Reframed: A Collection of Photographs, and, Capturing the Real: Reframing Visual Pleasure in the Photographed Female Nude, an Exegesis

Larry Defelippi

Edith Cowan University

Recommended Citation

This Thesis is posted at Research Online.
https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/564
You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study.

The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following:

- Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.
- A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement.
- A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.
Reframed

A collection of photographs

– and –

Capturing the real:

Reframing visual pleasure in the photographed female nude

An exegesis

This thesis is presented in partial fulfilment of the degree of

Bachelor of Communications Honours

Larry Defelippi

Edith Cowan University
Faculty of Education and Arts
School of Communication and Arts
2015
Copyright

This copy is the property of Edith Cowan University. However, the literary rights of the author must also be respected. If any passage of this thesis is quoted or closely paraphrased in a paper or written work prepared by the user, the source of the passage must be acknowledged in the work. If the user desires to publish a paper or written work containing passages copied or closely paraphrased from this thesis, which passages would in total constitute an infringing copy for the purposes of the Copyright Act, he or she must first obtain the written permission of the author to do so. I grant permission for the Library at Edith Cowan University to make duplicate copies of my thesis as required.
Abstract

This creative Honours project is a practice-led inquiry into the photographed female nude. The images of the female nude photographed during the course of this project were taken in Australia and Colombia, providing a progression in aesthetics as the project unfolded. Informing the practice, and hence the images, is Roland Barthes’ concept of the punctum as read through Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytical concept of the real. The project endeavours to develop an aesthetic of visual pleasure to liberate the female nude from a predominant psychosexual reading, and advocate a revisualisation of the nude as a less sexually objectified form. In addition, while previous experience with photographic film gave insight into the apogees and nadirs of the ‘accident’, those good or bad moments that interrupt the photographer’s intent. I found that operating in the developing world – Colombia – provided far more uncertainty. Contingent and serendipitous elements arose that gave greater scope to my investigation into the aesthetics surrounding the female nude.
The declaration page
is not included in this version of the thesis
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank George Karpathakis for his untiring feedback and encouragement for the project. I would also like to thank Max Pam for his supervision and guidance of the photography. I am also highly appreciative of the technical support and advice from Paul Godfrey and Alistair Edwards. The photographs taken in Colombia would not have been possible without the advice and support of Ivan Carazo and Karen Paulina Biswell, to whom I am eternally grateful. Last, but not least, I would like to thank the models who trusted me to photograph them, for this project could not have proceeded without their participation and collaboration.
Contents

Copyright i
Abstract ii
Declaration iii
Acknowledgements iv
Chapter One – Introduction 1
Research Questions 2
Theoretical Considerations 2
The Nude/Naked Dichotomy 4
Obscenity 5
Chapter Two – Literature Review 6
The Desired Body 6
The Naked and the Nude 10
Photographed the Female Nude 12
Chapter Three - Methodology 16
Practice Led Research 16
Photographic Portraiture 16
Participants 19
Technical Aspects 20
Editing 20
Contingency 21
Serendipity 21
Chapter Four – Outcomes 23
References 28
Appendix 31
Chapter 1: Introduction

Anyone who examines the history of Western art must be struck by the prevalence of images of the female body. More than any other subject, the female nude connotes ‘Art’. The framed image of a female body, hung on the wall of an art gallery, is shorthand for art more generally; it is an icon of western culture, a symbol of civilization and accomplishment. (Nead, 1992, p. 1)

For the past decade, a substantial part of my creative photographic practice has been focused on the female nude. My first female nudes were photographed as part of my university studies, and at the time I had not given them much thought, as my photographic aspirations were predisposed towards ideas of either being a street photographer or a photojournalist. With that in mind, in 1999 I left Australia with plans to photograph the unrest in Abkhazia. However, through a series of unexpected events I found myself in Japan instead, and influenced by the works of Nobuyoshi Araki and Daido Moriyama, started to photograph nudes there. The photographs I took, especially those I wished to exhibit there, had to adhere to Japanese censorship laws. This meant no clear depictions of genitalia, male or female: laws that even extended to the drawn nude. These legal restrictions had a direct influence on how I posed and framed models. During my final days in Japan, an artist friend asked me to photograph her in a pose not dissimilar to Courbet’s *L’Origine Du Monde* (1866) (appendix fig. 1), but with erō guro overtones (a Japanese artistic tradition focusing on eroticism, sexual corruption and decadence). I said I could not. I was primarily concerned with its potential reception as pornographic. This prompted me to question my practice of photographing the female nude, particularly ideas of objectification, controversy, and obscenity.

Throughout history the depiction of the female nude has from time to time been wrapped in controversy. Mark Twain described Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* (appendix fig. 2) as “the foulest, the vilest, the obscenest picture the world possesses” when he encountered the canonical Renaissance nude of a woman reclining on a sofa, body turned toward the viewer, her gaze meeting his (cited in Dennis, 2009, p. 15). Her reclining pose as *venus pudica*, a gesture modestly concealing her pubis “originated with the Greek sculptor Praxiteles’ fourth century BCE depiction of the *Aphrodite of Knidos*” (p. 15), which itself was not without controversy. Many depictions of the female nude now considered acceptable as art met with controversy when first exhibited, for instance “Manet’s *Olympia* (appendix fig. 3), first shown in Paris in 1865 caused a furor. Two guards were posted to prevent an assault on the painting” (Eck, 2001, p. 611).
Today we can find these paintings in the Louvre, and the Uffizi Gallery, two of the oldest, and most prestigious art museums in the world. Many of the spectators viewing these female nudes today, arguably have no idea how provocative these works were once considered. How these images were once viewed, compared to today, points to constantly changing attitudes operating in the sphere of sexuality, obscenity, and representation. This project is concerned with the continuing reassessment of how to photograph the female nude, that is, both in how its produced and viewed. It seeks to reframe some of the ways the female nude is viewed and received, by contemplating alternative perspectives to the traditional notions of voyeuristic objectification as a principle site of pleasure, and applying these theories to creative practice.

The research involves both a creative and exegetical component. The creative component of this project is comprised of a series of photographed female nudes informed by theories of affect by Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan. The photographs that were used as the basis of the creative project were taken in both Australia and Colombia. Plans to travel to Colombia preceded this project, and during the development stage it was decided to extend the project to Colombia. The ensuing photographs from Australia and Colombia exhibit differing aesthetical qualities, not only as a result of changing techniques as the project progressed, but from an entire gambit of contingent and serendipitous factors that were for the most part unforeseen. The photographic project, along with its exegetical component, both hinge on a set of research questions, theoretical considerations, the nude/naked dichotomy, and concerns regarding obscenity.

**Research Questions**

**Main question:**
What strategies can be employed to elicit visual pleasure outside voyeuristic objectification when working with the photographed female nude?

**Sub-questions:**
What are some of the concerns that arise when photographing the female nude?
When photographing the female nude, how do these concerns affect the work?

**Theoretical Considerations**

The photographs and the accompanying exegesis are informed by Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida* (1980) his seminal text on photography, which inquires into the nature of the photograph and its effect on the spectator, read through Jacques Lacan’s concept of the *real* as outlined in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1973). Barthes suggests that theoretical schemas derived
from sociology, semiology or psychology is reductive and that they do not take into account the immediacy of the photograph. Therefore, instead of interpreting the meaning of a photograph using a pre-existent conceptual framework, he makes the feelings aroused by particular images the starting point of his analysis.

