

C O N C E R N I N G T E N S I O N

Investigating the nature of the photograph

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Smatthews", written over a horizontal line.

Samantha Matthews

2013

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ABSTRACT

This practice-based research project delves into a complex relationship that exists within photography. In the space between the photograph and what it represents there is a level of disconnect. This intangible space became the stimulus of my research, instigating a dialogue with the notion of tension. By investigating how tension is manifest and operates in the photographic image, the research seeks to not only converse with the tension existing in the photograph, but also propose a space for discourse with the medium of photography itself.

INTRODUCTION

This exegesis outlines the framework for this practice-based research project in which the entire thesis is comprised of 80% practical outcome and 20% written exegesis. The following writing serves to support the final practical work, culminating in an exhibition for examination. Part One of the exegesis concentrates on the relevant conceptual and creative ideas of the research, setting up the critical framework for the entire project. This includes a discourse with the concept of tension and the photograph,¹ the referent, residue, and resistance. Part Two covers a discussion of the practice, seeking to contextualise the developmental nature of the project. By interweaving the practical work with self-reflection and analysis, this section explores the developing strategies of the methodology and the photographs produced, connecting practice to critical framework. Part Three covers the subsequent tensions arising in the work, and offers a reflective commentary with the final works and exhibition. The conclusion in Part Four reflects upon how tension was identified and suspended in the final outcome of the research project.

Just as a photograph cannot exist without its subject, words and language are separated from the visual, a symbiotic relationship where one cannot exist without the other. The writing and subsequent reading of this exegesis is like that of engaging with Roland Barthes' book *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1981/1993). This exegesis alludes to and illuminates upon some photographs that could not be directly contacted during the immediate reading experience, just as Barthes gives us a dialogue with the *Winter Garden* photograph, yet does not produce it to be seen by the reader. For a time a separation between this piece of writing and the final work exists, not unlike how Barthes' *Winter Garden* is out of view. This separation is an important aspect of the exegesis to consider because its operation in this separated way is like that of the photograph, which the research addresses.

PART ONE: CRITICAL FRAMEWORK

Tension and The Photograph

“The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled” (Berger, 1972, p. 1)

The term tension constitutes many different meanings and connotations in various fields. It is often an intangible and subliminal by-product, response or afterthought. Through its presence it can propose dialogues, becoming a space for instigating both negative and positive relationships. There lies a potential for tension² in everything we encounter. At first glance the photograph may not constitute a state of tensioned hostility, suspense or uneasiness (for example in its content, see Figure 1), but upon closer inspection, the photograph is permanently in a condition of suspense, always uneasy in its constant relation to another context. Here lies the source of the tension within the photograph; it is perpetually something other than itself.

At its core the photograph consists of three elements that define the medium: the frame,³ the subject and light. When these three elements combine they form the creature⁴ of the photographic image. Within this photographic image there is the nucleus of its being: the visual content of the photograph. This aspect of the photograph is where the following discussion resides. With the photograph we are presented with a completed output of a film or digital file, but that is not its only sense. Through its medium (the frame, the subject and light), it begins a dialogue with the visual content, the space it represents (real world subject) and how we experience it as a photographic object⁵ severed from its original context.



Figure 1. Derek Henderson (2004). *Palmerston Street, Westport, West Coast, 6:24pm, 2nd February 2004*. Retrieved 6 May 2013 from <http://www.derekhenderson.net/tbop.html>



Figure 2. Peter Peryer (1987). *Dead Steer*. Gelatin silver print. 180 mm x 180 mm. Retrieved 4 May 2013 from <http://www.chartwell.org.nz/Collection/ArtworkDetails/artwork/1044/title/dead-steer.aspz>

The Referent

The photograph is a referent; the visual content of the photograph, and the subject matter that it represents is the anchor of the image. It grounds it with a photographic purpose of documenting and recording showing the viewer something they may not have seen. At its simplest level, in order for a photograph to be, there needs to be a subject to be photographed. This is what gives the photograph its unavoidable quality: it cannot break away “from what it represents” (Barthes, 1981/1993, p. 5). For example, in the photograph *Dead Steer* by Peter Peryer (see Figure 2), the engagement of viewing is driven by a feeling of potential disgust or morbid fascination with the dead animal portrayed. The core visual content of the photograph (the dead steer) is so prominent that it directs the experience of the image away from the photographic context it exists in and its representation beyond its visual content. This effect of the image is utterly consuming removing any ability to digest it as a photographic object. As Barthes explained, “The persistence of the referent (the subject), makes it difficult to understand photography” (1981/1993, p. 77). The visual content and its referents tend to push through, seducing us with a seemingly transparent view of reality, complicating any potential reading of the photograph.

The indexical nature of photography has always led to this complicated discourse with the referent. On its most essential level the photograph can only ever be in relation to the subject, making it a substitute for the actual scene. However, when Barthes (1981/1993) stated, “In photography I can never deny the thing has been there” (p. 76) he revealed a disputable point. We as viewers cannot be so sure that “the thing has been there” even though it may be represented in the frame (either analogue or digital). Within this questioning of the subject lies the tension of the photograph. There is tension in never being completely reassured of the existence of a subject, and there is tension in the disconnected context in which the photograph operates. As Susan Sontag (1977) argued in *On Photography*, “Photographs are a way of imprisoning reality, understood as recalcitrant, inaccessible; of making it stand still. Or they enlarge a reality that is felt to be shrunk, hallowed out, perishable, remote” (p. 163). In his book *Each Wild Idea*, Geoffrey Batchen (2001) presents a convincing argument around this problem with the reception of photography:

Indeed, the invisibility of the photograph, its *transparency to its referent*, has long been one of its most cherished features. All of us tend to look at photographs as if we are simply gazing through a two-dimensional window onto some outside world. This is almost a perceptual necessity; in order to see what the photograph is of, we must first repress our consciousness of what the photograph is [emphasis added] (p. 59).

