An Investigation of the Relationship Between the Material and Illusionary Aspects of the Photograph.

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ABSTRACT

This project is an investigation of the relationship between the image of a photograph and the paper on which it is printed. It addresses transmission and reception caused by the interconnection of symbols (image) and object (paper substrata).

It can be observed that the major exchange with a photograph is mostly a symbolic one. The power of the image engulfs us, overshadowing the material nature of the paper object, creating the perception that there is something non-material about the photograph. There has been a continual 'de-materialising' of the photograph over its history. This is due to many factors, including the evolution in the materials used as substrata, the effect of supports such as frames and albums, the half-tone process in print media, as well as different uses and viewing contexts including those of museums, collectors and conceptual artists. These factors have created an inconsistent and unstable relationship with the material of the photograph, resulting in a diminishing appreciation of its object qualities, particularly when reading the image. To explain this situation I reference writers including Roland Barthes and Geoffrey Batchen and artists of relevance including Jan Dibbets, Mel Bochner, Doug and Mike Starn, Joachim Schmid and Gottfried Jäger.

Sanding and ripping are used in this project to explore the association between image and the material of the photograph. Such processes alter the viewer's usual relationship with a photograph by highlighting the material. Sanding confuses the surface and requires close scrutiny to determine what is image and what is paper. Actual rips are combined with images of rips to create a similar flux between real and faux. The work incorporates the materiality of the photograph and the image so that the two are read in unison, making their separation difficult.

This project sets out to highlight the problematic relationship between the image and material of a photograph. It does this by confounding the viewer's escape into imagery through self-referencing the photograph and enhancing its material. These devices constantly remind us of the object qualities of the work. It produces a dialogue and contemplation around the relationship between material and image. It raises issues regarding the meaning engendered by the material of the photograph, as well as issues about originality, aura, reproduction and commodity. The paradoxes and ironies associated with the photograph are highlighted, adding to an ongoing dialogue about the role and importance of the photographic in our culture.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines my interest and reasons for undertaking this research, the general concerns of the project and what I hope to achieve with it.

Background to the Project

When I look at a photograph I am amazed by how consuming the illusion is. After all we know about photography, the fact that we are still seduced by its action is nothing short of magic. The presence of a three dimensional object — the photographic paper — seems to make no impact on our reading of the image. The object disappears as the image goes to work convincing us of space, time and reality. I find the power of image over object intriguing, and it is a relationship I have explored in this project.

Central Research Questions

Photographs are used within many systems and they mean different things to different people. Although this thesis cannot address the myriad relationships between image and paper, some associations are considered.

> Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner,
> a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see.[1]

The relationship between a photograph's image and the surface on which it is printed is paradoxical and problematic. For most of photography's history, the image and the substrata have been inextricably linked. A thin layer of emulsion clings to a support

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[1] Barthes, R., *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. 1993, London: Vintage Random House, p.6.

without which a photograph would be a wispy tissue. It is within these microns of matter that the power of the photograph is situated.

The associations between the photographic image and its support are complex. The most important aspect of a photograph is its image — its raison d'etre is to exchange information contained within it; to show others or oneself a picture of something. What is the role of the support material in this exchange? All photo images need a support or they collapse (even projections need a wall and digital files need a screen), but is the relationship just about holding up the emulsion or is there a more meaningful association?

There are many variables in reading a photograph, including types of support, reproduction and viewing contexts, and these variables change our relationship to the object qualities of the photograph. We can experience a multitude of relationships with one photographic image. If we see it reproduced in books, reprinted as postcards or on television screens, the paper on which the original photograph is printed cannot be considered a constant element in the reading of that image. The desired exchange is with the image, but is there no symbolic content in the original material? If there is, should that not be carried with the photograph and read the same way every time we see it?

A photograph is weak and understandably it needs support. These exoskeletons impact greatly the reading: frame as memorial, photo album as a sequential narrative, or shoebox as archive. All of these devices resonate over the paper of the photograph.

A photographer may choose a paper stock for a particular effect; however, once a photograph leaves its creator's hands and is framed, reprinted or rescaled, any relevance the original paper may have had to the image changes; thus readings change. The image is the reason for the existence of the photograph and, most of the

time, the material is immaterial to its reading. However, paper does 'speak' — it has clues associated with intent, origin and age. Taken as a whole, a photograph becomes carnate — it is an object that can echo temporal and spatial concerns of its own. Photographic material can resonate with evidence of who, what, when, where and why.

Different people place different emphases on the importance of the paper to the photographic image. Photographers, museums, collecting connoisseurs and conceptual artists would all have a different relationship towards the material of a photograph. Examining some of these relationships highlights how complex and inconsistent the association between photographic image and its paper substrata can be.

This project positions itself in the space where the image and paper meet so as to explore a relationship that is elusive and in flux, and becoming increasingly so with the proliferation of digital processes. I have investigated the relationship between the image of a photograph and the actual matter to which it is adhered. It is about the act of receiving an image, and the association between this act and the paper on which it is printed.

Overview of the Project

The thesis comprises a solo exhibition of art, supported by this exegesis, which facilitates the reading of the artwork by placing it in context and explaining the procedures involved in its production.

Chapter 2 provides a context for my work. It discusses ideas, history and artists that assist the reading of my work and locate it in a broader field. Chapter 3 outlines the process and progress associated with the making of the work, including paths not followed. The final chapter concludes the paper by stating my

project's contribution to the field and articulating its failures and successes.

My overall aim for this thesis is to generate contemplation about the materiality of photographs. Though they are often perceived as symbols without matter, they in fact have a structure that is not separate from the image. By engaging the material and 'connecting' it to the image, I highlight this problematic and co-dependant relationship. My intention is to ensure that the material is present and enmeshed in the reading of the work, so that the image cannot be read separately. My aim is to create work in which symbols do not overshadow the material, but act in a unified manner to create a reading addressing the paradoxical nature of the image/paper relationship.

CHAPTER 2 CONTEXT

This chapter presents a range of ideas and information with which to consider the thesis exhibition, and places the work in a broader global context. I do not intend to comprehensively document the history of processes or philosophies associated with photography, but rather highlight some elements, writers and artists that pertain specifically to this project.

When looking at a photograph, there are two elements that we may see: physical structure and image. The physical structure, for instance a 7 x 15 centimetre piece of paper, is the material actually present in the space with us. The image is an illusion that involves a complex symbolic exchange, given meaning by what we read into it. This thesis explores the relationship between these two elements. I assert that the main exchange with a photograph is with the image and not the material. In this chapter, I intend to show why this is so by first looking at why the image is so compelling and investigating our changing relationship to this. The trajectory of the materiality of the photograph is then examined to show that the relationship between image and support has changed. In this analysis, examples are provided to show that materiality was once more intrinsic to the photograph's reading, and that, on occasion, this may still be the case. I then consider various processes and viewing contexts that impinge on a photograph's material qualities. Along the way, I cite the work of specific artists as examples of the areas addressed. I want to highlight the complexity of the relationships between paper and image and how they may be dependent on each other.

The Image of a Photograph

> A photograph is this paradoxical image, without thickness or substance (and in a way, entirely unreal), that we read without disclaiming the notion that it retains something of the reality from which it was somehow released through its physiochemical make up.[2]

In this section I address why the image is so compelling and present some of the reasons why we see past the actualities of the object into an illusionistic space. I also look at how our relationship to the image has changed.

The illusion at work in a photographic image is a complex interweaving of many elements, but it is its connection to truth and reality that most commands our attention. The photograph had (and to a large extent still has) the burden of embodying truth and objectivity. From its inception photography's link to reality was at the core of its fascination. While its inventors were tackling the technical aspects of the production processes, they were also grappling with the ontology of the photograph. What was this thing? What was the relationship between their activities that induced the image, and the image itself? Who was doing the 'drawing with light': them or nature? These questions were critical to revealing the photograph's relationship to reality. William Henry Fox Talbot, Louis Jacques Madre Daguerre and Nicéphore Niépce were not quite sure if it was culture or nature at work. Verbs used by Talbot to describe the action included *render, imitates, drawing, effected, impressed*[3], suggesting a struggle to comprehend the association between themselves, chemistry and light. If nature were rendering itself, then

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[2] Damish, H., 'Five Notes for a Phenomenology of the Photographic Image', in L. Wells (ed), *The Photography Reader*. 2003, London: Routledge, p. 88.
[3] Batchen, G., *Burning with Desire, The Conception of Photography*. 1997, Cambridge: MIT, p. 68.

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this was no illusion but an index — a direct emanation, one that had to be inherently truthful.

Its evidentiary nature and verisimilitude stem from an understanding that what was captured by the camera was actually, at some time, in front of the lens. Roland Barthes explains:

> The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze; light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed.[4]

There is a temporal and spatial bridge that the photograph creates through the reflection of light from an existing object onto light sensitive keepers, which conjures a reality so detailed that we embrace it as a literal representation of the subject. A photograph keeps its referent close at hand.

A photograph's verisimilitude is assisted by some of its technical aspects. An infinite tonal range helps to create quite detailed representations of form and depth and was, for a long time, unsurpassed by mechanical means (some would argue it is still unchallenged). Of course the viewer is already familiar with the camera's ordering of space because of the use of the lens in painting, which manifests as linear perspective.[5] This confluence of

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[4] Barthes, R., p. 80-81.
[5] The lens has been used for centuries as a drawing tool in devices such as the camera obscura.

subject and camera relationship, detail, and ordering of space magically combine to produce a compelling image.

However, the status of the photographic image has long been under pressure. While a more sympathetic response to the photograph's representation of reality was evident in the past, in contemporary culture there is reconsideration of its stature. Theorists and semiologists point to the relationship between reality, representation and reception, highlighting subjectivity, intent, context and framing to question any assertion of a photograph as truth – 'Photographs, which cannot themselves explain anything, are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy'.[6] Scott McQuire believes that because, today, we have a more sophisticated knowledge of the machinations of the photographic process and image, there is ambivalence towards the photographic image. While the photograph can have a visceral effect on us, we are aware of artifice and manipulation and there is an oscillation of belief and disbelief.[7] There is a devaluing of and scepticism towards the truthfulness of a photograph. Photographs have always been doctored, and physical intervention can often be identified; however, this is becoming more difficult with digital processes. The ease of image manipulation via digital means has created a situation in which we can question whether what we see in a photograph has *ever* existed in the real world.

An interesting phenomena noted by Keith Stuart suggests that the use of mobile phone cameras with their low-quality imaging has raised the level of acceptance of the digital as evidence, '...when we see grainy images on the news...it means authentic reality, never

[6] Sontag, S., *On Photography*. 1977, New York: Picador, p. 23.
[7] McQuire, S., 'Signs of Ambivalence: Documentary Images', in Blair French (ed), *Photophiles: an Australian Photography Reader*, Sydney: Power & ACP, 1999. This article was updated in
McQuire, S., 'The Rites of Photorealism: Photography and Ambivalence', in Witness, A Photography Symposium. Elizabeth Murdoch Lecture Theatre, University of Melbourne, 2003.

meant for public consumption and therefore hypnotically enticing'.[8] This illustrates Barthes' point that an image is imbued with reality because the photographer was there with the subject; mobile phone images seem to lie less because their spontaneity is less likely to allow time for manipulation.

We value the ability to see into other spaces and times, and the usual manner in which we interact with a photograph effortlessly allows this. We position ourselves in front of it looking at the image that (usually) employs a monocular pictorial technique galvanised in painting in the 1500s to convince us of spatial depth. Perspective's placement of the viewer at the focal point of its mimetic actions is absorbing, and the material reality of the photograph is usually ignored.

Jan Dibbets is an example of an artist highlighting the illusionary nature of the photograph and its connection to visual truth. In his *Perspective Correction* series of the late 1960s he dealt with the monocular perspective inherent in the lens-based image. Dibbets drew attention to the perspectival illusion by creating shapes within an environment that, once photographed, look as if they sit flat on the photograph's paper surface (like the disorienting, skewed advertisements painted onto the surface of contemporary sporting fields).