For Barthes, many photographs provide him with little or no emotional impact and he is only interested in the few that do. These photographs possess what Barthes terms a *punctum* which he defines as an “element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me… . A photograph’s *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (pp. 26-27). Barthes suggests that the sort of response elicited by such photographs cannot be completely explained discursively, nor placed there intentionally by the photographer. Rather, it happens unintentionally, as an individual entity experiences engaging with the object at a non-discursive level. In describing what he calls the *punctum*, Barthes is contemplating a type of photographic accident. While acknowledging the insights that Barthes offers into individual photographs and into himself as spectator, I feel his account does not recognise the prospect of photographers contriving the sort of tension between *punctum* and *studium* that has the potential to take the photographs to a higher level. Just as Barthes had searched for his elusive *punctum*, so had I every time I ‘aimed’ a camera. As Sontag famously says, “there is something predatory in the act of taking a picture” (1977, p. 14), and so it is for me as I attempt to ‘shoot’ and ‘pierce’ the viewer.

If both the photographer and the viewer, in looking at the female nude, only focus on what is exposed as the disturbing element, her nudity, then what predominates is a point of transgression that could be described by Barthes as the *studium*:

That very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste: I like / I don’t like… .To recognize the *studium* is inevitably to encounter the photographer’s intentions, to enter into harmony with them, to approve or disapprove of them, but always to understand them. (1980, pp. 27–28)

It could be argued that many examples of the photographed nude are “invested with no more than [the] *studium*” (p. 27), mobilising what Barthes calls a “half-desire”, the information the photograph presents as we study it. These photographs may represent part of the artist’s intention, and their allusion to our knowledge and culture only provide an unchallenging and “irresponsible interest” in the photograph. By solely investing in the *studium* the photographed female nude falls into being formulaic and conventionalised, not unlike that of the Playboy centrefold.
Whereas the punctum “points ‘beyond’ both nature and culture, to their inevitable impossibility, to what Jacques Lacan calls the domain of the ‘real,’ anxiety provoking anomalies in the order of symbolic representations” (Friedlander, 2008, pp. 152-153). What Lacan suggests here is that the photograph exists for us, only because it corresponds to something in us, stirring something within us. The Lacanian real can provide an understanding of these points of desire within the image. As with Barthes’ punctum, Lacan’s real functions retrospectively. There is something elusive, something intangible, about desire that pierces you that may be quite difficult to articulate, but you cannot refute its existence. Lacan calls this the objet a – the object-cause of your desire, “the leftover of that process of constituting an object; the scrap that evades the grasp of symbolization” (Fink, 1995, p. 94). The objet a being that which is left over from the real.

Friedlander argues that many theorists, when discussing desire, overly “emphasise Lacan’s notion of the imaginary to the virtual exclusion of his concept of the real. This omission manifests in, among other things, a limited notion of the spectator” (2008, p. 167). One result is a reductive view of the spectator’s desire as that being driven primarily by voyeuristic objectification. This fails to take into account notions of a spectator that engages with the image because of something intrinsic to them that can be accounted for within the image as the real. Therefore the punctum that disrupts the studium of the photograph is that ephemeral glimpse, or encounter with the real as objet petit a, an absence, a lack that determines desire.

The Nude/Naked Dichotomy

In discussing the female nude it is important to understand the difference between the nude and the naked. Within the literature there are two main opposing perspectives on the difference between nude and naked; these stem from the seminal writings of art historian Kenneth Clark (1956) and art critic John Berger (1977). The first is Clark’s notion that the nude, male or female, is wrapped in art, as if there is a metaphoric sheath covering their nakedness. The second, a counter argument to Clark’s nude/naked dichotomy, has Berger argue that the nude is the body in representation mediated by the artist for a voyeuristic gaze, whereas the naked is unmediated, and not in representation. Therefore Berger views the nude as somehow inferior to the naked, and the nude as an object in art for the male gaze. Bostrom and Malik suggest that “Clark's attempt to clothe the nakedness of bodies with nudity is an attempt to return to the innocence of the Garden and/or to imaginary Greek paganism” (1999, p. 45), as Clark considers the nude a product of ‘good taste’ as opposed to the obscenity of the naked.
**Obscenity**

Obscenity is a mediated entity, and Mey in her discussion of art and obscenity, describes it as a “valorising cultural category” that in being “vulgar, dirty . . . and thus morally corrupting . . . functions as the other of the aesthetic” (2007, p. 2). An example of obscenity not being intrinsically linked to the object is Gustav Courbet’s painting *L’Origine Du Monde (The Origin of the World)* (1866). Though an almost anatomical depiction of female genitalia, it could be argued that it escapes any notions of obscenity. Arguably it is an example of the naked being cloaked in Clark’s metaphorical sheath of the nude.

Could the same be said of a photograph? Falk (1993) in an article on the anti-aesthetics of pornography asserts that the tendency to “exclude photography from (visual) art as a medium and mode of (re)presentation goes hand in hand with arguments excluding the pornographic from (classical) aesthetics” (p. 2). Photography precisely because it is “*too real*” abolishes the reflective distance required to be considered art and not pornographic. To maintain a reflective distance, the aesthetic is experienced through a negation, “maintaining a ‘disinterested’ and contemplative distance from the object without any desire for realization . . . [of] bodily pleasures” (p. 8). Within photography’s argued lack of reflective distance, there is an interesting “parallelism between photography and pornography” (p. 2) to be found in aesthetic-philosophical discourse.

Theories of aesthetics combined with poststructuralist theories of affect, are used here, to arrive at photographs that are considered as art, and not pornography. These theories are covered in more detail in the next chapter’s literature review, providing a theoretical and conceptual framework to the photographs. This leads to a discussion of methodology in Chapter 3, followed by a discussion of the outcomes in the concluding chapter.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review, written as part of the research proposal, precedes and informs the creative project, and provides a language allowing me to take part in the discourse surrounding the nude and visual pleasure. It is structured thematically to explore poststructuralist theories of affect, the naked/nude dichotomy, and the photographed female nude. The first section, *The Body Desired*, examines theories of affect relating to the image, paying particular attention to Barthes’ notions of the *punctum* and Lacan’s psychoanalytical concepts of desire. The second section, *The Naked and the Nude*, reviews literature concerning the differentiation between the usage of the terms naked and nude, and their applications to discussions of representation and viewership. The last section, *Photographing the Female Nude*, provides a discussion of early to contemporary photographers informed by traditions of the painted nude.

The Desired Body

Barthes (1977) suggests that the relationship between self-image and the body is one that can only be realised through the reflected gaze. Barthes states that:

> You are the only one who can never see yourself except as an image; you never see your eyes unless they are dulled by the gaze they rest upon the mirror or the lens . . . even and especially for your own body, you are condemned to the repertoire of its images. (Barthes, 1977, p. 31)

Similarly, Berger’s (1977) discussion of Western cultural aesthetics in *Ways of Seeing*, further privileges the metaphor of the mirror, suggesting that women merely mimic the male gaze. Berger purports that men looked and women appeared in his formulation of the male gaze.