The reception of the photograph relies on this “transparency to its referent”. A photograph’s referential transparency to the actual scene can confuse our interpretation of the image. Therefore Batchen’s thoughts need to be taken into account when discussing photography. The frame (and its severing action) then becomes the key to perceiving the photograph away from the visual content. By considering the frame, what is within it, and therefore what is outside of it, a dialogue with the notion of tension begins (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Woodman, F (1970 – 80). *Untitled*. Chromogenic print. 8.6 cm x 8.9 cm. Retrieved 30 March 2012 from <http://au.phaidon.com/agenda/art/picture-galleries/2012/march/14/francesca-woodmans-guggenheim-retrospective/?idx=4>

Residue

The word photography is derived from the Greek *phot* for ‘light’ and *graphos* for ‘drawing’, literally meaning light drawing. The camera demands a conversation with light in order to produce its indexical and referential nature. It is both present at the source point and end point of the entire process of photography, a revolving entity that is captured and passed on, to continually reflect upon itself. It is light, as William Henry Fox Talbot proposed, that “can exert an action” (1844), giving rise to the photographic object and the material image,⁶ becoming a tangible output of light’s intangibility.



Figure 4. Fox Talbot, W. (1835 or 1839). *The Oriel Window, South Gallery, Lacock Abbey*. Photogenic drawing negative. 8.3 cm x 10.7 cm. The Rubel Collection purchase, Ann Tenenbaum and Thomas H. Lee and Anonymous Gifts, 1997 (1997.382.1) Retrieved 26 August 2012 from <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1997.382.1>

When encountering one of Fox Talbot’s early works (see Figure 4), we are presented with a haze of the photographic process. In its slightly blurry, obscured state there is a quality of the intangibility of the light that brought the image into being. All these years after the image was taken, there is still an undeniable presence of light held within this photograph, evidence of the indexical trace left upon the light sensitive paper. A residue, both ambiguous and tangible, is tied to the artefact. The subject seems to be forever caught in a state of unresolved appearing. The manifestation of residue in this early photograph is evidence of a sense of tension, becoming a stimulus of the juncture between the photograph and its referent that is undefinable yet paradoxically defined by the frame.

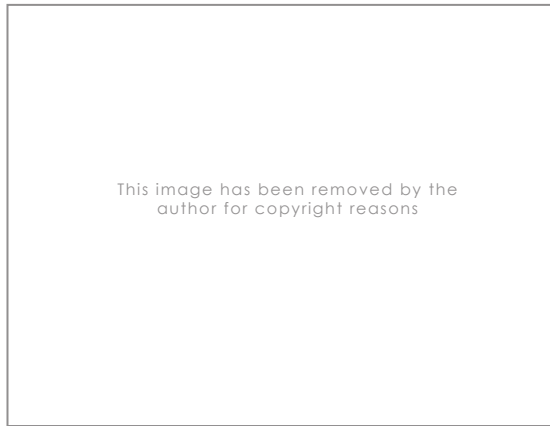


Figure 5. Sugimoto, H. (1980). *Akron Civic, Ohio*. Gelatin silver print on paper, 42.0 cm x 54.5 cm. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Retrieved 26 August 2012 from http://www.hirshhorn.si.edu/searchresults/?edan_search_value=Hiroshi%20Sugimoto#

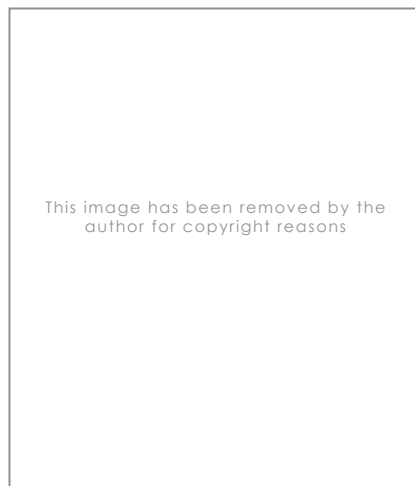


Figure 6. Cyr, J. (2010). *Emmet Gowin's Developer Tray*. Retrieved 26 August 2012 from <http://www.edelmangallery.com/AIPAD2012/cyr/cyr4.htm>

Residue as a term has connotations of the physical and of the previous decay of matter. It is something possibly subject to change, loose, organic, or of less permanence. Residue can be a remainder or trace of something, a remnant of a material. A photograph can record an actual instance of this residue in reality (for example a physical residue, see Figure 6) or become a conceptual residue (by dealing conceptually with residue in the photograph). One visual arts practitioner who deals with residue and photography in some of his works is Hiroshi Sugimoto, in particular, in his photographs of theatre screens (see Figure 5), which at first glance are meditations on both time and the perception of space. We are presented with the antithesis of what we would expect to encounter. The theatre screen, which is the site of a projected film or moving image, is not filled with content but empty. The screen is presented to us as a void (the result of a long exposure time), which acts as a visual residue of the entire duration of a movie. This void is a type of “residual absence” (Batchen, 2001, p. 122) of the projected movie. Through photographing the screen in this way, Sugimoto enables or enacts the void, making the blank white space both an initiator of that residue and evidence at the same time an uneasy territory to occupy.