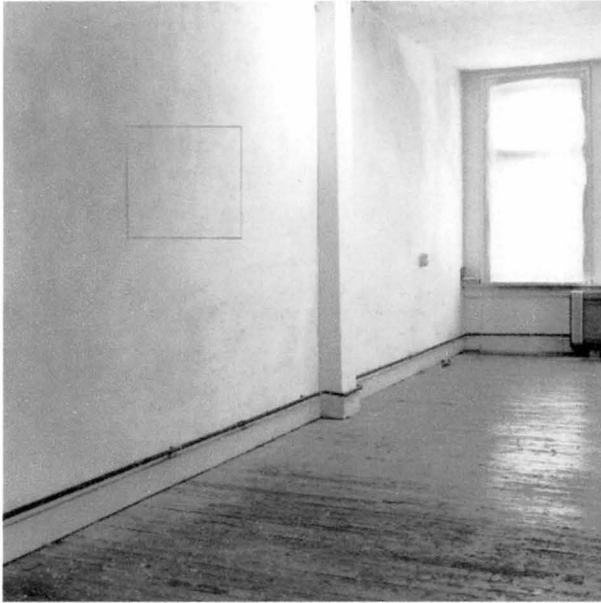[8] Stuart, K., 'I am a Camera'. *Frieze*, 2004 (81), p. 54.

Fig. 1
Jan Dibbets
Perspective Correction
My Studio I, 1: Square on wall
Black and white photograph on photographic canvas
110 x 110 cm
1969

This work confounds the perspectival mechanisms within the photograph by creating a flux that takes our gaze from the shape sitting flat on the surface of the photograph into the depths of the illusion and back again. It highlights the camera's particular approach to capturing reality and points out that it is all an illusion — there is, in fact, a surface there. The device of working within the system to expose its machinations is an effective approach.

The photograph's association to reality has diminished over its lifetime. Yet, despite this, the illusion it presents in its sophisticated manner is still compelling. The vestige of truth, the possibility of actuality and the seamless representation of a reality-like space fuel our ocular desires.

The Material of a Photograph

Over its history, the materials used to make a photograph have changed, altering the way we relate to and read it. Materials were once more intrinsic to the reading of an image. This section outlines these changes to illustrate how the contemporary photograph has come to lose its materiality.

Observing the world by mechanical optical means can be traced back to the earliest description of the camera obscura in the fifth century BC. From 1790, when there was a convergence of technical, chemical and biological knowledge, inventors searched for effective processes to permanently fix such projections to a surface.

Materials as diverse as stone, glass, metal and vellum were tested as substrata. William Henry Fox Talbot was one of the first to fix an image to paper, creating the Talbotype or Calotype as it became known in France. These paper negatives produced fuzzy images that the public saw as inferior to another process — the Daguerreotype — that was announced in 1839 as the first commercially available photographic process. Invented by Louis Jacques Madre Daguerre and Nicéphore Niépce, the Daguerreotype process created a sharp, positive and unique image on metal. A fragile object easily damaged by fingerprints and atmospheric conditions, it was protected by casings which gave it a significant material presence:

> ...[F]ormed on a silvered surface, protected by glass, surrounded by brass or paper, juxtaposed with silk or velvet and enclosed in wood, leather, thermoplastic or gutta percha, the Daguerreotype exhibited a combination of materials and

confronted the viewer with a variety of surfaces, colours and textures.[9]

Even without the decorative elements, it was still a significantly material object and to see the image properly it needed to be moved forty five degrees to the light: 'Hand and eye must work as one if a Daguerreotype is to be brought into visibility; the look of the images comes only with the feel of its materiality'.[10] The image, its materials and the viewer's body are brought together when viewing the Daguerreotype.

The process, however, was not ideal. The mirror-like surface was difficult to see; the image was reversed laterally; and, being one-of-a-kind, copies could not be made easily. Even so, the Daguerreotype was very popular for more than a decade. Many experiments were made in an attempt to marry affordability, durability and image quality. Paper continued to be problematic because of its lack of definition and fading. Glass and metal became popular bases for photographic images in various processes. For example, the Ambrotype was a glass negative with a collodion emulsion that, when chemically treated and backed with black fabric, card or lacquer, became a unique positive encased in a similar way to the Daguerreotype. The collodion emulsion was subsequently applied to thin steel backing in the Tintype process, which, because of its durability and affordability, became very popular and remained so well into the twentieth century.

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[9] Schwartz, J., 'Un Beau Du Canada', in E. Edwards, and J. Hart (eds), *Photographs Objects Histories, on the Materiality of Images*, London: Routledge, 2004, p. 18.
[10] Batchen, G., *Photography's Objects*. 1997, Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico, 1997, p. 3.

Fig. 2
Daguerreotype
16.6 x 9.2 cm (open)

Fig. 3
Daguerreotype's silvered surface.

Originally a sensory and tactile object the photograph's image took precedence over matter during its most popular phase with the move to a slight paper substrata. By the 1860s the cheap and easily replicable albumen print on paper allowed the working class to have their photographs taken. The carte-de-visite (a visiting card with the

caller's photograph) became very popular, causing the photograph to diminish in its status as unique and precious.

The end of the nineteenth century witnessed the invention of the easily handled celluloid negative and affordable cameras. Thanks to innovators and marketers such as Kodak, both print *and* process came into the reach of the average person. This boom enabled a significant exchange of information; it was cheap to produce and circulate. A photograph's materiality was important in that it facilitated an easy exchange of cultural and commodity information (they were easily mailed or inserted into books) that has essentially underpinned our economic, political and cultural lives. In this realm, the material mattered politically and economically more than it did aesthetically.

The materiality of the photograph has transformed from being quite a significant object in terms of physicality to being an insignificant one. Today digital equipment has divested the photographic image of the need for a permanent base at all. The image has been released into the ether, and we see images on electronic equipment, televisions, computers and telephones. The material is transient, so it is the image that matters most and the device on which we see it becomes less significant. This vision without substance is reminiscent of a camera obscura experience. The digital age may or may not be the end of paper-backed images; regardless, our interaction with the photograph has increasingly become a symbolic or indexical one, and not necessarily a physical one. The interaction is becoming a relationship in which the material is barely engaged, let alone considered intrinsic or significant to the viewer's response or experience.

The Use of Photographs in the Printing Process

This gradual undermining of the photograph's physical properties and its perception as a material-less thing can be linked to various mechanisms, the most significant of which is the use of photo images in other processes. Experiments in transferring the photograph to a plate compatible with the printing press began early. The most successful, the half-tone process, varies the density of dots of the same colour to express tone — tightly gathered dots in the darker areas, the inverse in light areas. The photograph first appeared in a newspaper in March 1880.[11] Once co-opted into the service of printing processes, the photograph's materiality was of course lost, and to most people a paper substrata, whether photographic or not, is inconsequential. A real photograph's infinite tonal range and detail is evident when compared to images formed on the printing press; however a photograph in a newspaper or book has enough of the original's integrity to remain satisfying. Susan Sontag notes that '...since it is, a printed, smooth object, a photograph loses much less of its essential quality when reproduced in a book than a painting does'.[12] The consistency of image across different surfaces has meant that the photochemical realm has lost ownership of the photographic-like image: to most people, the fact that a reproduction is not a genuine photograph makes little difference.

Anne Ferran, in an article about the exhibition *Mirror With a Memory*, articulates this:

> Note how the object-qualities — what the photograph feels like to hold, how big or small or dull or shiny or smooth or dog-eared or heavy it is — are all ones that are lost or compromised in reproduction, which means you won't find

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[11] Gernsheim, H., *The History of Photography, from the camera obscura to the beginning of the modern era*. 1969, London: Thames and Hudson, p. 551.
[12] Sontag, S., p. 5.

them in the catalogue; they have to be experienced in the here and now or not at all.[13]

For me, this loss of the original material in reproduction was exemplified in 2004 when I visited a Man Ray exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria. I had only ever seen the Man Ray images as reproductions and I was not prepared for their scale, colour or textures.[14] They were so small, delicate, pearlescent and beautiful that they challenged my preconceived notions of them as large, wild statements and, instead, I read them as delicate fantasies. The reproductions I had experienced in books, cards, posters and the like had misled me: they did not resonate in the same way as did the originals.

Viewing Contexts

Photographs are employed in many ways by many systems. They therefore mean different things to different people. Viewing contexts impact their reading — it all depends on who's doing the looking where, when and why. The photographer, the museum, the average person, the connoisseur and the non-photographic artist all relate differently to the photograph, and, particularly, its material. In this section I highlight the inconsistent and problematic nature of this relationship by examining the different ways in which people relate to the material of the photograph.

Viewing Context: Home

As stated previously, early photographic processes were inherently tactile because of the materials employed in their production, and early vernacular uses for the photograph included much more tactile

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[13] Ferran, A., 'The Body in the Library'. *Art Monthly Australia*, 2000 (131), p. 8.
[14] Credit must be given to the choice of frame as the edges of the photographs were exposed, giving much more of an insight into the object.

practices than are common today. From at least the 1600s, the aristocracy would wear small painted portraits of their loved ones as jewellery. With photography, the middle classes could afford a similar practice. They were memorials to lovers, lost or absent family and friends; and were turned into earrings, brooches, lockets and watches. Encased with the photograph were often pieces of hair or clothing to be caressed while simultaneously looking at the image. You can imagine a metal locket warming in the hand as it, together with hair and image, enmesh and infuse the symbol with the actual. When attached to the body of the wearer an important transference and association with the missing is achieved. Batchen describes this action as a 'perpetual caress'. [15]

Fig. 4
Makers unknown
Portrait of unidentified man in hair bracelet
c.1850.

Contemporary domestic photographs too have a more physical and material presence in our lives, primarily because we are able to handle them. Barthes' notion of touch is magnified and a photograph's carnality becomes evident when we hold snapshots in our hands for extended lengths of time. The physical relationship is greater with the vernacular photograph, and as Christian Metz

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[15] Batchen, G., *Forget me not: photography and remembrance*. 2004, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, p. 32.

points out '[t]hanks to these two features (smallness, possibility of a lingering look), photography is better fit, or more likely, to work as a fetish'.[16] This of course is true until we file them away into a support: album, frame or shoebox.

Viewing Context: The Connoisseur

With vernacular photographs, a connection with the subject is sought; however, for the connoisseur, the imperative is often a connection to the photographer. To the collector, the connoisseur of photographs, the object is all-important. Like most other art, the closer an object to the hand of the artist, the more valuable the object. Reproductions are far less sought after than original works.

The question of what is an original in this field comes down to the proximity of the print temporally and physically to the photographer. For example, Edward Weston laboured over his prints, and his sons made subsequent editions with just as much effort; however, the latter are considered less valuable to collectors. Cartier-Bresson did not print his own work, but signed some of his photographs — those bearing his signature are, of course, more valuable than those that do not.[17] Theoretically there is no original photograph as the negative is the original from which copies are made. Walter Benjamin saw the photograph as a leveller in art — without a cult status because a reproduction of an original lacks the aura of creativity, genius, eternal value and mystery.[18] Can there be an original with aura in photography? Sherrie Levine, looking at the fine art print from a conceptual art standpoint, questions the whole notion of the original in photography. In *After Walker Evans* (1987), she took photographs of the famous photographer's images to

[16] Metz, C., 'Photography and Fetish'. *October*, 1985 (34)Fall, p. 81-90.
[17] Coleman, A.D., 'Photography as Material Culture: Originality at a Premium'. *Art On Paper (USA)*, 2000 4(4), p. 42-46.
[18] Durden, M., 'Against Aura, Walter Benjamin on Photography'. *Creative Camera (U.K.)*, 1992/93. 319: p. 36-37.

question the position of the original and the auteur. Is Levine's or Evans' photograph an original or is the original out in the real world with the model and pose? Can the originality of the image be traced back to a previous posture rendered in the tradition of painting? In connoisseurship the material matters in relation to the original photographic object because there is money or provenance involved. The aura is evident the closer one gets to the artist.

Photographs can be quite valuable objects. To date, the most expensive photograph purchased at auction is Man Ray's *Glass Tears* (1930–33), at $1,300,000.[19] Yet, the collector appreciates such an object because of its value, and its proximity to the artist, not necessarily because it is an insight into the author's intent.

Viewing Context: Galleries, Reprinting and Framing

Photographs presented in an art context are usually displayed to exemplify the image — up on a wall, framed behind glass or not, its 'object-ness' and tactility are often denied.