Laura Mulvey's (1975) appropriation of psychoanalytical concepts of voyeurism and fetishism in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* gave added cogency to ideas of women as passive objects of the gaze, and men as active subjects of their own desires. Mulvey appropriates Lacan’s (1949) *Mirror Stage* to discuss the pleasure in looking and the psychological implications of the gaze. Mulvey argues that the unconscious of a patriarchal society structures film, and that woman are objectified by:

> The determining male gaze [projecting] its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionistic role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. (p. 206)
For Mulvey the screen functions as the *mirror* reflecting an image more perfect for the male spectator than the real world. The author connects this psychological idea to cinema by pointing out the traditional plot structure that dominates film provides a passive female figure for the man to affix fantasy and desire onto. The male acts a catalyst for the action, moving through the narrative easily and exerting a control and dominance over events. Here Mulvey outlines a second kind of viewing pleasure, narcissistic identification, where:

The spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence. (p. 207)

Mulvey’s notions of viewing pleasure, voyeuristic objectification and narcissistic identification, both presume or conform to, an asymmetrical relation between the sexes. Women, she argues, are usually objectified by mainstream realist cinema; visual pleasure derives from voyeuristically looking at the woman-as-spectacle. In her conceptualisation of the male gaze, Mulvey sees the woman’s role as purely passive, allowing for no vested interest in her own representation. Butler (1990) in her discussion of gender performance suggests otherwise, when she posits that “the category of women is a variable cultural accomplishment, a set of meanings taken on or taken up within a cultural field, and that no one is born with a gender – gender is always acquired” (p. 111). Gender according to Butler does not represent any inner stable psychic entity rather it is performative, not only the “looked-at-ness” of the passively objectified woman.

Discussions of psychoanalytical concepts investigated here are somewhat informed by film theory, given its broader discussion of psychoanalysis, and the parallels that exist between film and photography, that is they both “depend upon the making of optical impressions of the world, both [requiring] subject matter” (Campany, 2011, pp. 10-11). In discussing desire, traditional Lacanian film theorists (Metz, 1982; Mulvey, 1975; Rose, 1986) argue that film, like the mirror stage, is an imaginary deception, an enticement to distract from an underlying symbolic structure. Here the gaze is a function of the imaginary, indispensible for the imaginary deception that takes place. Here desire is posited as a function of the imaginary, overlooking the *real*.

McGowan (2007) provides an alternative interpretation of the gaze to that of traditional Lacanian film theorists. Rather than locating the gaze within the subjectivity of the spectator, McGowan locates the gaze within the objectivity of the film text in what McGowan terms the “real gaze”. McGowan suggests Lacan’s *petit object a*, the unobtainable object of desire, is the “real gaze”. The *objet a* represents the Other’s lack, not a specific object that is lacking, but as lack itself.
Desire, strictly speaking, has no object. Desire is always the desire for something that is lacking and thus involves a constant search for the missing object. Through the separation between subject and Other, the desire between that of the child and that of the mother diverges. It is this divergence that provides a shift in desire and the advent of the objet petit a. Driven by a process of phantasm, the subject attempts to sustain the illusion of wholeness with the Other and ignore his or her experience of their own existence. Although the desire of the Other always exceeds or eludes the subject, there nevertheless remains something that the subject can recover and thus sustains him or herself. This something is the objet a. Therefore it has been argued that Lacan’s gaze is not the look of the spectator but something the spectator observes in the object, something that distorts the experience of the object seen. McGowan suggests, “though the gaze is an object . . . there is, according to Lacan, a form of the objet petit a that corresponds to each of our drives” (2007, p. 6). This interpretation of Lacanian theory possibly allows the conception of the spectator as a void who encounters the real, where:

The gaze is the point at which the subject loses its subjective privilege and becomes wholly embodied in the object . . . Understood in Lacan’s own terms, the gaze is not the spectator’s external view of the filmic image, but the mode in which the spectator is accounted for within the film itself. (McGowan, 2007, pp. 7–8)

In discussing desire, both Lacan (1949) and Barthes (1980) speak of a desire that is idealising, unrequited, and related to the elemental experience of the mother. Lacanian psychoanalysis revolves around the issue of the subject’s lack as the determinant of desire, and provides a way to theorise lack/desire as it functions in photography. If subjectivity is based on lack/desire as a function, Barthes’ (1980) Camera Lucida suggests the photograph acts on both; the photograph always represents lack and absence, but simultaneously offers possession, images of wholeness, and the semblance of proximity. Barthes’s A Lover’s Discourse (1978) further explores desire, and provides compelling affinities with Lacan. Here Barthes refers to Lacan’s (1973) Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis in which Lacan introduces the concept of separation. Lacan describes separation as the process through which the child differentiates itself from the Other, no longer simply a subject of language, giving rise to the subject’s lack/desire. Lacan (1973) asserts that:

Two lacks overlap here. The first emerges from . . . the fact that the subject depends on the signifier and that the signifier is first of all in the field of the Other. This lack takes up the other lack, which is the real [lack] . . . to be situated at the advent of the living being . . . by being subject to sex, has fallen under the blow of individual death. (pp. 204 -205)
The separation from the Other, here the child’s mother, and the search by the subject for that “not of the sexual complement, but the part of himself, lost forever, that is constituted by the fact that he is a sex living being, and that he is no longer immortal” (Lacan, 1973, p. 205). The Lacanian process of separation creates a psychic loss, a lack that generates desire. There are parallels to be found in Barthes’ *Camera Lucida*, for his final book is quite explicitly a work about loss and mourning. The death of his beloved mother, forever absent, drives him to find the quintessential photograph of his mother in a search to find that, which is missing. The actual loss of Barthes’ mother, the loss of the real through being photographed, and the loss of the mother through separation all correspond to a lack, bringing about desire.

Barthes states that when he looks at the photograph he only sees “the referent, the desired object, the beloved body”, allowing him to see through the photograph to the object he desires (Barthes, 1980, p. 7). Cadava and Cortés-Rocca (2006) state that, “it would seem that the force of love, and particularly of ‘extreme love,’ enables him to pass through the photographic surface to reach the referent, to exceed the limits of the photographic medium to see his beloved” (p. 5). Barthes’ interest in photography arises from the relationship between particular photographs and their referent. The photographic referent is not the referent of other sign systems. It is not an “optionally real thing to which an image or a sign refers but the necessarily real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph”; the photograph, he states, “is literally an emanation of the referent” (Barthes, 1980, p. 76 & 80). Whereas language by its very nature is fictional, the photograph has a sense of certainty and authenticity.

For Barthes (1980), then, a specific photograph can never be distinguished from its referent. Unlike painting or language “which can feign reality”, photography can never deny that the thing has been there in front of the camera, but that actuality is lost the instant the photograph is taken superimposing reality and the past. Barthes terms this the *noeme*, the something “that-has-been” (p. 77) in front of the camera, positing it as the very nature of photography. This corresponds to the real in Lacanian psychoanalytical theory. In *Seminar XI* (1973), Lacan tells us that psychoanalysis is essentially an encounter with the real that eludes us; the term he uses to describe this encounter is *tuché*. Barthes is pierced by this encounter, an encounter with the *noeme*, that is the intractability of the real and the realisation of one’s own mortality. The *tuché* presents itself as trauma, something that is difficult for the subject to withstand and come to terms with. It is this conceptualisation of trauma at the centre of subjectivity that structures Barthes’ text and his conception of photographic essence. As Victor Burgin (1986) has mentioned, “trauma derives from the Greek word for ‘wound’; its Latin equivalent is punctum” (p. 86).
The punctum, as described in Barthes’ *Camera Lucida* (1980), is that which strikes us non-verbally like an arrow, and the studium is the information the photo offers as we study it. The photograph, not unlike the punctum, can include the unintended. Arnheim suggests the photograph “embraces accident, since not everything in the lens’ view can be controlled…. Its imperfection is a sign of the victory of reality over the artist’s efforts” (cited in Steiner, 1995, p. 40) (the unintended, particularly film processing imperfections, became part of my experience in producing work for this project). As the studium corresponds to what is happening within the photo on a discursive level, the punctum corresponds to the Lacanian real. Friedlander (2008) suggests that “the punctum . . . derives its logic from the object that Lacan designates as the signifier of lack in the other” (p. 160). Barthes’ detail that accidentally pierces, disrupts the studium of the photograph when it encounters the real as objet petit a. Friedlander (2008) states that “rather than clearly representing reality, these ‘meaningless’ details signal an intrusion of . . . the Lacanian real” (p. 160). Like Friedlander, McGowan (2003) also asserts how “desire is motivated by the mysterious object that the subject posits in the Other, the objet petit a, but the subject relates to this object in a way that sustains the object's mystery” (p. 32). The objet petit a as the void, the gap, and whatever object momentarily comes to fill that gap in our symbolic reality. It is essential to realise that objet petit a, is not the object itself but a function of masking the lack, which is necessary for desire to exist.