John Cyr's series *Developer Trays* (see Figure 6) explores residue in a different way to Sugimoto's theatre screens because of their explicit recording of an actual residue. The analogue photographic process is laid bare through his precise, repetitive representations of developer trays making visible the usually unseen. They are absent of any developed print; instead they are occupied with physical residue. As objects in their own right, the developer trays are relics of a history of photography.⁷ Through Cyr's photographing of these trays, a multi-layered discourse around them is evoked that would have laid ‘undeveloped’ if it were not for his investigation. The photographic process itself becomes even more interesting to ponder through their representation of residue.

The relationship between these two works by Sugimoto and Cyr consolidates a relationship between residue and the photograph. Cyr's work nods to the physical creation of the photograph; the tray is the site where an exposed piece of paper or negative is submerged in developing solution, where light transforms into a tangible object. Sugimoto's nods to the final act of the life of an image, by means of projection of light, captured into one single frame by his camera. One work manifests residue through illumination, and the other through hiding. A visual and conceptual paradox exists between these two pieces of work in the operation of residue as a physical (Cyr's visual content/tray) or theoretical concept (Sugimoto's white screen illuminating the concept of residue through the void). In comparing the works to each other, tensions are released through residue, rather than just the visual content or the frame of the image. The two practitioners works are more inward looking; they are subconsciously referring to photography through the photographs themselves. They create a specific space for critiquing the photographic medium itself, demanding a discourse with their own medium.

Resistance and The Void

In addition to Sugimoto and Cyr's dialogue with aspects of residue, both practitioners exercise a relationship with resistance. Their two particular works (Figures 5 and 6) are both photographs of something, yet are an absence of something at the same time (the theatre screen with no picture, the developer tray with no chemical solution). Because residue is a remainder of something that is not entirely there, it makes it a marker for absence; it is refusing to be represented. The nature of residue implying this absence in turn implies a level of resistance within the photograph. This is a philosophical concept to reflect upon in the context of the photograph since it is a vessel for illumination and for sight. The resistance of an image from being seen and the avoidance from the act of looking is in total conflict with the nature of the photograph itself. The resistance that stems from unpacking residue is pivotal to an understanding of tension within the medium. Even more pivotal to this understanding though is the further examination of the void represented by residue (for example Sugimoto's theatre screen). The void of residue is a resistance, creating tension from its subversion of view.

Another way of describing the void represented by residue and resistance can be found in Rosalind Krauss's essay *Notes on the Index* (1977) where she discusses a performance from dancer Deborah Hay in which instead of dancing for her audience, she talked. As Krauss explains in the text, Hay's "refusal to dance" (p. 58) opened a discourse with active resistance through the residue of action (her performance was in a way a vocal residue or representation of a void a 'non-dance'). In the absence of Hay's dance or visual content in the case of Sugimoto's screen, the void creates a residue where something else can occupy it, a space for the juncture to be tangibly held without the frame. By harnessing resistance it unlocks the potential for the photograph to converse with tension.

Disappearance and Juncture

In *Camera Lucida*, as well as in his wider discussion on photography, Roland Barthes (1981/1993) contemplated the *Winter Garden* photograph. Barthes opens up a dialogue with photography around his experience of finding the photograph of his mother after her death, which the reader does not see. The photographic object he holds in his hand is a substitute. It is a visual residue of his mother, which becomes a residue of his memory. As Barthes explained in *Camera Lucida*, “The photograph does not necessarily say what is no longer, but only and for certain what has been. This distinction is decisive” (p. 85). The image is always of something that is not there for the viewer. That gap between reality and the visual representation is what holds the photograph together, pushing and pulling for the viewers’ attention. The sense of “that incapacity for the subject to let go of the lost object and to accept loss” (Lepecki, 2006, p. 112) is also present in the nature of residue and resistance.⁸

Photography is performed and then lost. It is an existence that is created by its own passing, a paradox of a birth, life and death in one moment. The moment the photograph is taken, when the shutter is released, can enact a disappearance. The photograph becomes a record of that experience, but it can only ever exist as a referent. The instance of the photographer – camera – subject combination exists for that precise moment and cannot be reproduced again (even though the output/by-product can). The photograph acts as a record of that moment, nothing more. That is why the photograph maintains such a layered tension; it is the juncture of disappearance. It is caught in-between a captured and non-captured moment, the decision to move or not move, to click the shutter or let the moment pass by. Through its inception, the photograph embodies disappearance, creating a tension of subjectivity as Peggy Phelan suggests: “The act of writing toward disappearance, rather than the act of writing toward preservation, must remember that the after-effect of disappearance is the experience of subjectivity itself” (1993, p. 148). Just as the medium of performance becomes itself through the ‘act’, the photograph becomes itself through the act of photography, in a way making the actual scene obsolete by its presence. The moment of capturing the disappearance (the pressing of the shutter) becomes an agent for the juncture of the space between the subject and its photograph. The photograph is forever caught in this in-between of re-enacting or rather ‘re-performing’ a reality that is absent for the viewer.