Many photographers are acutely aware of their materials. Choice of paper may be crucial for them and hours are sometimes spent manipulating prints as they are worked to correct exposure or touching them up with spotting inks. It is said that a fine art print by, for example, Edward Weston shows great labour and uniqueness, but something happens to these subtleties when taken into the realm of the viewer — when reproduced or framed they mutate. Only a rare few people would have the opportunity to gaze (without any impediments) into the surfaces of the originals in an effort to mine any resonance the materials may have.

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[19] Gefter, P, 'A Thousand Words? How About $450,000?', *The New York Times*. 13 March 2005. www.nytimes.com.

Paper is physically weak and needs to be supported, thus the reading of a photograph is dependent on the form of its presentation; for example, a frame, album, book or driver's licence. The support structure helps to contextualise a photograph but de-materialises it as an object by veneering it to its own physical properties — the material nature of the photograph is usurped by those of its host.

Another exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria, *City of Light: Paris and Photography 1850s-1930s,* confirmed for me the museum's implicit involvement in the separation of the material from the illusion of the photograph. In it were images, framed behind glass, by Brassaï and André Kertesz, taken in 1926 and printed almost 50 years later, circa 1972. Two issues arose. The first involved the reprinting. Having come from the Man Ray exhibition, I wondered if the materials used in the 1926 versions would have been different to those used in 1972. I was also aware I was viewing a reprint, but couldn't quite understand why. Could I not just as easily have been viewing these in a book? What was achieved by reproducing them as photographs? Bring out the originals and let's compare the difference. The second issue concerned the fact that they were framed behind glass which reflected my likeness and kept me well away from the material print. Anne Ferran notes how the glass of the frame acts on a work, employing photo-booth images:

> The conditions of their real-world existence — endlessly produced, tastelessly displayed, carelessly abandoned, worn and dog-eared from use — can't be reproduced in the gallery and without it the images lapse. Under glass they simply look lost and lonely, wild animals at a zoo.[20]

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[20] Ferran, A., p. 10.

The Man Ray experience taught me that the physical properties of the original photograph give clues to the artist's intent, and may contextualise it in terms of time and place. Once the image is reproduced (photographically or in another media) or obscured behind glass, things change — it becomes a different object resonating a different meaning.

The Use of Photographs by Conceptual Artists

The object qualities of the photograph were to a large extent ignored when Conceptual artists began to show great interest in the medium in the 1960s and 70s. It was seen as a way to challenge the egocentric, object production of Abstract Expressionism (or Modernism in general) because it was cheap, seemingly objective and was not as yet accepted as an art media by the contemporary art system. Its documentary nature meant that artists dealing in non-object-based practises could have a record of their work. Their interest in photography as a means to express an idea, over the importance of any interest in its materiality or even technical or artistic merit, assisted in devaluing the photograph as an object.

Mel Bochner is an example of such an artist. In 1966 he was working with the Minimalist approach; he based his work on numerical systems and progressions using small wooden blocks. Although content to use this approach, he was nonetheless concerned about the overt object qualities of some Minimalist work. He was less interested in creating autonomous sculptures than in the individual steps of a larger process. When approached by a curator to exhibit, he was so imbedded in process that he had little to show. He turned to photography because he felt it could provide an objective representation of his work. He wanted the photographs to be anti-illusionistic and uninflected: 'the thing is the thing and not

a representation of the thing; there's no mediation at work'.[21] He discovered, however, that the camera's fingerprints could not be removed. Several details confounded his attempts: he could not eradicate the shadows cast by the blocks; their wood grain suggested a discrepancy between their actual size and that depicted within the photographs; and the distortion of the camera lens warped the perfectly linear structures — it all indicated intervention and illusion. No matter how hard he tried to contain it, the camera had a will of its own and produced images that were obviously mediated.
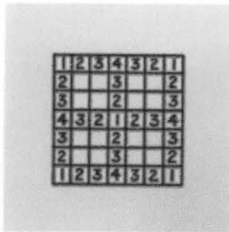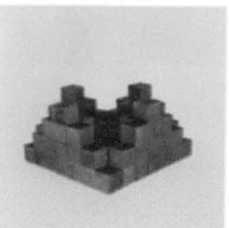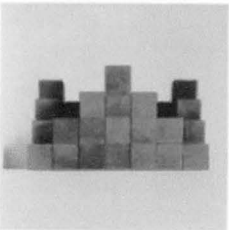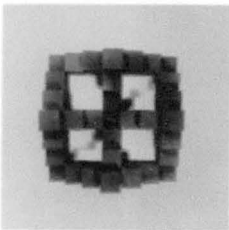
Fig. 5
Mel Bochner
3 Photographs and 1 Diagram (Row H)
4 gelatin silver prints mounted on board
50.8 x 50.8 cm each panel; 228.6 x 50.8 cm overall
1966-67

Since practitioners of this new use of photography were often not professional photographers, the 'fine art' qualities were missing and in fact redundant. The photograph was employed, somewhat naïvely, because it was considered unbiased and closer to an idea than an object. 'It could even be argued that photography is the manifestation of a desire for pure opticality, for a visibility without mediation.'[22] These artists did not set out to make objects, but rather to make their conceptual or temporal processes apparent. For the most part, the material was once again a means for the existence and dissemination of the idea. Any reading which the material may

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[21] Rothkopf, S., *Mel Bochner Photographs 1966-1969*. 2002, Cambridge: Yale University Press, p. 11.
[22] Batchen, G., 'Ere the Substance Fade: photography and hair jewellery', in *Photographs Objects Histories*, p. 39.

impart was therefore of little concern; instead it was important that the photograph appeared not as an object, but as a material-less idea.

Altering the Material

In contrast to the de-materialising emphasis of the Conceptualists, many photographic artists have manipulated the physical nature of the photograph to enhance its materiality. The Daguerreotype was sometimes scratched to expose the metal to highlight hair or jewellery; the Pictorialists of the late nineteenth-century manipulated negatives, processes and papers to help them create images resembling drawings or etchings to enhance the 'art' qualities of the photograph; and members of the Bauhaus cut and pasted photographs to create collages.

In the 1980s the Starn twins conducted a 'full scale attack on photography'.[23] Interested in the photographic process and paper, they created a significant body of work employing cutting, ripping and reordering of images. For a while they received negative reactions from galleries because of the lack of 'professionalism' in the way they treated their photographs; however, the Starns cared little about the dents and dings. Their early work often referenced art history from ancient to modern. Some works were void of images. In *Kandinsky*, the lack of image creates a formalist work where the photographic paper is used for its material qualities, — the viewer can concentrate on the lustres, colours, curves and edges of the paper, elevating the status of the substrata to the heights of a modernist piece. Their latest work centres on the importance of light; moths, trees and arc lamps are some of the metaphors used for this. Their overt materiality suggests decay, demise and

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[23] Grundberg, A., *Mike and Doug Starn*. 1990, New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., p.13.

transience. Their approach was quite influential and can be seen echoed in the collage work of Bill Henson.

Fig. 6
Mike and Doug Starn
Kandinsky
Photo collage
1988

Fig. 7
Mike and Doug Starn
ATL 28 Ephemera
25.5 x 25.5 cm
Ephemera obtained from studio detritus, and are unique.
2003

A shift in the materiality of these photographs seems to 'value add' in terms of uniqueness — objects, with the potential of being mass-produced become unique when damaged or changed materially. (note the image notes for ATL fig.7). It is a reverberation of the argument that dogged photography early on — its status as an art was questioned because of its ability to produce multiples, and this

spurred the Pictorialists to use the techniques they did. Walter Benjamin's notion of aura comes to mind again.

Reading the Material

Does the material ever matter in the reading of the photograph? The importance of paper choice for photographers was mentioned before and different surfaces elicit different readings if we are able to see without impediments. For example, I've always found the lush surfaces of gloss paper somehow modern and quite aloof — that extra sheen keeps you slightly at a distance — whereas matt paper has about it a sense of age and honesty that lets you get closer.

Regardless of paper stock, the material is observed more distinctly when an accidental kink, tear or rip appears. We are made aware of the illusion and our focus begins to oscillate between image and material. If it is a small intrusion we ultimately ignore the imperfection, settling on the comfort that centuries-old ordering of three-dimensional space brings.

When the material is overtly present in a way that cannot be ignored, there is a collapse (change) in the illusion, which brings us back from our escape into imagery. We have a visual system that simulates dimension juxtaposed with dimension itself. There is a physical intrusion into the viewer's space. When a photograph's accepted presentation is challenged by some degree of three-dimensionality, it becomes spatially disoriented — the image is no longer self-sufficient and there is an uneasy relationship between image and material. The viewer needs to negotiate a new terrain because additional symbolic material has been attached. The relationship to the viewer's body has changed and we find ourselves engaged in an action similar to viewing the Daguerreotype: we have to move it or move ourselves to experience the work in order to read and incorporate this extra materiality.

Barthes noted two elements in the photograph: the *studium* is a general interest in a subject 'which is never my delight or my pain'[24], and the *punctum* is a poignant interest, one 'which raises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me'.[25] Hal Foster shifts this focus from illusion to material by looking at a tear — a physical glitch — in an Andy Warhol screen-print and notes how it manifests as a traumatic punctum.[26] Similarly a rupture — a perversion of the flat surface of a photograph, a tear in the illusion that effectively transfers to the subject the action originally committed — can be quite startling.

Found photographs, such as those collected and displayed by Joachim Schmid, can highlight these issues. Often these are damaged — ripped to pieces. I was shocked at what I felt was a transgression against these photographs and by my reverence towards them. The display of so many torn images together caused me great displeasure — the tears became wounds. My reaction seemed unreasonable and uneducated, heightened because Schmid would reconstruct 'whole' images from pieces (sometimes from unrelated bits) that looked like an attempt to patch things up, fix the photograph or heal the transgression.

On seeing his collection, I realised there is a threshold of tolerance towards the tear or rip in an image. We can ignore small encroachments on our absorption of the illusion (this happens in photo collages), but a large rip or multiple rips are quite startling. An image, especially that of a human, which has been ripped to pieces, engenders a visceral reaction. What could have possibly happened to elicit such a violent response to a photograph? We project the emotion of the act towards the person in the image. The particular material qualities of the photographic paper play a significant role in this shift in reading.

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[24] Barthes, R., p. 27.
[25] Barthes, R., p. 26.
[26] Foster, H., *The Return of the Real.* 1996, Cambridge: MIT, p. 130-136.

Fig. 8
Joachim Schmid
Found photographs
Top L to R
140 Belo Horizonte,
August 1992
192 Sao Paolo, Oct 1993
Bottom L to R
187 Sao Paolo, Sep 1993
83 Berlin, July 1990

A photograph does have substance — it is a three-dimensional object. Wolfgang Tillmans has said that '[a] piece of photographic paper has its own elegance, how it bows when you have it hanging in one hand'.[27] I agree — photographic paper has a unique structure and presence, and it can be presented in its purest form, void of image, as an object (fig.9) but once emptied out, what next?