**The Naked and the Nude**

Clark’s (1956) discussion of the nude suggests that to “be naked is to be deprived of our clothes . . . . The word nude, on the other hand, carries, in educated usage, no uncomfortable overtone” (p. 1). This suggests that artistic representation has the ability to render the naked as nude, as if ‘nude’ is another form or style of clothing, leaving behind ‘naked’ as the truly disrobed. However, Borzello (2012) suggests:

*The representation of the nude in art is a victory of fiction over fact. It’s great success has been to distance the unclothed body from the any uncomfortable taint of sexuality, eroticism or imperfection. There are visual areas where these particular aspects of the body are dealt with . . . But fine art is the place to view the ideal body, the perfect body, the young body, the body that has been cleansed of its everyday reality. (p. 6)*

Borzello acknowledges that, “no one who considers nudity, the nude, nakedness or the body in art has been able to ignore Clark’s definition” (p. 6). Furthermore Nead (1992) asserts that “Clark’s text now stands as a monument to official culture; it is regarded as the classic survey of the subject and there have been curiously few scholarly attempts to revise or rework it” (p. 12). Clark’s differentiation between representations of the naked and art that represents an ideal body, the nude,
have provided points of departure in more recent contributions to the discourse on the female nude in art. Cover (2003) argues that treating the naked body as the nude in art:

Ignores how it is always already represented and constrained by codes of behaviour, contexts, differentiation from the clothed body, loose significations and cultural rituals. Although nakedness is most often performed during, with or alongside practices of sexuality, it appears in frames that connote otherwise. (p. 53)

Nead (1992) extends this argument, suggesting that “the dualistic construction of the naked and nude is . . . problematic, not only because of the evaluative judgments that it promotes, but also because it sets in place the possibility of an unmediated physical body” (p. 15). Nead finds fault with the traditional views of the nude, and suggests that there is no possibility of an “unmediated physical body” since “even at the most basic levels the body is always produced through representation” (p. 16). This is because “there can be no naked ‘other’ to the nude, for the body is always already in representation” (p. 16).

Bostrom and Malik (1999) provide a counterpoint to Clark’s concern with a specific classical and idealising tradition of representation. Bostrom and Malik argue that the idea of viewing the nude through an aesthetic distance is merely a device to convince us that the unclothed bodies before the artist is neither sexual, social, nor political. Aesthetic distance refers here to the tradition of seeing the nude as un-naked, as an arrangement of formal elements. Clark (1956) describes the Greeks as the source of his ideal form when describing how “Greek athletes wore no clothes, although that is of real importance, but because of . . . religious dedication and love . . . gave to the cult of physical perfection a solemnity and a rapture” (p. 34). Bostrom and Malik (1999) argue that Clark in ignoring “Greek traditions of orgiastic religious practice and never [elucidating] the myths (bloody and/or sexual) that the sculptures represented” and in never mentioning that, “Greek marbles were painted garishly and in detail” presents the ideal form as a fabrication (p. 44). In her discussion of Clark, McDonald (2001) argues that, “art stands between the artist and the spectator . . . [and] that art that represents the naked body serves the artist both as a sexual lure and as a shield against intimacy” (p. 7). McDonald further states that the ways in which the female nude has been historically viewed has given rise to ambiguities that have “clouded, veiled or permeated representations of the female body, rendering their meaning opaque or transparent” (p. 7).

Clark’s notion that the nude, male or female, is wrapped in art, as if there is a metaphoric sheath covering their nakedness has provided a point of departure for Berger (1977) who puts forward an alternate position to Clark’s naked/nude dichotomy. Whereas the nude is subjected to pictorial conventions, “to be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet
not recognized for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude” (p. 54). Berger (1977) favours the naked over the nude, stating that “nudity is a form of dress” that objectifies as “the surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight” (p. 45).

**Photographing the Female Nude**

The first photographed female nude has no known exact date, but is generally considered to have taken place in the 1840s. Scheid and Koetzle (1994) in the discussion of erotic photography’s history suggest that when it did, its “true-to-life-detail” had a “far reaching effect, in fact decisive when it comes to nudes, [arising] from the phenomenological aspects of the new technique [and] its link with the object” (p. 10). Di Bello (2008) mentions how “Andreˊ Bazin talked about embalming time and compared photographs to insects preserved in amber” (p. 144). An analogy that illustrates how the photograph’s “relationship with the referent . . . is different from that of a painting: the necessity for a ‘subject’ to be there for a photograph to be made or taken, because it could not be done from memory or the imagination” (p. 144). Berger (1977) in his discussion of the photographed female nude suggests:

> In lived sexual experience nakedness is a process rather than a state. If one moment of that process is isolated, its image will seem banal and its banality, instead of serving as a bridge between two intense imaginative states, will be chilling. This is one reason why expressive photographs of the naked are even rarer than paintings. The easy solution for the photographer is to turn the figure into a nude which, by generalizing both sight and viewer and making sexuality unspecific, turns desire into fantasy. (pp. 107-108)

This literature review looks at the work of photographers from early practitioners to the more contemporary whose work is representative of particular movements in photography. It is not possible to exhaustively cover the large number of photographers whose practice includes the female nude. Therefore this review is limited to the works of photographers Nojima Yasuzo, Bill Brandt, Araki Nobuyoshi, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Nan Goldin.

Charrier (2006) states that Nojima Yasuzo’s (Japanese, b. 1889) nudes were not shown publicly during his lifetime because of their erotic subject matter, indicative of earlier attitudes towards the female nude. Yet today “contemporary critics generally regard Nojima as a serious, thoughtful artist who developed an appreciation of the feminine that transcends the superficial and the shallowly erotic” (Charrier, 2006, p. 48). Nojima drew inspiration from the painted nude, with “the most directly observable formal influence on the treatment of the actual bodies in Nojima’s
nude photography are the nudes produced by Renoir, De'gas, Ce'zanne, Gauguin, and Matisse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” (p. 53).

Bill Brandt’s (German-British, b. 1904) nudes can be seen through the lens of surrealism. Brandt had briefly apprenticed with Man Ray, and “he also admired the work of de Chirico and Magritte” (Brooke, 2006, p. 128). Brooke (2006) suggests that a surrealist tone imbued many of his pictures, mapping a “dark and often surreal world of sexual and psychological obsession” (p. 119). Brooke argues that these “desires portrayed in the nudes are not only impossible to normalize, to gather into a progressive discourse about sexuality, but they resist apprehension and categorization” (p. 136).