Contemporary New Zealand photographer Anne Noble creates a dialogue with tension through residue and resistance, opening a space for questioning our engagement with the disappearance in the captured moment. In a seminar discussing her series of work undertaken in Antarctica she posed a simple question: “We are looking, but what are we seeing?” (Seminar, Dunedin School of Art, 18 April 2013). Her images taken in the whiteout of the Antarctic environment situate themselves within this question (see Figures 7 and 8). They offer us an image, seemingly of nothing at all. “We are looking, but *what are we seeing?*” [emphasis added]. In the search for the photographs’ content we are forced to consider not just the *seen* but also the *unseen*. The space beyond the frame becomes just as essential as what is within it. This search for the image and for the visual content is what drives the nature of the tension inherent in the photographic medium because like Barthes proposed, “Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see” (1981/1993, p. 6). In Noble’s work the collection of uncannily similar images almost refuse the viewer through the camera’s depiction of the whiteout. They propose a sense of tension in that resistance and void.

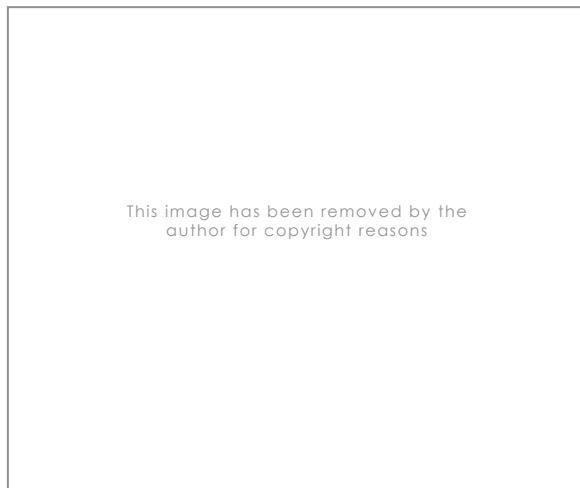


Figure 7. Anne Noble (2002). *William's Field No.2*. 400 mm x 475 mm. Retrieved 4 May 2013 from <http://www.bartleyandcompanyart.co.nz/artist.php?artistID=505&p=1&ID=505&k=0&FMartID=AN02WF7&FMseriesID=&series=Antarctica&artID=14009>

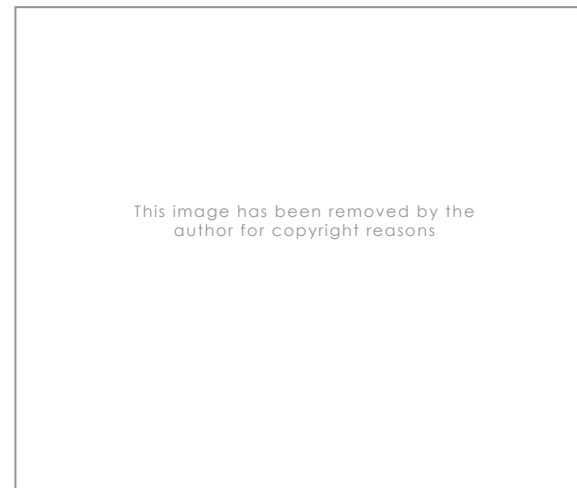


Figure 8. Anne Noble (2002). *William's Field No.7*. 400 mm x 475 mm. Retrieved 4 May 2013 from <http://www.bartleyandcompanyart.co.nz/artist.php?artistID=505&p=1&ID=505&k=0&FMartID=AN02WF7&FMseriesID=&series=Antarctica&artID=14009>

So what is the photograph if it is invisible as Barthes proposes? It is in-between what the viewer sees and what the photographer has seen, in the intangible space between the photograph and what it represents. It is in the search for the visual content by the viewer, in the act of immersing in-between the conceptual and physical realm. The photograph is anchored to this ongoing search, as referents and residues are tied to the visual content of the image. Through residue, resistance and the void, the image converses with tension, exposing the photographic nature of disappearance. Here the juncture of the space between the photograph and its physical subject continue to be positioned outside of the frame. In this relationship there is the facilitation of the tension present within the photograph, one that it seeks to exchange with the viewer.

In the following sections of this exegesis I will demonstrate how my practice-based research undertaken for this project addresses these concepts explored in my critical framework, and how those photographs produced from my investigations uncovered a complex dialogue with tension through practice.

PART TWO: DISCUSSION OF PRACTICE

Developing Strategies

Over the course of this project my relationship with the photograph was both reformed and challenged. Through the process of observing, selecting and photographing a tension was unravelled in not only the photographs I produced, but in my own personal relationship to space and place. I was, as photographer William Eggleston calls it “at war with the obvious” (1988) throughout the making process of this research. This underpinned the dialogue with tension, residue and resistance that the resulting works possess. The following Part Two section discusses how the project developed with the notion of tension, which became a primary strategy for inquiry. Through a discussion of methodology and the final works I will attempt to address the tension present within the photographs I produced and how the critical framework explored in Part One came to bear in the actual work.