Is there anything more to a photograph's materiality? Lucy Lippard suggests that '...a piece of paper or photograph is as much an object, or as "material" as a ton of lead'.[28] If we examine a piece of photographic paper, we see that the sides are slight but there is another visual field on the back. This field at its purest is simply white — a minimalist rectangle, pristine and limitless in depth like a ganzfeld effect.[29] Sometimes this space has the manufacturer's or printer's mark on it, making us aware of its status as a commodity. If this is the case we have another visual system at work — an

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[27] Verwoert, J., P. Halley, M. Midori, *Wolfgang Tillmans*. 2002, London: Phaidon Press Limited, p. 131.
[28] Lucy Lippard quoted in Soutter, L., "The Photographic Idea: reconsidering Conceptual Photography". *Afterimage*, 1999. 26(5), p. 8.
[29] Snow blindness/white-out where ones orientation in space is difficult to ascertain.

arrangement of text (maybe grey or yellow) repeating itself across this white field; it is flat(ish): a rhythm appears like a wallpaper effect; it has an aesthetic of its own, quite different to the ordering of its front.
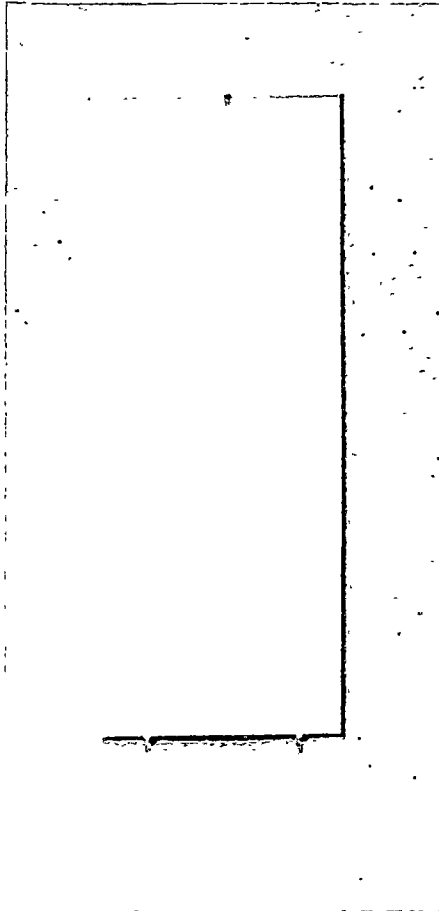

Fig. 9
Gottfried Jäger
Faltblatt (folded leaflet)
Photopaper # xxv
40 x 30 cm folded
1999

Though slight, weak, and subjugated by the image, the paper substrata, when considered, does provide a reading. The resonance is often denied, but can be important to the image. When torn the paper enmeshes with the image, but even when pristine, the paper, if allowed to be experienced, does have a presence.

Gottfried Jäger

I have left the discussion of Gottfried Jäger to the end of this chapter because he is for me the most influential artist in this project, and his work is, to some extent a stepping off point. It traverses the aspects of illusion, and material and spatial shifts highlighted in this chapter. He produced a body of work that considered the photographic image in relation to its paper substrata: photographic paper without images. The paper was exposed to light in the darkroom (the black areas), developed and folded. The effect was a dislocation between front and back; the white areas were not always the back of the photograph. One had to look twice before realising an assumption was made about the surfaces. This represented a challenge to expectations and prompted contemplation on process, material and reading of a photograph — all without the use of a camera.

Jäger's photography is described as an extension of concrete art. They are photographs that:

> ...[D]o not replicate anything of similarity. They rather concretise that which is photography, thereby making the latter lose its status as a medium, but gain status as an object. Concrete photographs are aesthetic objects of themselves... [they] neither replicate nor represent anything. They are what they are: the reality of photography.[30]

Most of what is termed concrete, though, is image based and not related to the material. 'It is naturally not the photo paper that is meant as a concrete object in the ordinary sense but the object that

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[30] Jäger, G., *Project Art Theory: Concrete Photography*. www.gottfried-jager.de 2003.

becomes visible on the paper.[31] So, included in this genre are luminographs, photograms and alternate chemical processes that produce images — they are considered concrete as long as they do not mimic, represent or abstract anything in the real world. Even so, this particular body of Jäger's work does address the material and its relation to image. It self-references the process and challenges monocular perspective. It was pivotal to my interest in this field.
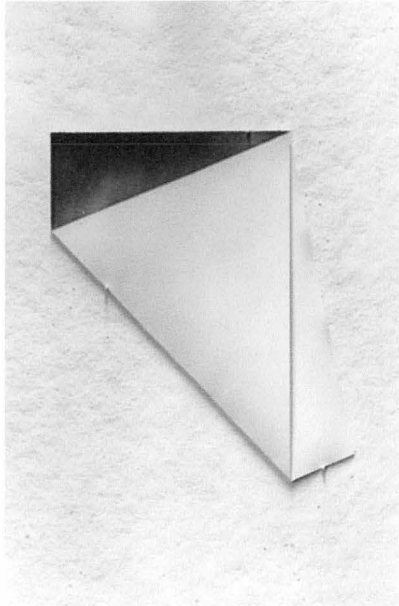
Fig. 10
Gottfried Jäger
Faltblatt (folded leaflet)
Photopaper #xxv
40 x 30 cm folded
1999

Conclusion to Context

We 'take' photographs to show others and/or ourselves an image of something. Our first action is to absorb that image: the 'connection' to the subject and the 'information' embodied in a photograph are more important than the physical object of a photograph. 'The information, and not the thing is valuable.'[32] This is not to say that photographs are not valuable objects, rather that their objectness is not always valued in their reading.

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[31] Wiesing, L., 'What could Abstract photography be?', in G. Jäger (ed), *The Art of Abstract Photography*, Stuttgart: Arnoldsche, 2002, p. 91.
[32] Flusser, V., *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*. 1983, London: Reaktion, p. 51.

I have supported this idea by: pointing out some of the reasons why a photographic image is so compelling; showing how change in photographic materials has influenced the way we read the image; and providing examples of where the photograph has been divested of its particular materiality because it is confused with the materiality of other processes and presentations. I then included examples of viewing contexts to highlight the different ways in which materiality is treated in different situations and the complexity of these associations.

Specific artists were referenced because of their relationship to the photographic material: Dibbets and Jäger because they highlight the nature of the photographic illusion and surface; the Starns and Schmidt because they incorporate paper's specific qualities into their work, and Bochner for using the photograph as a means of dissemination of a Conceptualist project.

Although much of photography's history has seen its image as paramount, its reading in certain circumstances can be assisted and even enhanced by consideration of the paper substrata. This idea forms the basis of the thesis.

CHAPTER 3 DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROJECT

Previous Work

Although I have long been interested in the ontology of the photograph, I have previously only dabbled with issues in this area. In the late 1990s, I experimented with relationships between different symbolic modes, picture, text and graphic symbols. Some of this studio work incorporated the physicality of the photograph (fig.11&12).

Fig. 11 & 12
Trees
3 C type photographs and metal clips
15 x 10 x 8 cm variable
1999

In 1999, an exhibition by Gottfried Jäger excited me because I recognised some elements of my work in his. After some contemplation it became clear to me that my interest in the photograph concerned its action of disseminating symbols, and in 2003 I decided to explore this area earnestly.

The beginning of my focused investigation into this field was marked by my exhibition at Melbourne's Conical Gallery in February–March

2004. In this exhibition I experimented with the expected relationship between the front and the back of the photograph. I attempted to create confusion between sides and to enhance the photographs as objects. Four large black and white portraits printed at around 10% opacity (in Photoshop terms), were suspended from the ceiling. They held their space firmly in the middle of the gallery, swaying slightly, but looking heavy and very physically present. When observed face on, their pallor gave the impression of viewing the back of the photograph, through the paper, to the image on the other side. When one walked around to investigate the 'front' of the photograph, the paper manufacturer's mark, the actual back of the image, was evident. A dislocation of front and back was achieved. This exhibition helped me identify the particular area in which I was interested — the relationship between image and support.
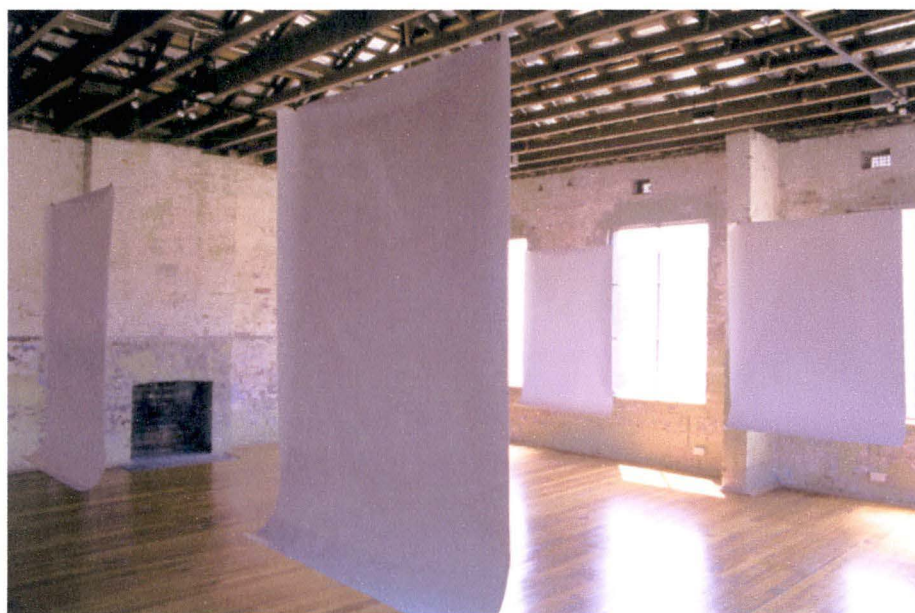

Fig. 13
Installation details, Conical Gallery.
Lambda Prints
4 images each 120 x 150 cm
2004

Fig. 14
Installation details, Conical Gallery.
Lambda Prints
4 images each 120 x 150 cm
2004

How the Project was Pursued

Topographic Survey and Self-Referencing

This current project began with a desire to continue to use the portrait to further explore this relationship. I had employed the genre at Conical because of its power to connect and compel people to make eye contact. Waiting for the necessary ethics approval to use portraits in my research, I began to take photographs of inanimate objects in the search for alternate subject matter in the event that my ethics submission was rejected[33]. At the same time, I was reading Italo Calvino's 'The Adventure of a Photographer', in which the main character sends himself into a state of near lunacy trying to capture the 'essence' of his wife — 'I can't get you'[34] — and ends up photographing photographs to bring the obsession to an end. This

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[33] Ethics approval is required for research projects using people or animals.
[34] Calvino, Italo. 'The Adventure of a Photographer'. Trans. William Weaver, *Difficult Loves*. London: Vintage Random House, 1999. p. 46.

was a cue for me to turn the camera onto the photograph and use it as a subject to explore its materiality.

I began a topographical survey of the photograph's surface, investigating the front, back and sides. I made images of sections of photographs that included text, decorative edges, surface types and reflections. The following examples were shown in my solo exhibition at INFLIGHT Gallery, Hobart, April 2005, entitled *What's the matter?*
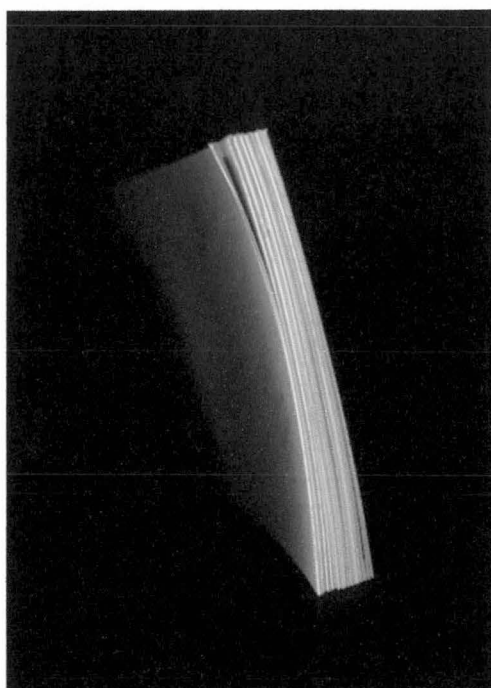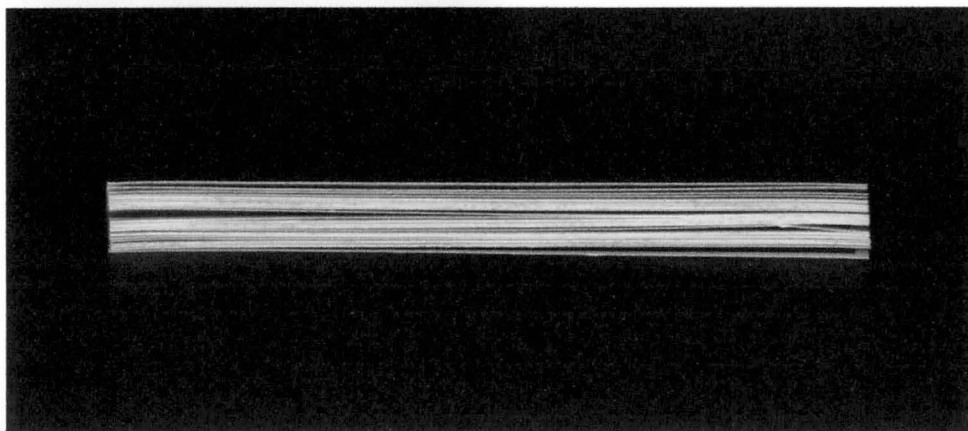