Araki Nobuyoshi (Japanese, b. 1940) has prolifically and continuously exhibited and published provocative photographs for more than thirty years in Japan and for some years in the West. In discussing his work, Hagiwara (2010) states, “visually, on the surface at least, it seems difficult to differentiate the images from crude exploitation and general degradation of women” (p. 232). Rather than being simply read as objectifying, Hagiwara states that Araki’s photographs can be read “as [a] representation of desirable sexual excess, which might lead us to sexual liberation, and as critical representation of sexual desolation, which characterizes the postmodern urban scene” (p. 247). McNair (2002) in his discussion of postmodern aesthetics of transgression suggests “the objectification once seen as an instrument of patriarchal oppression comes to be viewed as a tool in the critique of patriarchy, as well as the celebration of voyeurism” (p. 177). McNair further suggests “in Japan, as in western societies, progress in women’s rights has been accompanied by their greater participation in sexual culture, including their ‘submission’ to the simulated violations of Araki” (p. 224). Mey (2007) suggests that Araki’s “images demonstrate, camera and photographer [fusing] into one to literally excavate and lay bare sexual difference, the hidden sexuality of the Other. Araki, first and foremost, sexually reifies womanhood” (p. 122).

Bonney (1985) in her discussion of changing perspectives in photography suggests that, “as a result of the women’s movement many male photographers have changed the way they view women, and themselves” (p. 13). Particularly, the interest in the ‘ideal’ no longer seems relevant, “instead, photographers are searching for variety in form and an expression of the uniqueness of each individual or thing” (p. 13). Robert Mapplethorpe’s (American, b. 1946) Lady: Lisa Lyon series is a good example, “the bodybuilder-cum-performance artist Lyons had developed herself into ‘a sculptor of her own body’ whose taut, muscular frame willfully blurred the masculine/feminine divide” (McNair, 2002, p. 183).
Nan Goldin’s (American, b. 1953) many photos of her friends naked, having sex, never look intruded upon by the photographer. Prosser (2002) describes Goldin’s photographs as “very trusting moments” and suggests that, “in testimony one is above all a witness because one was involved (I was there) and these photographs testify to intertwined lives” (p. 342). Goldin is posited as “the engine of the new school of auto/biographical photography, in which photographers take as their subjects themselves and their friends across time, forming a biographical and interwoven autobiographical narrative” (p. 342). Prosser asserts that, “preservation of memory, in photography, is crucially tied up with loss, and death and destruction with sex” (p. 347). Goldin (1986) explains the origin of her autobiographical photography in her book *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, as a compulsion to document and preserve memory.

**Conclusion**

These reviewed sections inform a practice led research project that investigates the *punctum/real* in the female nude. Theories discussing the naked/nude dichotomy provide another lens through which to read the female nude, while photographer case studies inform the photographic project’s aesthetics. Though Barthes’ poststructuralist approach to the discussion of visual pleasure appears to be a refutation of psychoanalytical theories that posit desire as lack, Barthes’ reference to Lacan’s Seminar I and XI in *A Lover’s Discourse* (1978) provides a demonstrable argument for his consciousness of Lacanian psychoanalytical theory. Cadava and Cortés-Rocca (2006) suggest that:

> Like the lover who wishes to address the singularity of his beloved without recourse to the lover’s discourse he inherits, Barthes seeks to invent a language that would be more faithful to what he “perceives” to be the singular paradoxical, and contradictory nature of photography. (p. 6)

Oxman (2010) states that Barthes’ “early semiological texts strive to demystify the apparent immediacy of images by showing how they operate as signs”, whereas *Camera Lucida* “[celebrates] precisely those elements of the image that elude signification – the *punctum* of the photograph” (p. 71). Rancière, in his assessment of *Camera Lucida*, states that it “speaks to a certain tendency in the reception of Barthes’s later texts, which have been celebrated for their literary merit but which are no less criticized for having regressed to a naïve, quasi-phenomenology” (cited in Oxman, p. 71). Though critics of Barthes’s *Camera Lucida* suggest a theoretical regression from his earlier work, Oxman argues that Barthes’s later writings “must be viewed in the light of [a] critical practice of forgetting, and, what’s more, as a critique of the scientific assumptions that had driven his early work” (p. 72). Barthes’ affective engagement with the image extends the conversation of how visual pleasure is derived, forming the basis for a renewed aesthetic appreciation.
However, Barthes’ discussion of photographs that affect him does so without mentioning the photographer’s role, if any, in the orchestration of the punctum. Friedlander (2008) states that, “by emphasizing that the punctum is an irruption of ‘nonmeaning’—a seemingly insignificant accident—Barthes insulates the punctum from any question of the author’s conscious intentions and meanings” (p. 148). Whereas Barthes finds the punctum in the content, Friedlander postulates that it is a function of form, and that “such intrusions of meaningless or insignificant fragments of the real shatter the possibility of any complacent immersion in the socio-symbolic reality” (p.162). Friedlander’s assertion that “viewers are provoked to respond to these points of symbolic dissolution through … the Real [flashing] before them in surprisingly similar ways … despite the absence of uniformity in the particular associations that give rise to these effects” (p. 162). A view that is important to my research, as my creative project is predicated on the idea that the photographer’s intentions can give rise to the punctum as read through the real. The efforts to achieve this are discussed in the following chapters on Methodology, and Outcomes.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Practice led enquiry

For the purposes of this exegesis, I will use the strategies of practice led research as my methodological approach. According to Gray, practice led research is:

Research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners in the visual arts. (1996, p. 3)

Practice led research can enhance the capability “to articulate what is crucial about one’s practice, while also having the time, resources and space for critical reflection to take the practice to a higher level (at least of reflection)” (McNamara, 2012, p. 7). Practice led research allows me to explore my research questions through a photographic project, whilst providing a critical reflection of my creative practice using a “reflective practice method, which involves the researcher thoughtfully considering one’s own experiences in applying knowledge to practice” (Yee, 2010, p. 15). A key characteristic of photographic art practice is the production of new work, often for display in exhibitions and publications.

The knowledge gained in doing so is mostly experiential, whereby the production of knowledge in research is understood to require systematic study including the specification of research questions, context, methods and the production of new knowledge. Practice led research will enable me to negotiate the characteristics of practice and research in a theoretical framework. An important aspect of a reflective practice method is to understand how the artist as researcher can avoid “what has been referred to as ‘auto-connoisseurship’, the undertaking of a thinly veiled labour of valorizing…the creative work, or alternatively producing a…mere description or history” (Barret & Bolt, 2007, p. 135). This is of particular importance as new work produced needs to be regarded as research, and a site of the production of new knowledge. In my case, the new work is a book depicting the photographed female nude.

Photographic portraiture

Portraits of the female nude, as suggested by Nead (1995), invoke obvious gender performativity, particularly when it pertains to the ‘masculine’ artist and the ‘feminine’ model. Therefore, when the model appears before the lens a performance takes place. Photographic portraiture can thus be seen
as a specific methodology constructed on a degree of performativity, resulting in fiction. The photograph has been widely viewed by society as objectively depicting reality, while fostering the lingering thought that they are somehow completely fictitious. Humphrey (2014) suggests that all fictions are “understood as being derived from everyday experiences, and a thorough analysis of fiction would yield the elements from which such complexes have been constructed: fictions may be understood by reducing them to their constituent parts” (p. 386). The photographed nude itself is an exemplar of this fiction staged by the use of three parts that constitute the portrait: costume, pose, and composition.