At its very core the focus of this project has been the execution of photography as practice-based research. As Lisa Candy explains, “If a creative artefact is the basis of the contribution to knowledge, the research is practice based” (2006, p. 1). It is through the practice of photography that an investigation of tension and the photograph took place; the photographs produced from this investigation are the main artefacts of research. A heuristic approach was also undertaken, which moreover requires a level of personal engagement and a relationship to the spatial, social and cultural environment of the researcher. Throughout the practice of taking and making photographs for this project an internal dialogue was constantly maintained with the external world, as Moustakas (1990) described “In heuristics, an unshakable connection exists between what is out there, in its appearance and reality, and what is within me in reflective thought, feeling and awareness” (p. 12). The nature of the photographic medium requires a particularly intimate engagement with space, not just through the viewfinder and confines of the frame but in the physicality of process. With every shot I took the camera became even more so a part of myself; it became in turn a “thinking apparatus” (Gemeinboeck, 2004, p. 59) with which I investigated. This act of photography as research for this project was supported by relevant critical theoretical and practitioner investigations, the use of the visual diary as a physical reflective tool and digital practice with Adobe creative suite. These all formed my approach.



Figure 9. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Visual Diaries*. These are my vehicles (outside of my computer) for processing and critically reflecting upon my work.

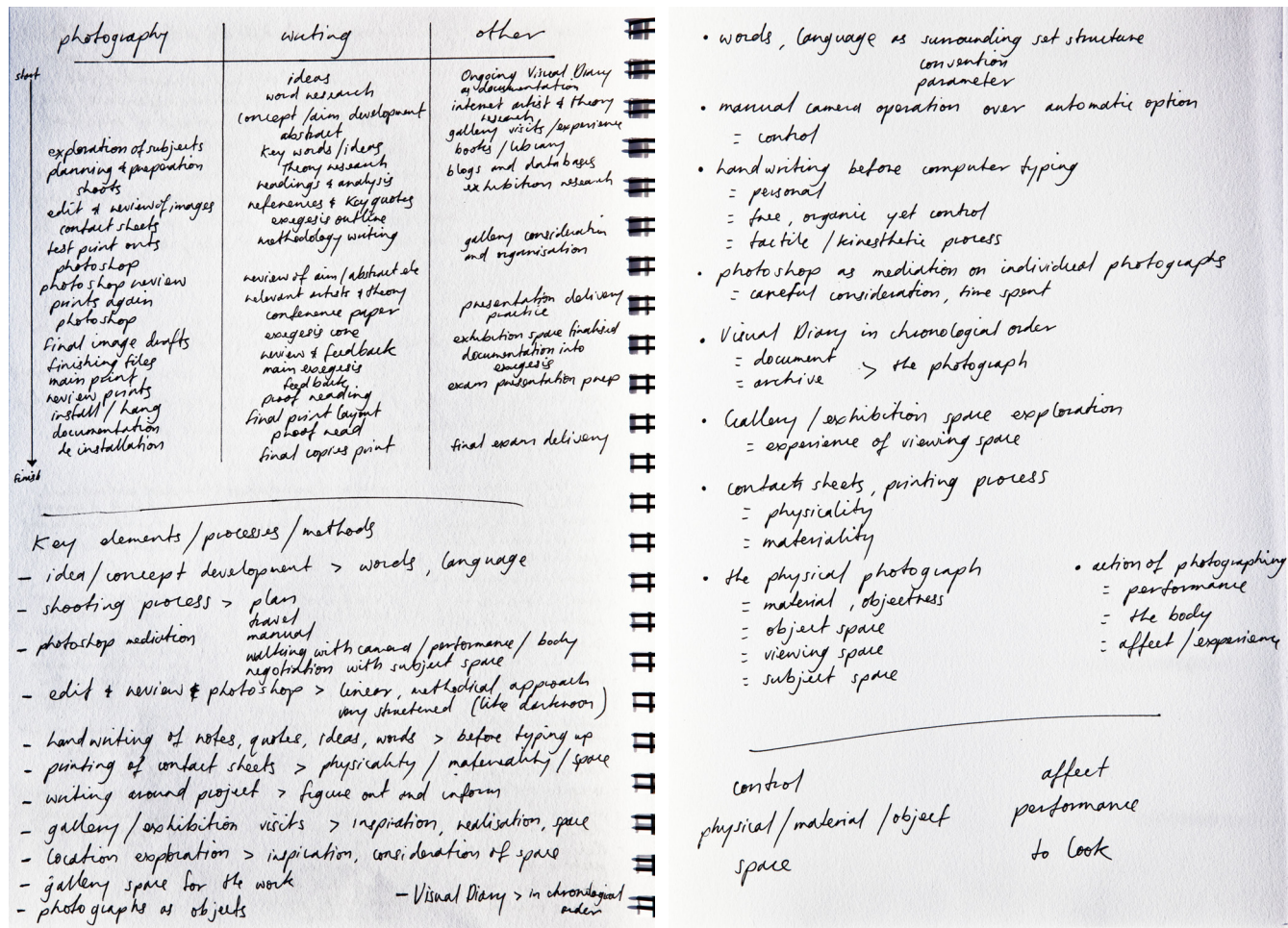


Figure 10. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Visual Diary* page. Planning / mapping / listing of research approach.

At this point the decision was made to exclusively use digital photography rather than analogue practice as the research methodology for the project. This was a conscious choice based upon my own current practice and the contemporary climate of the medium of photography at the time of undertaking this project. By choosing to shoot digital for this research it opens an interesting conversation with tension and the photograph, particularly because of a key strategy not to manipulate pixels in any way, resisting digital manipulation to the image in post-production. Over the course of the research the digital vs. analogue divide was considered, but not as a foremost concern to the project. Throughout the entire process I was attempting to stand in a more neutral position. This involves considering the photograph as a lens based media, whether digital or analogue in nature, it is created by a response to light in relation to a subject/content in the frame. By taking this position it allows a wider understanding or contemplation of tension and its relationship to the photograph.