Fig. 15
Short Side
Lambda Print
102 x 74 cm
2004

Fig. 16
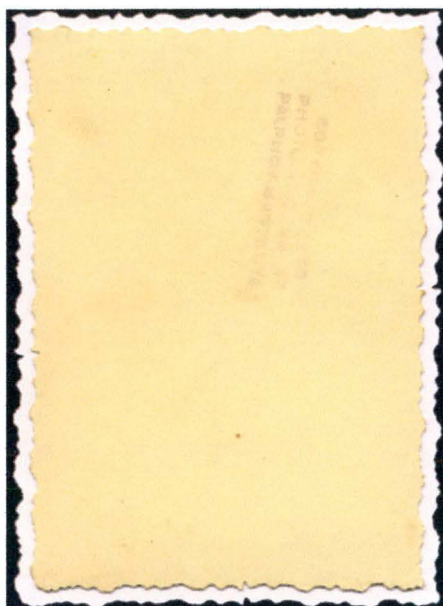*Long Side*
Lambda Print
135 x 59 cm
2004

Fig. 17
Back to Front
Lambda Print
105 x 75 cm
2004

In my research, the issue of self-referencing the photograph was constantly being raised, beginning with Jäger, then Calvino and finally by Wolfgang Tillmans. In an early work entitled *All Sides Now* (fig.18-21), I pursued a reference to Tillmans' quote about the beauty of a hanging piece of photographic paper. I wanted to achieve a circular discussion between the front, back and sides of a photograph. I photographed the side of a large piece of photographic paper hanging in space. When processed and printed large, the new image was suspended and re-photographed from the front and from the back. I could have continued this process ad-infinitum, but I felt that the perpetual nature of the piece could continue in the minds of the viewers. I presented these two photographs in my solo exhibition *What's the matter?,* where they were suspended from the ceiling, facing each other as if holding a conversation. The viewer walked through and around them observing them observing themselves.
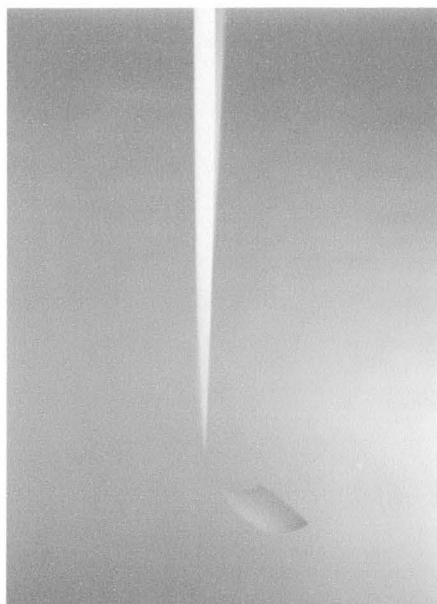
Fig. 18
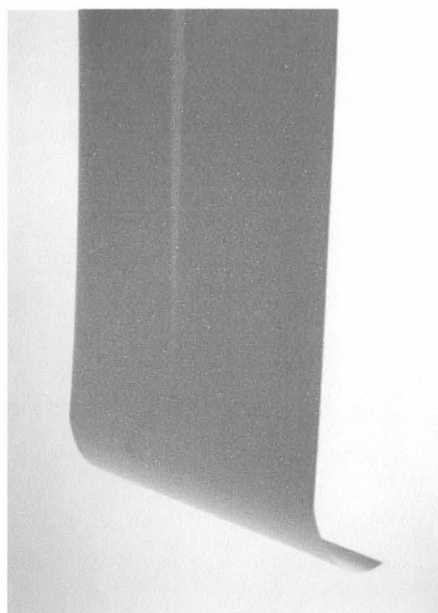Original image taken to rephotograph for
All Sides Now

Fig. 19
Image of the back of the
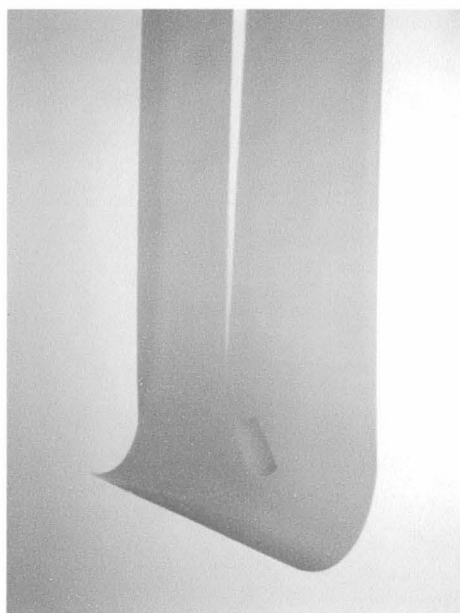suspended photograph
Lambda Print
120 x 91 cm

Fig. 20
Image of the front of the
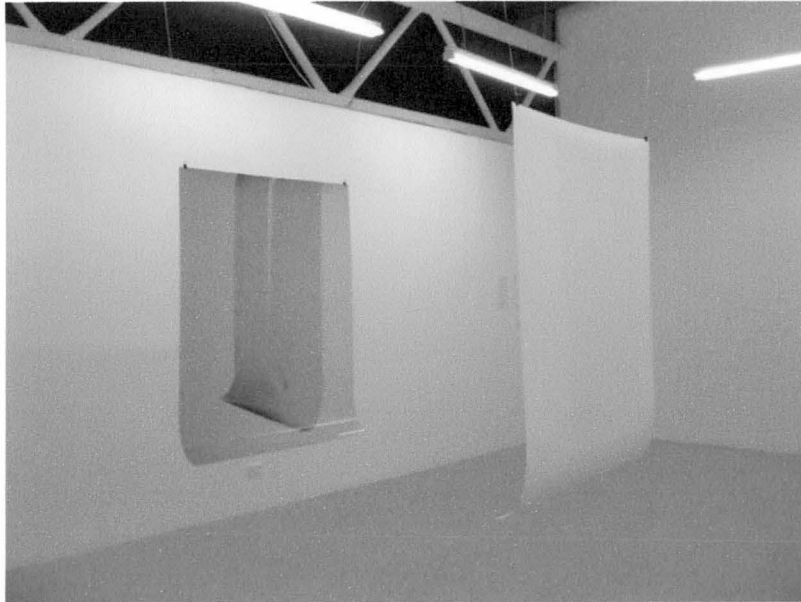suspended photograph
Lambda Print
120 x 86 cm

Fig. 21
All Sides Now
Installation view
2004

Documenting Damage

I soon realised that my focus was becoming the evidence of the material which manifested itself through damage. There was something about imperfections that heightened the presence of the material and made the photographs unique, reminding me of Walter Benjamin's notion of aura. The damage evoked the material in a manner that fused it with the image, becoming part of its reading.

I began collecting photographs with an altered materiality as a resource for making my own images. I looked for those that had been changed from their original or pristine condition. I scoured antique shops, tip shops and personal collections — a process that is still continuing and has become an addiction. The type of damage I saw included dent, rip, fold, puncture (via pin), embossing (caused by writing on the back of a photo with a pen), peeling (layers separating), insect damage (little silverfish trails of eaten paper), fading (1970s photos losing pigment to leave magenta), light leaks, chemical stains, mould and swelling by contact with water.

I found the collection interesting in itself and presented parts of it in the University library to gauge reactions to the process of highlighting a photograph's materiality. Many images were presented face down or partially covered. Most of the responses were to do with sleuthing — figuring out how old the photographs were or where they came from. Although archive, collection and museum are not central to this current thesis, the exercise was useful to help define the project's boundaries.

Fig. 22 & 23
Installation views of library exhibit
2004 – 2005

I was quite aware of the reactions I would get if I included the images from these old photographs in my work. Even though some did slip in, I avoided including them as much as possible, as I did not particularly want notions of memory, death, history or appropriation to infiltrate or be associated with my work.

A source image that continued to be included, however, was that used in the works *From Behind the Mountain* and *Through the Mountain,* exhibited in *What's the matter?* It was an early favourite and became quite emblematic of the project. It began as a documentation of damage sustained by a photographic postcard: the franking stamp had embossed through to the front and cracked the photographic emulsion. This in its purest form is the image for *From Behind the Mountain.* Then, the notion of 'coming through' was extended by turning the image over and rephotographing the back in front of a light source, so that the front came through to the back. *Through the Mountain* is a continuous cycling of front, back and through, similar in notion to *All Sides Now*, and an extension of the work I did at Conical Gallery.

Fig. 24
From Behind the Mountain
Lambda Print
101 x 101 cm
2004

Fig. 25
Through the Mountain
Lambda Print
101 x 101 cm
2004

The topographical survey narrowed and I began to photograph damage. I accumulated lots of images, but I felt that while I was indeed looking at and speaking to the relationship between image and paper, in the end it was still the image that was paramount. I felt I needed to evoke the material more.

Making Damage

Parallel to documenting the material, I was testing what kind of damage I could impose on photographs, physically changing and manipulating photographic paper to find how far I could push the material before completely destroying it. A vestige of the photograph had to remain. For example, if I burnt a photograph, there would be no evidence of what it had been. I was also finding connections between manipulation, materiality and meaning. I knew I had to be careful with the type of action I used against an image because it would alter the reading. My experiments included cutting lines into and shapes out of photographs with a knife. I peeled its layers apart, ripped, embossed, folded simply and then more complexly to create forms, sanded colour images to reveal the colour strata, and sanded black and white images to 'fade' them. All actions towards the paper

were reading quite differently; the slash of a blade was quite dramatic and macabre, the folds imposed an order, and the peeling implied a fragility. I found two actions to be the most interesting: sanding and ripping.

Sanding evoked the surface in a mysterious way. It introduced colours that were not visible in the original image, and added new visual elements while obliterating or obscuring others. The action of sanding is not particularly obvious. This was evidenced by people's reaction to these works. For the most part people do not touch photographs in galleries; however, people felt it necessary to touch these to confirm what was occurring on the surface. There was enough of the material left to indicate it could be a photograph; however, illusion or reality was only confirmed by close scrutiny and/or touch. I enjoyed this mixing of fake and real, and the way they were interlinked and unable to be separated in the reading of the work. It shifted the viewer from the usual privileged viewing position assigned by perspective, reminding me of the Daguerreotype and early vernacular uses of photographs where ones touch was integral to the reading.

Sanding also has temporal associations that I find interesting. Considerable time goes into erasing images this way and it is evident in their surfaces. The more time added to this process, the more difficult it is to see the image, and, hence, more time seems to be spent by the viewer looking at it to define the image. The sanding seems to shift the usual temporal qualities of a photograph. It releases the image from its eternal frozen state, into another more flexible one, where there is a flux between image, space and time.

Ripping is a more overt, quick and obviously transgressive action. I like it because we are all familiar with it. We have ripped up photographs because they are either displeasing likenesses of others or ourselves, images of people we did not like, or which are

just plain boring. The 'cross' that often appears in these images comes from the action that usually occurs when we rip up a photograph. We rip it in one direction, put the two pieces together and rip them in half again. When we put the four pieces back together a cross appears.

Experiments That Were Not Pursued

I decided that sanding and ripping were the tools to evoke the material for my work. Once I received ethical approval I began to photograph people. I combined images of people with damage and the feelings I had had about Joachim Schmid's work surfaced in my own. It was very problematic.

I experienced the power of the image during the making of these works. I had an unexpected and emotional response to sanding photographs of people. At one point I had to stop defacing a portrait of a child because it distressed me. I was in fact in the clutches of the power of the image. If I could document this reaction it would illustrate how consuming the illusion is. Yet, if I showed images in which a person was still visible, the work would focus on the disappearance of the figure, maybe loss, grief or memory. I did not want the work to escape into an unrelated narrative. It seemed that damage evident on portraits heightened the power of the image, but did little to engage a discussion on the subtleties of the image/material relationship. I came to the conclusion that portraits could not be used in the work.

There was a point at which I felt that using photographs to express my ideas may not be the only way to achieve my goals. So I also made videos of the erasing of images: 3-7 minutes of an image being sanded away to nothing (fig.26-28). Notions of process and temporality were therefore added to the work; however, I did not want these ideas to be overtly present. Although interesting and

food for future thought, the videos were left behind in my search for a distilled and uncluttered conversation.