Arguably costume is symbolic, and not even the nude is without costume. Here it would be judicious to mention that the nude as a conventionalised type may be regarded as an example of costume. As posited by Clark (1956), and readdressed by Berger (1977), and Nead (1992), nudity is a costume: a symbolic form indicative of cultural context. Within the context of Western culture, Cover (2003) suggests nudity “has been inseparable from sex and sexuality, and has hence been located adjacent to the indecent, the obscene and the immoral” (p. 55). However, many theorists and art historians, Clark, Berger, T.J Clark, Nead and Grosz, have postulated reasons as to why the artistic nude generally eludes being considered obscene. Grosz proposes that because “we are mediated in a relationship to nudity through representations in art” (cited in Cover, 2003, p. 56) it legitimizes the act of looking upon the ‘artistic’ nude. Perhaps more than costume or composition, the pose is integral to this mediation.

Except for images that are often taken surreptitiously such as street or photojournalism, posing is a significant aspect of photography. The person in front of the lens expects to be photographed and prepares for the release of the shutter. This preparation, no matter how brief, is the pose. Barthes (1980) suggests that once he feels noticed by the camera, “everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of ‘posing’, I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image” (p. 79). This performative aspect that occurs before the lens can be described as a process whereby the models “imitate the image they believe photographers see through the camera” (Phelan, 1993, p. 36). Barthes describes this as the “photographic ritual” and it imbues the image with a stillness that is an inherent part of posing.

The initial poses I used for the photographs, taken in Australia, were inspired by the work of Nojima Yasuzo (b. 1889), a Japanese photographer in the early 20th century who drew inspiration from the painted nude. Reminiscent of Yasuzo’s work, I similarly used poses from the painted nude by way of homage, and my early photographs referenced the work of Ce´zanne, Gauguin, Manet,
and Lucas Cranach the Elder. I would show the model a painted nude, and have her interpret the pose; a task made easier by the models having life modeling experience. I chose paintings that I felt manifested both portrait orthodoxy and Western art culture, perhaps none more so than the reclining nudes as painted by Giorgione, Titian, Rubens, Goya, and Manet. Historically the reclining nude tended to lie with her eyes turned away from the spectator, however Édouard Manet’s *Olympia* (1863) portrayed the model as a contemporary woman who stared boldly back at the viewer. During the course of the project I had each model interpret Manet’s *Olympia*, a painting described by T.J. Clark (1985) as “the founding monument of modern art” (p. 79). The assertion that Manet’s *Olympia* displaced the “spectator from his accustomed imaginary position” (p. 79) and took the uncertainty about female desire and resolved it by making desire “the property now…the deliberate production…of the female subject herself” (p.131) resonated with me.

As the project moved from Australia to Colombia, apart from the reclining nude, the poses relied less on direct interpretations of specific poses. This was in part a result of the experiential differences of the models involved; the Colombian models were photographic models as opposed to life models. I had also discovered that the poses and perspectives in paintings could not always be achieved because of photography’s dependence on the referent, and the limitations that imposed. This shift away from the earlier, and more formalistic work, ultimately gave greater agency to the models, and their invaluable input was responsible for many of the poses photographed.

Prior to the commencement of this project, I had mostly used frontal poses (mostly half-length) against sparse backgrounds with the model looking directly at camera. During the course of this project I often directed models to look away from camera. This choice on my part was prompted by an attempt to keep the viewers out of the action by having ‘closed gazes’, or more simply, looking away from camera. The prominent art historian and writer T.J. Clark asserts that:

> A nude could hardly be said to do its work … if it did not find a way to address the spectator and give him access to the body on display. He had to be offered a place outside the picture, and a way in; … .This was sometimes done simply by looking: by having the woman's eyes and face, and her whole body, address themselves to the viewer, in the fashion of Ingres's Venus Anadyomene (1848) or Titian's Venus of Urbino. (1985, pp. 132-33)

The way in, as described by T.J. Clark, was typically via the returned gaze: looking at the viewer. In some images I employed the closed gaze to limit the male gaze, along with compositional choices to highlight connotative details, intentional and unintentional, to provide alternative sites of visual
pleasure beyond voyeuristic objectification. To capture as much detail as possible, I sought out highly detailed or textured backgrounds, influencing composition.

Composition in this regard refers to how the image is framed, scaled, and the relationship of elements to each other and to the edge of frame. The model was typically placed centre of composition, as is typical in square format photographs. Elements within the frame were composed with attention to their ‘centricity’ and ‘eccentricity’. Arnheim’s (1988) discussion of composition in _The Power of the Center_ describes how centric vectors emanate out from, or to, a centre, and that eccentric vectors occur in the interaction between centres. That is not to say that the centre has to be located in the middle, though this does seem to be the convention for a square image. As mentioned previously, in earlier work I had typically photographed models in half-length frontal poses. A half-length pose is typically a photograph of the model from the waist up, and when composed centrally within the square, the model fills most of the frame. This had allowed for virtually no variation in scale, and placed the greatest visual emphasis on the model. Here, however, I wanted to give greater prominence to the background, particularly details that could provide equal or greater visual interest to that of the female nude. To achieve this, I photographed the models in full-length poses of varying scale (scale being the relative size of the model in relation to the frame), allowing for more of the location/background to be in frame.

**Participants**

All the participants involved came to me as referrals with previous experience posing nude. The Australian models had a background in life modeling, and the Colombian models’ experiences came from having previously been photographed nude. This experiential difference, along with time spent with each model directly influenced the work.

I was able to meet all of the Australian models before we started photography to discuss the parameters of the project. Prior to meeting, I e-mailed the requisite information and consent forms for ethical clearance, along with samples of my earlier work. I had the opportunity to photograph each Australian model on at least two occasions. This gave me time to have negatives developed and contact sheets printed to review with the models at subsequent photography sessions. Consequently, subsequent sessions could involve a re-enactment and refinement of previous poses.

The Colombian models had come recommended to me by friends immersed in the visual arts and photographic scene in Colombia. I did not have the opportunity to meet all the models before commencement of photography, however, everyone involved was e-mailed information and
consent forms (in Spanish), and sample photographs beforehand. Due to model availability, and time constraints, I could only photograph most of the models in Colombia on only one occasion.

**Technical aspects**

A significant aspect of methodology requires the selection of equipment that best communicates the convergence of the technical, conceptual and theoretical. I chose to use a medium format film camera, as I wanted to capture very fine detail and texture within the frame. I selected medium format film over both 35mm film and digital because of its greater resolution when scanned: a high-resolution scan routinely exceeds 200 MB. Furthermore, I much prefer the look of film, even when scanned. Medium format’s ability to render fine detail with its increase in resolution, combined with my clear preference for the compositional attributes of square format led to my choice of using a Hasselblad V series camera. My decision to shoot film ultimately led to circumstances that should not have been entirely surprising.

**Editing**

Editing forms an integral part of the reflective process. In practice led research, editing is a continuous process of re-enactment and refinement to serve the project’s theoretical and conceptual concerns. For me the editing process commences in the viewfinder as I consider what to include and exclude, a process that continues to the final image selection.

The Hasselblad’s large focusing screen allows for more effective image evaluation, as the focusing screen is the size of the negative surface (56mm x 56mm). This camera also uses a waist level finder that allows two-eyed image evaluation. Therefore by using a medium format camera with a waist level finder the photographer can perform a more complete and effective evaluation of the image, observing more detail, with both eyes open: similar to viewing a print. The large focusing screen combined with a limited number of exposures per roll of film (twelve with the square format), provide a more deliberate and focused approach to each image.