Figure 11. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Visual Diary* page. Selection of first shoot contact sheet.

The research began with the initial proposal of a study of the ‘transition space’ (an early term used to describe the space between the photograph and what it represents). This coincided with a personal shift of location, which presented me with a new environment in which to undertake the research project (see Figure 12). This created a new context and mode of working unique to the research, through location and place, which ultimately directed the outcome of the project. The move to a new place offered new content with which to study tension, as well a physical boundary from which I could work in. This was because it provided a discourse with a subject matter that I otherwise might not have considered. The vernacular banal visual content of the photographs I was making developed a situational framework for the project, a context from the new place I was living in.⁹



Figure 12. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*. From first shoot in Balclutha (railway station).



Figure 13. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*. From first shoot in Balclutha (railway station).



Figure 14. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*. From first shoot in Balclutha (railway station).



Figure 15. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*. From first shoot in Balclutha (railway station).

From the first shoot, the dialogue with my new surroundings was to develop a strategy for my methodological approach. I took an observational, controlled, direct photographic approach with subject matter, where the framing of objects was done in a disciplined, straightforward, and eye-level way. Part of this disciplined approach was the construction of the actual scene/physical subject as close to human optical perception as possible, and to avoid exaggeration or emphasis of the visual structure through optical illusion. This resulted in a formalisation and balance of space within the frame on both a grid and linear level, led by the rectangle format of the camera with which I shoot. The formal, observational approach was being driven predominantly by framing the subject in a horizontal orientation, close to the human perception of seeing. Horizontality enforces an order of parallel lines and flat perspective upon the subject (when applied with the appropriate focal length, see Figure 15), which commands an ordered and considered viewing of the visual content of the image.

By creating images in this disciplined way (while on location, in the viewfinder), everyday spaces and places have been aesthetically treated. The camera recognising and potentially uncovering an aspect of the environment that might otherwise have gone unnoticed to the naked eye. This direct approach of highlighting a sense of banality (in noticing and recording) may be in contrast to the actual visual content of the image (a discussion had in a supervision meeting, March 13, 2012). For example, the composition of Figure 14 contrasts the potentially chaotic scene of a fallen in, decomposing ceiling (the dishevelled environment is treated in a precise way). This contrast between visual content and a disciplined approach can also describe the beginnings of the dialogue with tension that developed directly from research practice, not just from the photograph.