Fig. 26
Video still
Sanding Crumpled Photograph

Fig. 27
Video still
Sanding Child

Fig. 28
Video still
Sanding Ocean

Part of my research dealt with the support's action in the reading of the photograph. I was aware of the role frames and glass play in excluding the material from a photograph's reading, which is why they do not appear in my work. However, I tried to incorporate the frame into the image. I found this phase of my work interesting, and still do, but the issue remains to some degree unresolved. The most successful undertaking took two forms: first were images of the back of photographs showing the repetition of the manufacturer's text (fig.29) and, second, were photograms, where the actual text on the back of the paper came through to the front after exposure to light (fig.30). Frames were folded into the paper, bringing the back around to the front. The inbuilt frames were acting as support; they referenced the materiality and commercial identity of the paper. However, they were almost too specific, — familiarity with photographic processes was necessary in order to understand the work.

Fig. 29
Through with In-built Frame
Lambda Print
2 pieces each 31 x 18 cm
2004

Fig. 30
Pink Through with In-built Frame (detail)
Photogram
2 pieces each 31 x 18 cm
2004

The photograph as sculpture was raised in my initial investigation of materials when I was making forms out of paper, but it was an avenue I resisted. While it does address issues around perspective and the privileged point of view, I felt that making 'things' out of photographic paper was more about the object than the relationship between image and paper in a photograph. My project was not about sculpture. After a curator saw a roll of my sanded photographs in my studio, he wanted them for a show. At first I declined; however, after much discussion and deliberation I relented and a form appeared that I was happy to exhibit as a test for this project in, *Resonator*, Long Gallery, Hobart, August 2005. It did not make me change my opinion. I felt the work should act as much like a photograph as possible for a successful dialogue about the photograph to take place.

Fig. 31
Cross Sanded Floor Configuration
4 C type photographs and PVC pipe
105 x 17 x 12(h) cm approx. and variable
2005

Fig. 32
Cross Sanded Floor Configuration (detail)

Towards a Resolution

I had a strong desire to create work that referenced the materiality of the photograph. I also wanted to address the odd relationship between image and support, and ultimately incorporate the material in the reading so that the image and paper could not be unravelled or separated. The reading would be incomplete without the presence of the material; it was important that they be enmeshed. I abandoned video, folding and any overt reference to people, places or things. I concentrated on my tools of exploration: sanding and ripping.

I began to re-photograph the sanded and ripped photographs, creating representations of surfaces. I then sanded and ripped these rephotographed images, creating images in which it was difficult to distinguish between an actual rip or scratch and an illusion of such damage. These worked well in small scale, but when enlarged, the sanding and ripping took on dimensions that did not reflect reality;

they seemed like great big gestures, not related to the original transgression. While I felt the work should be big to emphasise the materiality and give it impact, the actual sanding and ripping had to remain 1:1. This was easy to achieve in the case of ripping; however, sanding was not easily reproducible because the scratching was so fine. While rips could have a faux presence, sanding had to stay real if the photographs were to be large.

In the large sanded pieces, issues about the amount and direction of sanding arose. It was important that there be some recognition that the object was still a photograph. I did not want to erase it completely, yet I did not want there to be a connection to the image in case it was read as an action against someone or something. There must still be a reference to the photograph without there being a reference to the subject of the image. I wanted these pieces to speak about the material, giving it presence without attracting unwanted readings connected to the image.
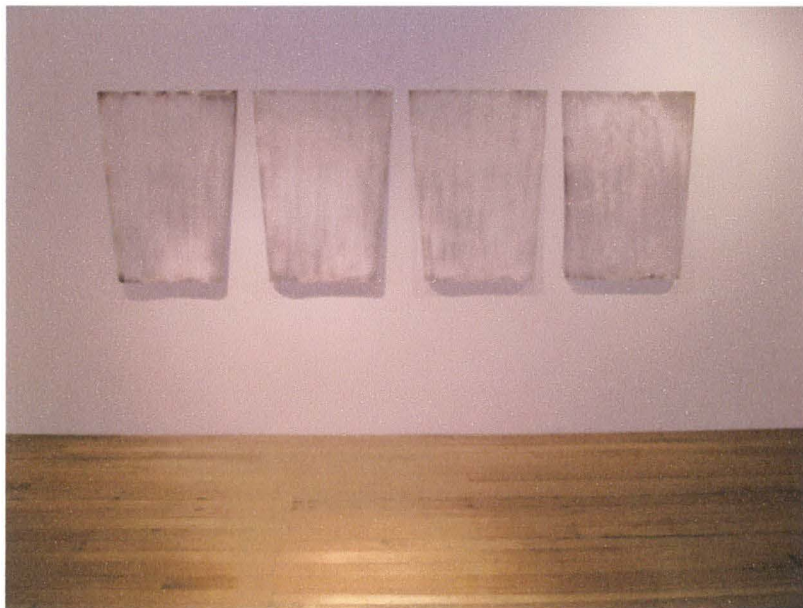

Fig. 33
Vertical Sanding 1-4
C type photograph
4 images each 105 x 76 cm
2005

I was struck by the uniqueness of each sanded piece. It addressed the relationship between photographs and reproduction. I made various sanded versions of the same image, leaving just enough trace of the image to indicate they were from the same negative, yet as it was impossible to sand them in the same manner, they became unique. When displayed in multiples they all look rather similar at first, but on closer inspection their individual aura is evident.

Beyond the initial experimental stage, there was never an attempt to use sandpaper as a drawing tool to make another image; I merely tried to find effective rhythms to eradicate the image. Although I could erase the image using strokes in only one direction, the photograph's surface was easier to remove if I went across the first sanding at a ninety or forty five-degree angle. I also tried sanding photographs that had no image, just a colour achieved in the dark room. These were beautiful, but I felt they read too much like abstractions and had lost their reference to the image. I employed photographs that had images, but made sure they had no identifiable subject matter. The portrait format was retained because at that scale (105h x 75w cm) it related more closely to the viewer's body and elicited an intimate approach towards the work. Of course, it may be that a vestige of the allure of the portrait also remains. A group of these were exhibited in *Ill & Vexed; modernity makes me sick* at the Carnegie Gallery, Hobart, June–July 2005, where an extra and unexpected element entered the scenario. The photographs were pinned only at the top allowing the once-rolled paper to kick out into the gallery space at the bottom. I thought this was an effective way to enhance their object-ness. After a while they took on a life of their own as the humidity in the room began to make them curl vertically, against the natural roll of paper. They looked as if they were trying to push themselves away from the wall and set themselves free.
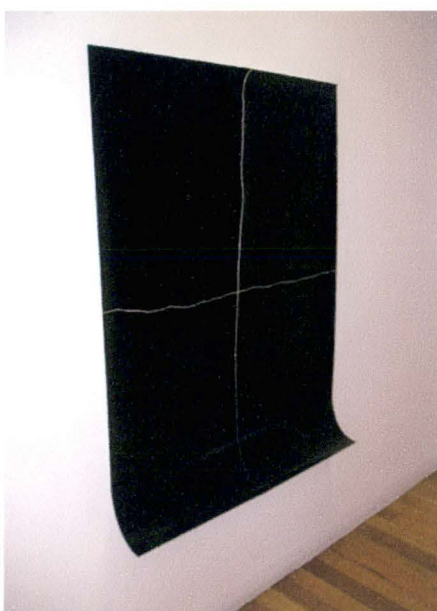
Fig. 34
Vertical Sanding 1-4 (detail)

Fig. 35
Black Rip
Lambda Print
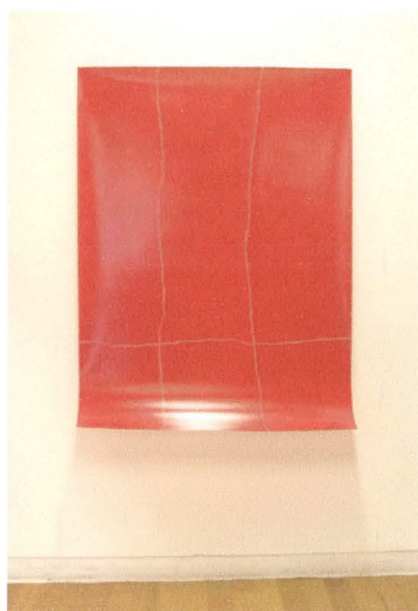136 x 95 cm
2005

Fig. 36
Red Rip
Lambda Print
136 x 101 cm
2005

The ripped pieces were emptied of an image so that no meaning could be transferred to them through the transgression against the paper. The image became that of a rip in a black field, so when I introduced an actual rip they spoke of themselves and their altered materiality. Again circular and self-referencing, they were achieving

my goals. Their scale meant that the rips were not spontaneous, as it took two people to execute them and this showed in the work — they seemed more considered. The real rip references the fake rip and visa versa. I experimented with various types and quantities of rips as well as coloured grounds.

The *Slip Rip* works have no fake rips, but a faux representation of two ripped halves pinned to the wall. On closer inspection, it is clear that the photograph is illusionary.

Fig. 37
Slip Rip
Lambda Print
168 x 112 cm
2005

Not all the rip works are empty of images. Some works contain fragments or suggestions of images. The multiple repetitive rip works emphasise the reproducibility of the rip. I wanted the viewer to note the materiality of the photographs first. The rips all look the same, but the images in the collages look different — an inversion of the state of a photograph's reproducibility. The images chosen for this work were to be nondescript and read as 'photograph' without being too much a 'photograph of'. The other aspect of this work is

that some of the images are reproductions of the ripped, reassembled photographs, so even though the rips look identical, there are some fakes amongst the real. I wanted to create a flux between material and representation, originality and reproduction, as well as creating work that, when reproduced in a catalogue, would dramatically undermine its meaning.
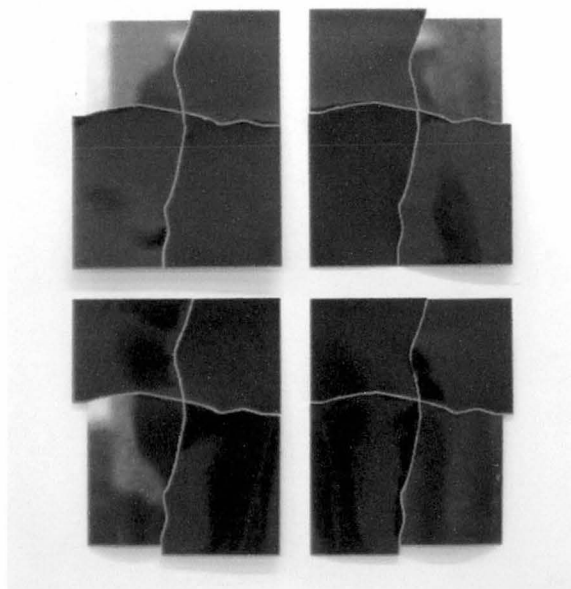

Fig. 38
Don't Force It
Lambda Prints and C type photographs (4 pieces)
60 x 45 cm
2005

The final works are those that oscillate between what is actually present in the room (the material) and what is not (the illusion). The sanded pieces disrupt the illusion with the presence of the material, causing viewers to investigate and acknowledge the surface and material. This confounds the usual way in which we view a photograph as well as our expectations of photographic content. Up close, it is not an illusion — the ripped pieces present fake and real rips in a manner that requires closer scrutiny to ascertain which is which. In reproduction these works lose their power. As well as creating a situation in which the image and the material cannot be separated, both processes produce work that questions the role of

the image in relation to the paper. They also alter the usual way we interact with photographs by causing the viewer to move towards the work to analyse, and in some instances, touch the surface for answers.

The Visual Style

There is a reductionism in my style of presentation that has arisen from my desire to produce work with uncluttered meaning. It was important to me to control the readings of my work as much as possible. From this, a minimal visual style evolved. I do not regard this as Minimalism, but rather that the content is sparse. The visual style has come about because I want people to concentrate on a specific relationship about the reception of a photograph, and how the paper's materiality affects that reception. My aim requires some symbolically-loaded elements, such as colour, be removed to avoid misreading. For example, I had made a purple version of *Slip Rip* and comments were made on how religious it seemed, but this was not the case when it was black.