After having the negatives developed, contact sheets were made. These contact sheets were viewed in consultation with my supervisors, and selected images were individually scanned, edited with photographic editing software, and then printed. These photographs were assessed, and altered if needed. This process also included revisiting and reconsidering previously discounted images. Once all the work was printed, the photographs were again reviewed for inclusion and exclusion.
Contingency

Contingency as defined by the Oxford Dictionary is the absence of certainty in events, and Barthes purports that the “photograph is pure contingency and can be nothing else … [as] it immediately yields up those ‘details’ which constitute the very raw material of ethnomological knowledge” (1980, p. 28). These very details described by Barthes can be attributed to the indexicality of the photograph. That is to say that the “filmic image is a trace of anything and everything that appears in front of the camera and indexicality proffers a guarantee that these objects/referents were indeed there, independently of any intentionality on the part of the operator” (Doane, 2007, p. 18). To paraphrase a sentiment found in Walter Benjamin’s A Little History of Photography, no matter how talented the photographer, or carefully posed his subject, we feel an “irresistible urge to search … a picture for the tiny spark of contingency” (cited in Conty, 2013, p. 479). Contingent elements became integral to this research project, and governed some of what appears in the frame – aspects such as the participants involved and what they brought to the collaboration, what I brought, the locations, the culture, the idiosyncrasies of analogue photography, and the innumerable “contingencies that make the event possible” (Muecke, 2012, p. 19). There is another kind of contingency suggested by Doane that has to do with the “traces of time on the photographic emulsion, the scratches and fading” (2007, p. 18). Though Doane is specifically discussing the “visible degradation of the image” over a long period of time, I would suggest that analogue photography’s reliance on materials which age (both film and chemicals) and third party processing, degradation starts the day the film and chemicals leave the factory.

Serendipity

The Oxford Dictionary defines serendipity as the occurrence and development of events by chance in a satisfactory or beneficial way. It is commonly seen as being synonymous with chance, luck, or providence. Yet to equate serendipity solely with the ‘happy accident’ does not credit the recognition of the meaningful combinations of events that serendipity reveals.

Moments of serendipity can occur in any of the steps required for analogue photography. From exposure to print, not everything goes as planned. Unless one has access to a photography laboratory, or happens to be shooting digital, a third party is required to chemically process film. A process that requires well maintained and operated equipment. Chemistry must be kept at a given temperature. Parts that come in to contact with the negatives must not be worn or dirty. The operator has to run control tests at the beginning of the day. The list of things that can go wrong is too exhaustive to list here. The litany of potential processing errors was something I did not
consider at the outset of this project, having become accustomed to flawless film processing during my time in Japan. When I first started studying photography, I developed my own colour negatives at university with good results. As digital photography became more prominent, colour film processing was no longer provided at university, and my negatives had to be developed by a third party.

Even in Australia where film processing is of a high standard, the processed films were not without flaws; roller transport damage from the processing machine resulted in fine scratches on some negatives. However, the films processed in Colombia had a number of issues as a result of a poorly maintained and operated processing machine. There were more substantial issues with roller transport damage resulting in both scratches and dirt transference. The negatives were at times underdeveloped and also showed evidence of poor agitation of the developer (possibly expired), resulting in uneven development and grainier negatives. Other negatives displayed evidence of processing light leaks affecting the way colours were rendered, though I must admit that some light leaks occurred in camera.

The resultant artifacts – the scratches, the stains, and light leaks contributed to an aesthetic that spoke of the contingencies of the developed world, while also providing the image with entirely unintentional detail akin to scarring. These ‘scars’, such as the dotted squeegee marks from the worn machinery could “serve as visual equivalents of our missed encounters with the Real” (Foster, 1996, p. 134). The processing errors gave rise to a different aesthetic providing more room for investigation and re-interpretation. Given what many have considered the camera’s “blunt factuality”, and its relatively effortless reproduction of the scene before it, for the photograph to be considered art it required that “photographers … [found] ways to assert themselves artistically and intellectually” (Garcia, 2010, p. 7); that something beyond mere technical proficiency. These scratches, stains, and leaks point directly to the presence of the operator(s), culminating in a degree of transparency that allows the operator(s) presence to be felt. And though photographic editing software would have enabled me to correct many errors, upon reflection, I decided that though unexpected (and initially shocking), the opportunities for further investigation they presented could be described as serendipitous.
Chapter 4: Outcomes

When I went to America, I left most of my material in Paris, and when I returned I found sixty percent of the glass-plate negatives were broken … one I saved, but it had a hole in it. I printed it anyway. An accident helped me to produce a beautiful effect. (Kertész, 1985, p. 72)

The research framework was built on questioning the assertion that the punctum/real elicited by certain photographs cannot be completely explained discursively, nor placed there intentionally by the photographer. Barthes’ (1980) discussion of photographs which interest him focuses upon those by photographic luminaries such as Alfred Stieglitz, William Klein, Richard Avedon, André Kertész, Lewis H. Hine, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Nicéphore Niépce, and although Barthes (1980) presents these photographs as exemplars of the phenomenon of the punctum, he does not acknowledge the possibility that these photographers intended to employ the tension between the random incident and the carefully composed scene.

It was therefore my intention to investigate the possibility of contriving to produce the sort of tension that gives rise to the punctum. Wigoder in his discussion of the punctum suggests:

It is almost always a detail that gives the impression of being directed at a particular person and therefore causing a subjective response that is not necessarily shared by all; each person may find a different punctum in the same photograph. (2001, p. 16)

Furthermore, I do not expect that the photographs shown here will affect viewers as they do me, and that they “may never strike some viewers as … the nondetermined experience of it [is] completely subjective” (Jenkins, 2013, p. 587). What follows is a discussion of the photographic project, and my efforts to engage viewers outside voyeuristic objectification: an endeavour centered on my reading of the images.

I began with the painted nude, with an exploration of re-interpretations of significant classical nudes. A decision partly prompted by the surrounding discourse on the artistic nude. Kenneth Clark’s distinction between the nude and the naked suggests that the artistic nude constitutes, as the book title indicates, The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form (1956), a nude that is beautifully formed and framed by the conventions of art. And though, Clark’s central distinction between the nude and the naked has been disputed by numerous critics, I found it helpful as a starting point to contemplating the controversies that can encircle the female nude. Moreover, I considered that the use of familiar imagery (to some) might spark an interest.

I began with allusions to the reclining nude as painted: a pose prevalent in classical nudes. I elected to photograph in low light using cinema lighting techniques to produce a chiaroscuro effect;
that is the use of strong contrasts between light and dark. The use of cinema lighting (continuous lighting) gave me a degree of control not available when using ambient (available) light (book p. 1). I also used this technique in a re-interpretation of Cranach the Elder’s *Venus Standing in a Landscape* (1529) (appendix fig. 4) (book p. 2). Not all the attempts to remain relatively faithful to specific nude poses were successful, and concurrent work with improvised poses was providing greater scope for creativity, and discovery. I subsequently stopped referencing specific poses prior to leaving Australia. While no longer using specific poses, the subsequent images were still informed by conventions of the painted and photographed female nude to some degree (book pp. 5 & 12). I also began to photograph outdoors with available light, negating the need for lighting kits. The decision to stop lighting the work was also prompted by technical and logistical considerations, particularly the unlikelihood of having access to lighting equipment overseas. The photographs, however, continued to be relatively formalistic, and I had expected this to remain the case as photography shifted to Colombia.

As previously discussed, the first images were mostly photographed with cinematic lighting to have a greater degree of control over the final result. The negatives were developed in Australia, and any minor imperfections from processing or scanning (particularly dust marks) were removed. I wanted the final prints to be free of significant artifacts. At the time I wanted to demonstrate evidence of my expertise and command over the elements that make the photograph, without an overabundance of accidental detail. I approached the Colombian work hoping for a similar aesthetic: a preservation of the *studium* from the Australian work. I discovered that using the same camera, light meter, and film stock was not enough to guarantee similar results. Numerous unforeseen factors ruptured my previously held expectations of producing work alike in appearance. Subsequently, the photographs represented a major departure from the Australian work primarily as a result of contingent and serendipitous factors, and a visceral fascination with my new environment.