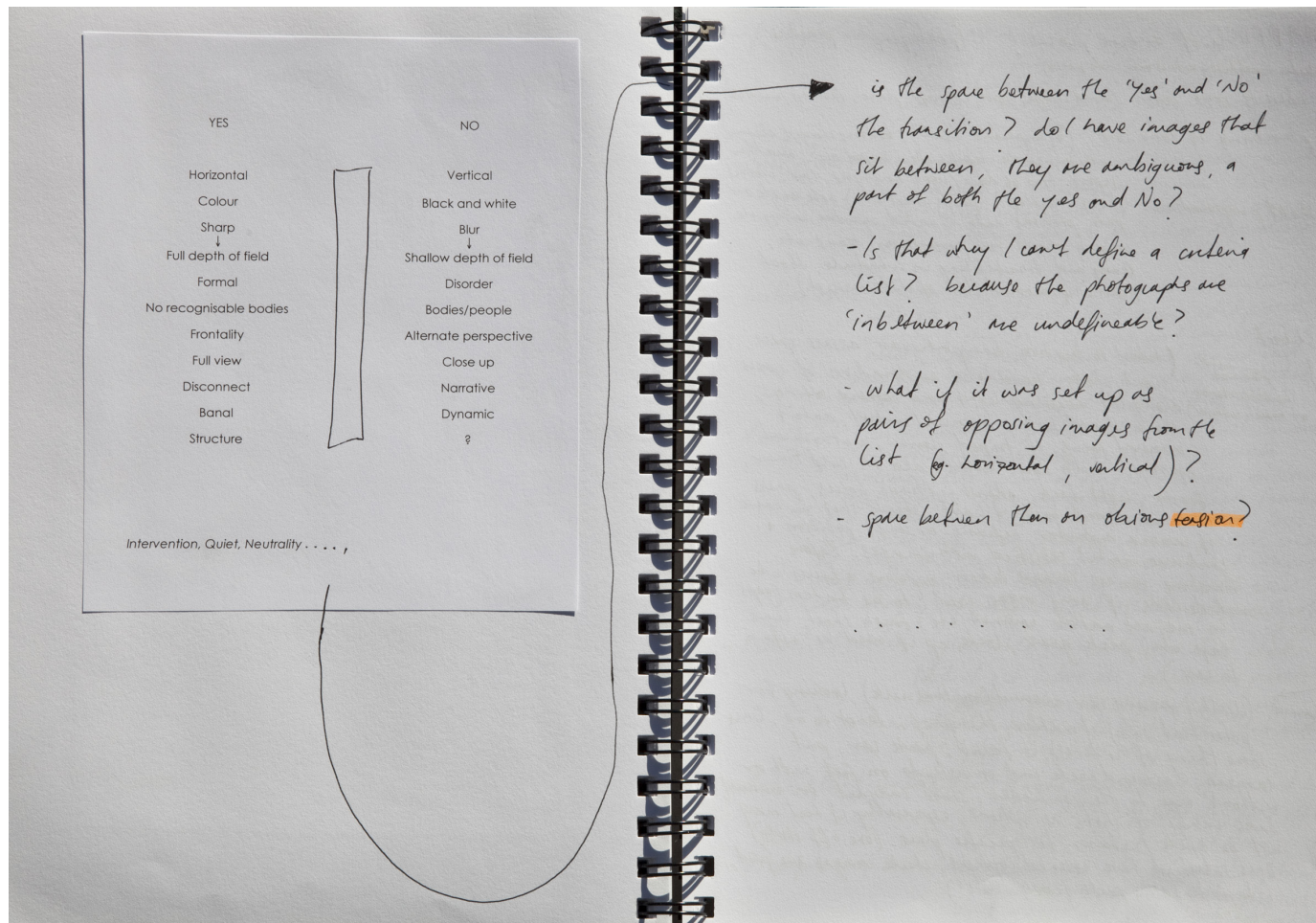


Figure 16. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Visual Diary pages*. Developing criteria.

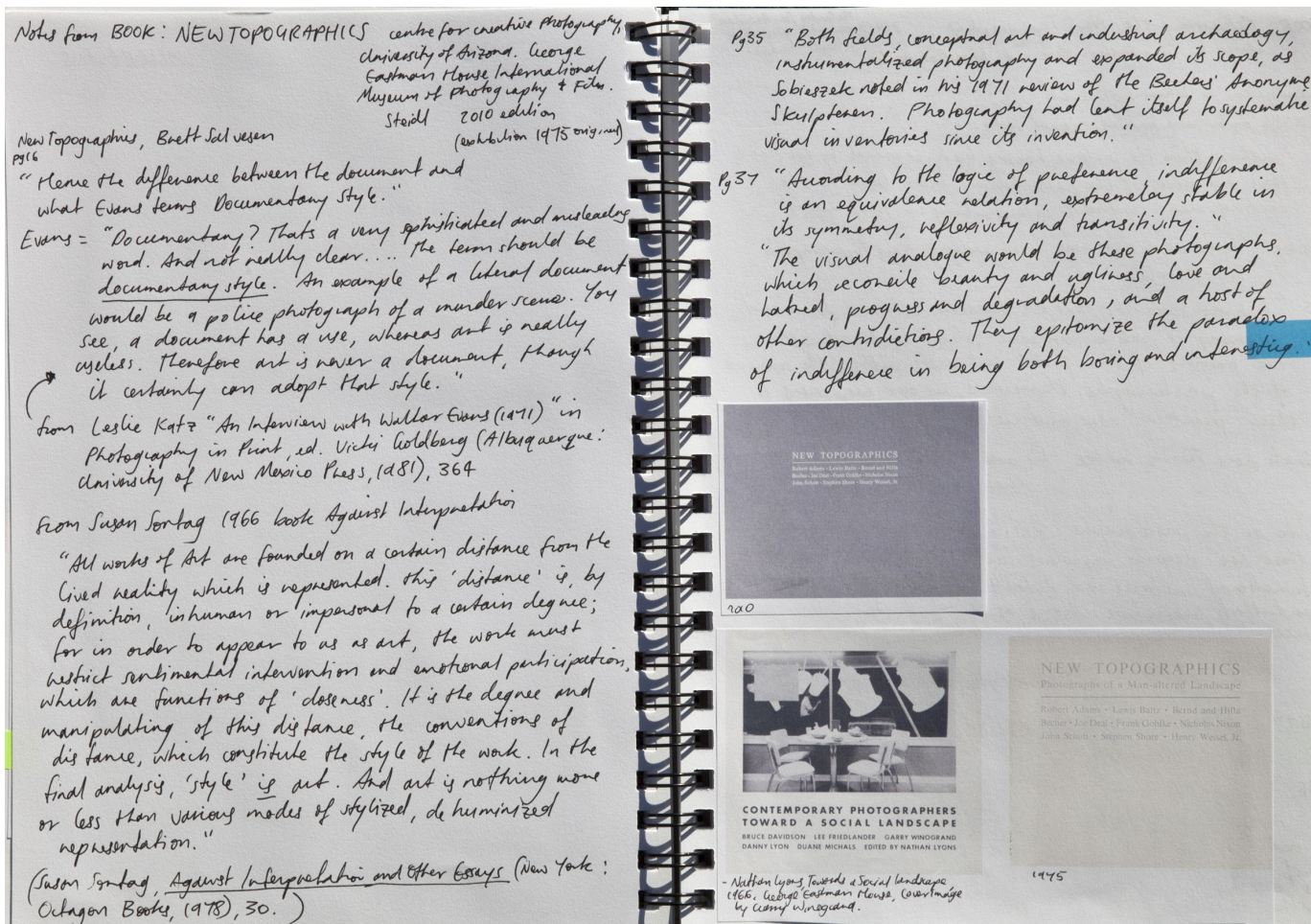


Figure 17. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Visual Diary* pages. Ongoing theoretical research notes.