Technical Aspects

Small and medium format photography, as well as digital (including scanning), were explored in an effort to achieve my goal. Using film to reproduce rips seemed to capture the gap between the lens and the ripped photograph; the rips in the reproduced image did not look as if they were attached to the surface of the photograph. The rips could have been achieved by producing photograms, of which I did make some smaller versions; however, I ultimately employed a digital process. To achieve the desired look and scale I employed a combination of analog and digital techniques. In my view scanning and digital production modes do not compromise my discussion of photography, as such technology is largely considered standard and photographic in the field. Most of the final prints are Lambda (Light

Jet) — digital output images, imprinted onto photographic paper via lasers. Technically they are C types because they are printed on photographic paper.

Notes on the Final Works

The final exhibition aims to create a balance between presenting the different phases of the project and maintaining a cohesive display. I felt it necessary to present examples of earlier work because they usher in new ideas, giving a better understanding to the project. The work in the final show consists of:

THROUGH THE MOUNTAIN 2

This is a different version of the piece exhibited in *What's the matter?* It presents a different paper stock with less overt text on the back. The newer Kodak papers have names like Endura and Supra that are printed quite large, but are loaded symbolically. They sound like names of condoms, so I decided to use an older paper stock that had less overt printing without modern names. As stated before, this work was quite emblematic of the project. It is the only document of damage in the final presentation and is an entrée to the rest of the show.

Fig. 39
Through the Mountain 2
Lambda Print
120 x 120 cm
2005

FRONT

This is a reconsidering of the suspended work *All Sides Now*. I felt that a simpler approach could be as effective in the act of self-referencing. In my effort to achieve a less cluttered conversation, a singular, bigger image was chosen as a refined version.
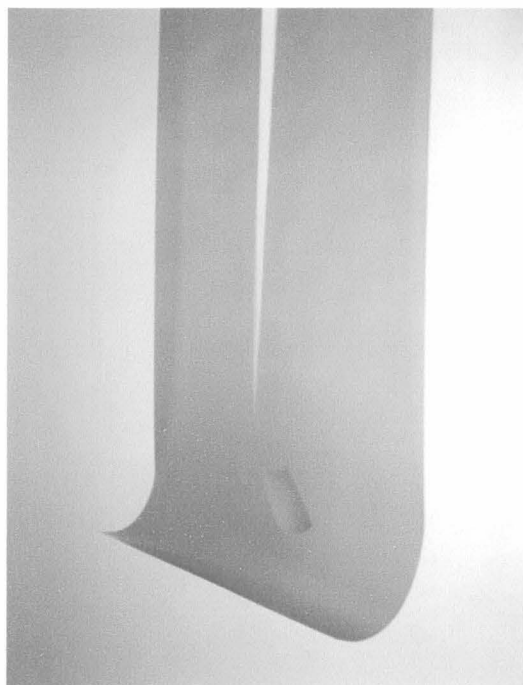

Fig. 40
Front
Lambda Print
182 x 120 cm
2005

CROSS RIP & FRENZY

These works were chosen to represent the extremes of the ripping process. Cross Rip has one real and one fake rip, while Frenzy, as the title suggests, is a combination of multiple real and fake rips.

Fig. 41
Cross Rip
Lambda Print
147 x 100 cm
2005

Fig. 42
Frenzy
Lambda Print
147 x 100 cm
2005

SLIP RIP 2

This is an example of the work in this area.
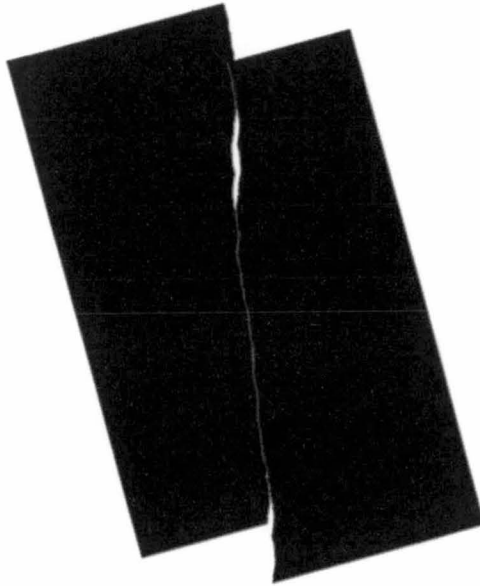
Fig. 43
Slip Rip 2
Lambda Print
150 x 110 cm
2005

SANDED

A small work (fig. 44), playing with the relationship between real and represented sanding, contrasts with the larger more dramatic examples of sanded works (fig.45). The large pieces are presented in pairs or as units of four. Even numbers are chosen so as not to highlight the middle work, which usually occurs in odd-numbered hangings. There are examples of various sanding methods: horizontal, cross and diagonal.
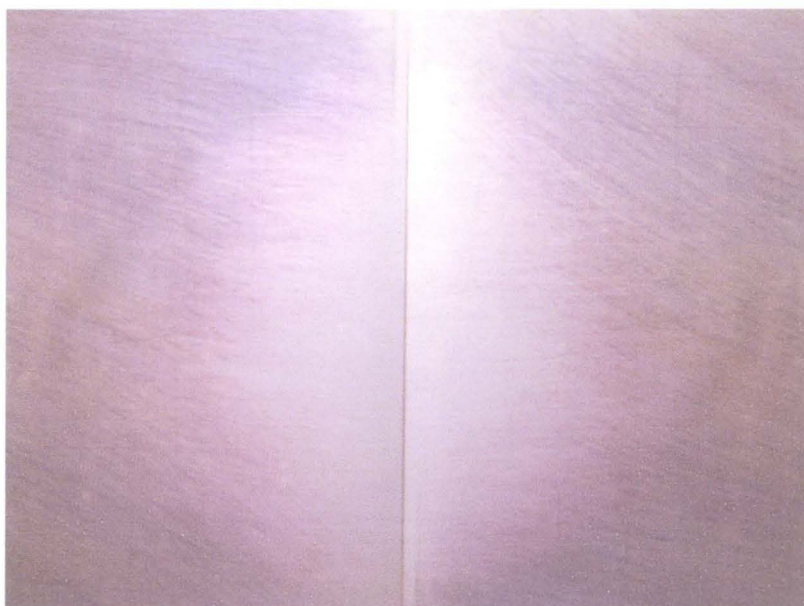
Fig. 44
Sanded Circle (detail)
4 Lambda Prints
126 x 25.5cm
2005

Fig. 45
Cross Sanding (detail)
C types
2 images 103 x 76 cm each
2005

MULTIPLE SAME RIPS

This work comprises a multitude of images connected by the use of a rip that appears uniform throughout all the variations of the pieces. A template was used to create the rips, and when seen in this quantity, the rip loses its transgressive nature. It reads more like a repetitive motif — part of the design, but still obviously the material at-large. There are also different paper types used here: gloss and lustre create an inconsistency in reflection, but also a subtlety that, once the rips have been noted, continues to impart the object's materiality into the finer stages of visual scrutiny.

Fig. 46
Multi Same Rips (detail)
Lambda prints and C type photographs
40 prints 25.5 x 20.5cm (approx)
2005

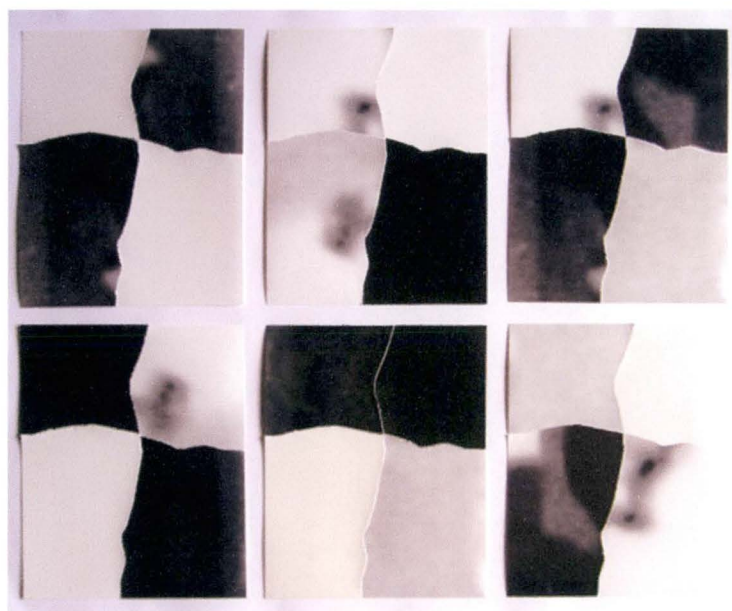# BIG VERSIONS OF THE MULTIPLE SAME RIPS

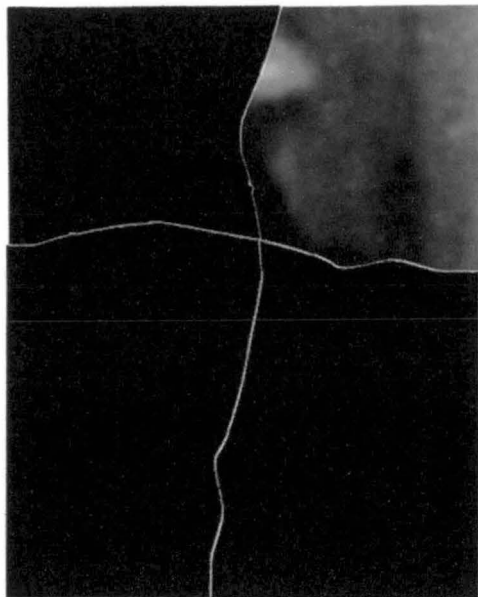Here I enlarged two of the small versions of these. One is presented with a rip, one without.
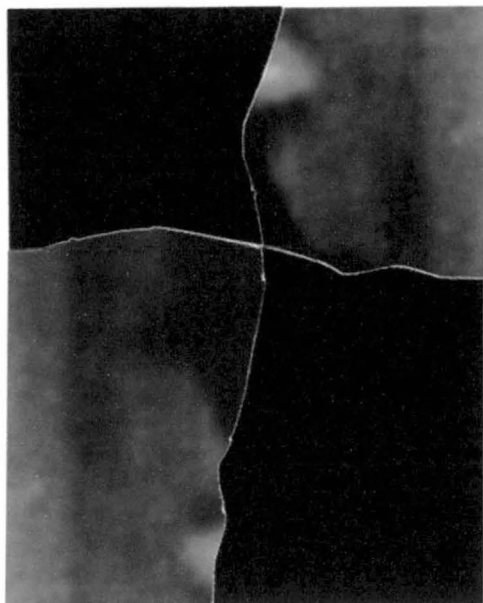

Fig. 47
Fit 1
Lambda Print
130 x 105cm
2005

Fig. 48
Fit 2
Lambda Print
130 x 105cm
2005

CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION

Photographs have always intrigued me and this project is an investigation of a particular area in which I have been interested for some time. I wanted to study the connection between a photograph's image and its paper, examining how this relationship imparts information and how we receive it.

This project was partly inspired by seeing the folded work of Jäger and, while it is in some way similar, his conceptual impetus is much more about process, both photographic and generative (imposed systems of production). I have used his reductive clarity infused with Schmid's torn 'found photographs' and have added other discoveries made along the way to create a final body of work that is a unique manifestation of the research I have undertaken.

The project began with some previous work in the area, but with no real insight into the research's trajectory. I treated it as an exploratory exercise, taking advantage of unexpected incidents and undertaking laboured investigation. The title of the project, 'An investigation of the relationship between the material and illusionary aspects of the photograph', remained the same throughout the project. I tried to stick with the task, allowing myself to deviate now and then, but always returning to the project's main focus by constantly asking myself, 'what is this relationship?'.

The question was a vexing issue for me when I began my research and, frankly, has remained so. I have concluded that this will always be the case. The relationship between image and material is one of slave/master, both elements are highly co-dependent, but one can never be sure to what measure. All I can say is that I know the field better now and accept the issues raised by it. In demonstrating the complexity of this relationship, I have raised many issues which both contribute to, and perpetuate, the area of investigation.

This project sits contextually within a continuum of artistic investigation and historical data. Changes in the materiality of a photograph are plotted from significant to slight in order to show its diminishing physicality. As a result, the photograph requires a support structure which changes its physical status and reading.