The most significant change aesthetically came independent of any intention on my part. Not wanting to risk potential damage to negatives from airport X-ray machines, I had negatives developed in Bogotá at one of the few professional photographic laboratories in the country. The negatives came back with a substantial number of processing errors. Compared to the photographs taken in Australia, they had significantly more imperfections including scratches, roller transport damage yielding green stains, squeegee marks and uneven development. Upon repeated viewings, however, I came to appreciate how this enhanced certain images. I digitally removed dust marks (which appear as white dots), while leaving the scratches and stains untouched. As Doane (2007) says, the photographs’ imperfections “pointed to a materiality that is foregrounded, not escaped”
I feel these traces of the photographs’ materiality (the grain, the scratches, and stains) and the detail they provide, contribute to the overall aesthetic, providing another dimension to the work.

The first photographs I took in Colombia were at a place called Campos de Gutiérrez: formerly a 19th coffee plantation (book pp. 3 & 4). I visited the hacienda before I commenced photography, and decided that the textures, the cracks and imperfections of the building gave me great scope to explore detail within the image. I composed the photographs to highlight the background (and not the model), and not unlike Barthes’ reaction to C. Clifford’s *Alhambra* (1854), “quite simply there that I should like to live” (1980, p. 39), this place elicited romanticised notions of Latin America, with its thick adobe walls adorned with Catholic images. Attracted to the proliferation of Catholic images, I juxtaposed models with religious iconography on numerous occasions. Indicative of the contradictory attributes of virgin and whore in the same body construction used to objectify Latin women, or as Alicia Arrizón and Lillian Manzor categorize, “the virginal señorita and the loose Latin spitfire” (2000, p. 20). The use of diverse locations contributed substantially to this project, while also providing a noticeable departure from my earlier practice of photographing the female nude – essentially indoors.

Beginning with the Australian work, and continuing in Colombia, I explored more outdoor photography – to be precise – backyards. This started with the re-interpretations of classical nudes in landscapes that were staged in backyards. I had previously not given much stock to the nude in the landscape, perceiving it as too fictional. Given the conceptual and theoretical concerns of this project, my earlier photographic practice of subscribing to a modicum of realism no longer seemed pertinent as I wanted to explore a variety of locations. Though I did not always have the opportunity to meet models prior to photographing them, I could often scout locations beforehand. One such location was an artist residency in Medellin. The backyard walls, one with a mural, the other a roughly laid red brick, yielded intrinsically interesting detail for me. I photographed there on two occasions with differing results as a consequence of processing errors, in particular light leaks that altered the colour cast of the first session’s negatives (book pp. 29 & 30). I was never able to achieve the visual and aesthetical cohesiveness that I had initially coveted, and instead came to see each photograph as providing different challenges and opportunities.

Nowhere was this more apparent than in post-production and editing. Usually when several rolls have been exposed under similar conditions, the results are quite uniform. It is possible to apply the adjustments made to one image to subsequent images for consistent results. This is known as batch processing. This was not possible given the lack of uniformity in processing results from the Bogotá laboratory. Each photograph often had to be treated individually. Some images I felt
were irrecoverable, as the errors significantly undermined my intention. In others, however, the
mistakes instill an element of surrealism, a movement that “has always courted accidents,
welcomed the uninvited, flattered disorderly presences” (Sontag, 1977, p. 52). Moreover, slightly
washed out colours evoke the ravages of time:

Part of the built-in interest of photography and a major source of aesthetic value, is
precisely the transformations that time works upon them, the way they escape the
intentions of their makers. (Sontag, 1977, p. 140)

As discussed, this project became predicated on an attempt to employ the tension between
the unintended and the composed. It would be disingenuous to suggest that I have arrived at a
formulation of aesthetics that elicits the punctum/real for others. For others, do not necessarily share
the psychological, social and cultural associations that the images elicit for me. The detail that
supplies the punctum (encountering the real as objet petit a) is seldom shared, nor completely
explained discursively. Though, I have come to welcome the altered aesthetic that surfaced from the
processing errors (I will exercise more caution with third party processing in the future), the
imperfections themselves do not necessarily strike me as the punctum. Many images share similar
effects, yet not all are selected. To paraphrase Kertész, ‘the accident helped produce the look’, but
the elements that Barthes may dismiss as the studium are integral to the contrivance of affect. The
images themselves were carefully composed within camera, particularly in regards to pose and
composition, and not all the images returned with evident processing flaws. All the elements, both
intentional and unintentional have to come together as one.

The choices regarding pose and composition sought to arrive at less sexually objectifying
forms of the photographed female nude (as read by me). Unlike previous images I had taken, the
images here do not seek to elicit a degree of sexual frisson. The poses here, informed by classical
nudes, along with the more improvised poses seek to avoid the visual tropes of the overtly erotic.
Though, unlike the poses and composition of images made before this project (admittedly restricted
by censorship laws), some of these images are quite revealing. This returns to my concerns when
photographing the female nude: concerns that are fueled by my aspirations as a visual artist. I want
the images to be contemplative, and not rely purely on the presence of the nude female body to
elicit visual pleasure. Previous reactions to my work have shown that this is not always possible, as
there will always be those who react only to the naked model, and not as intended. Other visual
artists do not necessarily share my concerns regarding notions of obscenity and objectification. The
work of visual artists such as Jeff Koons (specifically ‘Made in Heaven’) and Roy Stuart is
decidedly more graphic in nature, and arguably informed by pornographic tropes.
When I started photographing the female nude for this project, I intended to demonstrate my control over what appeared within the frame. I sought to somehow stack (so to speak) the elements that Barthes describes as the *studium* in attempts to contrive the *punctum*. As the project progressed, contingent and serendipitous elements arose interrupting those intentions. These accidents came to figure prominently in my research as I also investigated different ways to utilise the tension between what I had intended with the unintended to achieve my aims. What did not change, however, was a desire to arrive at methods to produce a less objectified form of the photographed female nude: one informed by theories of affect, and the discourse surrounding the female nude, particularly discussions of the naked and the nude. An endeavor not new to art:

Since the earliest times the obsessive, unreasonable nature of physical desire has sought relief in images, and to give those images a form by which Venus may cease to be vulgar and become celestial has been one of the recurring aims of European art. (Clark cited in Gualdoni, 2012, p. 11)

This project’s continuation of the dialogue surrounding the female nude, strives to produce a series of photographs that are read as being less voyeuristic, while providing alternative sites of visual pleasure. The reading of the work I have arrived at will invariably differ from others who view this work. As a visual artist, I can only exhibit my work and anticipate that some may read it as I do. For once revealed, it is in the hands of the viewer.
References


Appendix


Fig. 2. Titian. (Artist). (1538). *Venus Of Urbino*. [Painting] Retrieved from https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/asset-viewer/venus-of-urbino/bQGS8pnP5vr2Jg?utm_source=google&utm_medium=kp&hl=en&projectId=art-project
Fig. 3. Manet, E. (Artist). (1863). *Olympia*. [Painting]
Retrieved from https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/entity/%2Fm%2F03ws2y?hl=en&projectld=art-project

Fig. 4. Cranach d.Ä., L. (Artist). (1529). *Venus Standing in a Landscape*. [Painting]