I have highlighted some uses of photographs to show how viewing contexts change our relationship to a photograph's materiality. The connection to reality is addressed to show how compelling the illusion in a photograph is and how difficult it is to surmount such power. This mix of context, (including artistic examples), places the work in a mesh that shows the arena is broad, complex and problematic.

A primary goal of this research was to create work that highlights the relationship between photographic paper and the image, and to identify connections between paper and image that are unlike those usually experienced when viewing a photograph. I felt I could articulate the way photographs usually work by creating work that functions to the contrary. In my opinion, work produced for this project does just this. Sanding and ripping have created an interesting mix of the familiar and unfamiliar, evoking the material as well as our associations to the photograph. The work highlights the interrelationship between image, paper and reception, showing it as problematic and confusing by challenging the usual way we interact with a photograph. The main strategies employed are: displacing the observer from their privileged viewing position; complicating surfaces by evoking the material; shifting the focus from image to surface; and confusing the reality of the material with its replicas. Pieces that incorporate the materiality of the photograph speak of the paradoxes of the medium. They do so by making any reproduction of them fall back into the power of the image; and by denying the unique materiality produced by the sanding and ripping.

Consequently they raise issues of originality, aura, reproduction and commodity.

The concerns in this field are often circular and paradoxical. The relationship between photographic paper and the image printed on it is not always fixed. There are no definite answers to the questions being raised here; however, my contribution to the field is an added dialogue and articulation of the issues involved.

I have enjoyed dedicating time to this field of study and believe I have successfully highlighted pertinent issues arising from it, not only for myself, but also for viewers of the work.

APPENDICIES

APPENDIX 1

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APPENDIX 2

IMAGE LIST

Fig. 1
Jan Dibbets
Perspective Correction
My Studio I, 1: Square on wall
Black and white photograph on photographic canvas
110 x 110 cm
1969
Scanned from: Fuchs, R. and M. Vos, *Jan Dibbets.* 1987,
Minneapolis: Walker Arts Center p. 46.

Fig. 2
Daguerreotype
16.6 x 9.2 cm (open)
From the collection of David Stephenson

Fig. 3
Daguerreotype's silvered surface

Fig. 4
Makers unknown
Portrait of unidentified man in hair bracelet
c.1850.
Scanned from: Batchen, G., *Forget me not: photography and remembrance.* 2004, New York: Princeton Architectural Press p. 70.

Fig. 5
Mel Bochner
3 Photographs and 1 Diagram (Row H)
4 gelatin silver prints mounted on board
50.8 x 50.8 cm each panel; 228.6 x 50.8 cm overall
1966-67
Scanned from Rothkopf, S., *Mel Bochner Photographs 1966-1969.*
2002, Cambridge: Yale University Press p. 54.

Fig. 6
Mike and Doug Starn
Kandinsky
Photo collage
1988
Scanned from: Grundberg, A., *Mike and Doug Starn.* 1990, New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc. p. 112.

Fig. 7
Mike and Doug Starn
ATL 28 Ephemera
25.5 x 25.5 cm
Ephemera obtained from studio detritus, and are unique.
2003
Scanned from: Starn, D., *Attracted to light/ photographs by Doug and Mike Starn.* 2003, New York: Powerhouse Books p. 57.

Fig. 8
Joachim Schmid
Found photographs

Top L to R	# 140 Belo Horizonte, August 1992
	# 192 Sao Paolo, Oct 1993
Bottom L to R	# 187 Sao Paolo, Sep 1993
	# 83 Berlin, July 1990

Scanned from: Weber, J.S., *Pictures from the Street – Joachim Schmid*, in *Art & Design Magazine*. 1995. p. 14.

Fig. 9
Gottfried Jäger
Faltblatt (folded leaflet)
Photopaper # xxv
40 x 30 cm folded
1999
Scanned from: Jäger, G., and L. Wiesling, *Abstract Photography: Conceivable Images,* 2000, Bielfefeld: Lutz Teutloff Galerie p. xxix.

Fig. 10
Gottfried Jäger
Faltblatt (folded leaflet)
Photopaper #xxv
40 x 30 cm folded
1999
Scanned from: Jäger, G., and L. Wiesling, *Abstract Photography: Conceivable Images,* 2000, Bielfefeld: Lutz Teutloff Galerie p. xxxi.

Fig. 11 & 12
Trees
C type photographs (3) and metal clips
15 x 10 x 8 cm variable
1999

Fig. 13 & 14
Installation details, Conical Gallery.
Lambda Prints
120 x 150 cm (4)
2004

Fig.15
Short Side
Lambda Print
102 x 74 cm
2004

Fig.16
Long Side
Lambda Print
135 x 59 cm
2004

Fig.17
Back to Front
Lambda Print
105 x 75 cm
2004

Fig.18
Original image taken to rephotograph for *All Sides Now*

Fig.19
Image of the back of the suspended photograph
Lambda Print
120 x 91 cm

Fig.20
Image of the front of the suspended photograph
Lambda Print
120 x 86 cm

Fig.21
All Sides Now
Installation view
2004

Fig.22 & 23
Installation views of library exhibit
2004/2005

Fig.24
From Behind the Mountain
Lambda Print
101 x 101 cm
2004

Fig.25
Through the Mountain
Lambda Print
101 x 101 cm
2004

Fig.26
Video still
Sanding Crumpled Photograph

Fig.27
Video still
Sanding Child

Fig.28
Video still
Sanding Ocean

Fig.29
Through with In-built Frame
Lambda Print
31 x 18 cm (2)
2004

Fig.30
Pink Through with In-built Frame (detail)
Photogram
31 x 18 cm (2)
2004

Fig.31
Cross Sanded Floor Configuration
C type photographs (4) and PVC pipe
105 x 17 x 12(h) cm approx. and variable
2005

Fig.32
Cross Sanded Floor Configuration (detail)

Fig.33
Vertical Sanding 1-4
C type photograph (4)
105 x 76 cm each
2005

Fig.34
Vertical Sanding 1-4 (detail)

Fig.35
Black Rip
Lambda Print
136 x 95 cm
2005

Fig.36
Red Rip
Lambda Print
136 x 101 cm
2005

Fig.37
Slip Rip
Lambda Print
168 x 112 cm
2005

Fig.38
Don't Force It
Lambda Prints and C type photographs
60 x 45 cm
2005

Fig.39
Through the Mountain 2
Lambda Print
120 x 120 cm
2005

Fig.40
Front
Lambda Print
182 x 120 cm
2005

Fig.41
Cross Rip
Lambda Print
147 x 100 cm
2005

Fig.42
Frenzy
Lambda Print
147 x 100 cm
2005

Fig.43
Slip Rip 2
Lambda Print
150 x 110 cm
2005

Fig.44
Sanded Circle (detail)
4 Lambda Prints
126 x 25.5 cm
2005

Fig.45
Cross Sanding (detail)
C types
2 images 103 x 76 cm each
2005

Fig.46
Multi Same Rips (detail)
Lambda prints and C type photographs
40 prints 25.5 x 20.5 cm (approx)
2005

Fig. 47
Fit 1
Lambda Print
130 x 105 cm
2005

Fig.48
Fit 2
Lambda Print
130 x 105 cm
2005

APPENDIX 3

LIST OF WORKS IN EXHIBITION

(viewable on accompanying CD)

1   *Through the Mountain 2*
       Lambda Print
       120 x 120 cm
       2005

2   *Front*
       Lambda Print
       182 x 120 cm
       2005

3   *Cross Rip*
       Lambda Print
       147 x 100 cm
       2005

4   *Frenzy*
       Lambda Print
       147 x 100 cm
       2005

5   *Slip Rip 2*
       Lambda Print
       150 x 110 cm
       2005

6   *Sanded Circle*
       4 Lambda Prints
       126 x 25.5 cm
       2005

7   *Cross Sanding 1-2*
       C type photographs
       2 images 103 x 76 cm each
       2005

8   *Cross and Diagonal Sanding 1-2*
       C type photographs
       2 images 103 x 76 cm each
       2005

9   *Vertical Sanding 1-4*
       C type photographs
       4 images 103 x 76 cm each
       2005

10   *Multi Same Rips*
Lambda prints and C type photographs
40 prints 25.5 x 20.5 cm (approx)
2005

11   *Fit 1*
Lambda Print
130 x 105 cm (approx)
2005

12   *Fit 2*
Lambda Print
130 x 105 cm (approx)
2005

APPENDIX 4

CURRICULUM VITAE

EMIDIO PUGLIELLI
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Formal Education

2004-2005	Tasmanian University, Hobart. Candidate for Masters by Research.
2000	Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne. Honours Program in Photography.
1996-1999	RMIT University, Melbourne. Bachelor of Arts — Fine Arts.
1987	La Trobe University, Bundoora. Diploma in Education.
1982-1985	La Trobe University, Bundoora. Bachelor of Arts.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2005	*What's the Matter?* Inflight Gallery, Hobart.
2004	*DROME*, 24seven, Melbourne
	Conical Gallery, Melbourne
2003	*META*, 69 Smith St., Melbourne
2001	*Off Screen*, West Space, Melbourne
1999	La Trobe St. Galleries, Melbourne, Experimental Space
	City Art Public Space, Public Office, North Melbourne
1998	*Understory*, Dialogue, Words for Type Issue, p. 30-33

Thank you for shopping, 100 posters for
The City of Melbourne Public Arts Project

1997   *Junk Mail*, Catalogue delivery, Melbourne

            *I'm a teen love machine and man,
            you can't stop me*, Bus Stop Art,
            City Art Public Space, Melbourne

Selected Group Exhibitions

2005   *Early Fabricated*, Peloton Gallery, Sydney, Ocular
            Lab, Melbourne

            And Then Some..., Inflight Gallery, Hobart

            Resonator, The Long Gallery, Hobart

            Ill & Vexed: modernity makes me sick,
            Carnegie Gallery, Hobart

            Parallax, Maroondah Gallery, Melbourne

2004   *Static*, Kings Gallery, Melbourne

2003   *Royal Rumble*, Kings Gallery, Melbourne

            Pinocchio's Prose, Hobart Fringe Festival Street
            Gallery, Harris Scarfe windows

2002   *Meter*, Northern Territory University, Darwin

2000   *Famed*, VCA, Melbourne

1999   *Visibility*, R.M.I.T., Melbourne

            Yuan-Ze University, Taiwan

1998   *Decorart*, Linden Gallery, St. Kilda

            Palimpsest, Span Galleries, Melbourne

1997   *What's better than one Jeffrey? 25 Jeffreys*,
            George Paton Gallery, Melbourne University

Curatorial Projects

2005   *Ill & Vexed: modernity makes me sick*,
            Carnegie Gallery, Hobart.

2002   *Meter*, Northern Territory University, Darwin

Grants and Awards

2005   Received grant from Contemporary Art Services
            Tasmania's Emerging Curators Development Fund to
            curate *Locating the Photographic* at Plimsoll Gallery
            scheduled for Aug.– Sept. 2006.

2004   Tasmanian Graduate Research Scholarship

            NAVA Visual and Craft Artists' Grant was awarded to
            assist *Ill & Vexed*.

1998   Pat Corrigan Artists Grant, managed by NAVA was
            awarded to assist with *Decorart*.

            City of Melbourne financial support to the arts
            for *Thank you for shopping* project.

Publications and Media

Langridge, Colin, 'Ill & Vexed: modernity makes me sick'. *Artlink*,
Vol. 25, # 3, 2005, p. 86.

Andersch, Joerg, 'Surprises but no pretty pictures'. *The Mercury
Magazine*, June 18 2005, p. 13.

Scott, Sarah, 'What's the Matter?'. *Un.magazine*, Winter 2005, #4,
p. 62.

Puglielli, Emidio, *What's the Matter?*. Catalogue, 2005.

Peers, Juliet, 'Faites Vos Jeux! Aesthetics and Dis/Order in
Kennet's Victoria'. *Artlink*, Vol. 19 #4, 1999, p. 12-15.

Jerums, Georgina, 'Poster Boy'. *The City Weekly*, Vol. 2, Number
13, April 9 -15 1998, p. 3-4.

Puglielli, Emidio, 'Understory'. *Words for Type* (issue title) *Dialogue*,
July 1997, p. 30-33.

Healy, Guy, '25 Ways to Counter Censorship'. *The Australian*, April
30 1997, p. 35.