The disciplined way of photographing was at times quietly conflicting with my intuitive response to subject matter, developing a tension between my physical practice alongside what was happening with the images themselves. From the period of early shooting, the key method of precisely framing the space before the lens, *no matter the content*, emerged, in the vein of what can be described as “photographing democratically” (Eggleston, 1988). This is akin to photographer Robin Morrison’s¹⁰ ‘democratic’ approach where he turned away from the cliché ‘picture postcard’ images of the New Zealand landscape to focus upon the more everyday and ordinary places that people inhabit. My photographic process developed with this ‘democracy’ in mind, where nothing was considered unworthy of being photographed. This was also informed by the ‘straight photography’ mentality that was influenced by the photographers of the ‘New Topographics era,’¹¹ and other New Zealand practitioners such as Derek Henderson¹² and Laurence Aberhart.¹³



Figure 18. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*. From Balclutha spaces shoot.



Figure 19. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*. From Pukcawa Hall shoot.



Figure 20. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*. From Tapanui shoot.

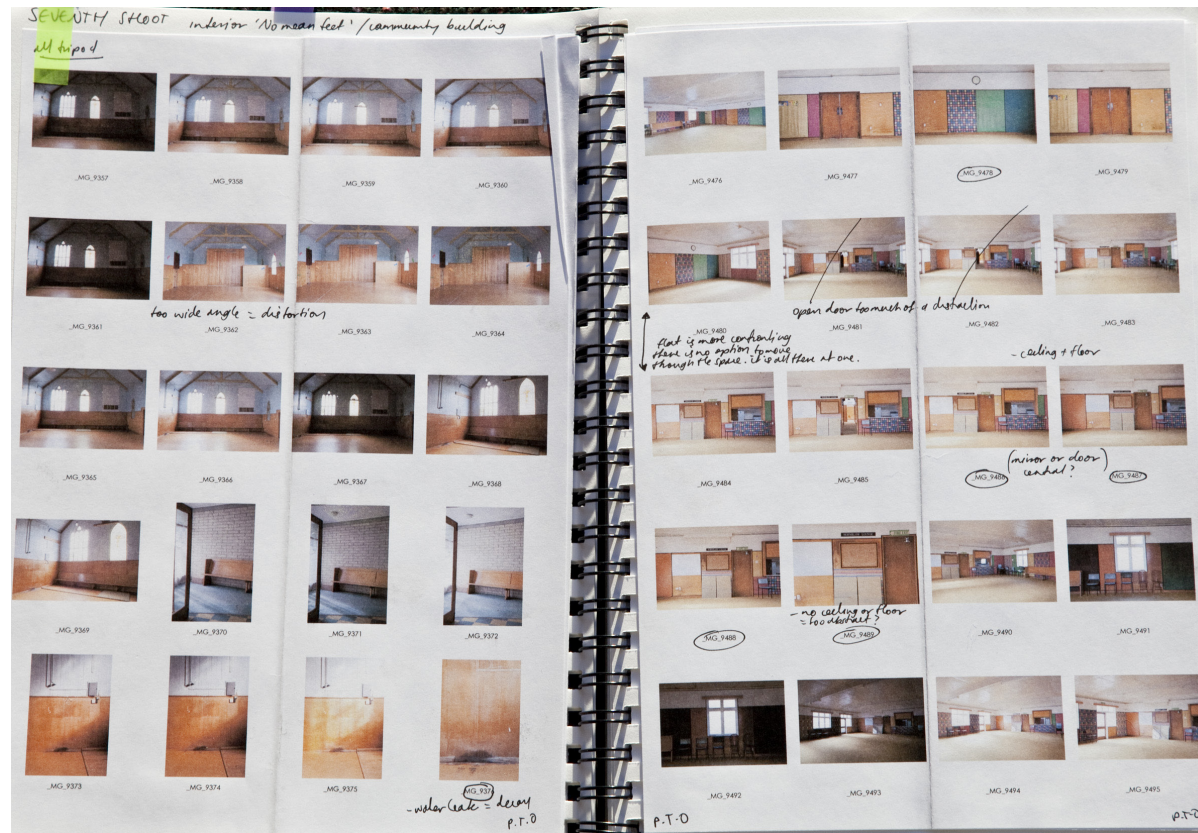


Figure 21A. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Visual Diary* pages. Examples of shoot contact sheets.

The disciplined, observational approach was then employed in my ongoing process, which was undertaken in a variety of interior and exterior situations (as demonstrated in Figures 21A and B).



Figure 21B. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Visual Diary* pages. Examples of shoot contact sheets.



Figure 22. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*. From Balclutha spaces shoot.

Methodological Approaches

By capturing what was before the lens with the least amount of photographic interference (virtually only the frame), I was developing a somewhat paradoxical strategy (especially in terms of my digital context). My approaches involved photographing spaces without physically altering them in any way by my presence (see the rubbish on the field in Figure 22). I photographed the subject as I found it, or rather as it found me (for example see Figure 23 which has no adjusting of chairs, they are slightly out of line as they were encountered). I felt my role was to be as much of an impartial observer as I could. The ambient, inherent light of the places photographed was used to create my exposures; no lights were turned on even if they might have been required, no other photographic equipment was brought into the space apart from my camera, and tripod for interior shoots.



Figure 23. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*. From Senior Citizens Centre shoot.



Figure 24. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Danger Explosives*. From quarry shoot.

This action of 'non interference' with the subject matter being photographed on a physical level is paradoxical because the very act of what I am doing with my practice is interfering. The frame cuts off the subject from its original context, creating a new context of its own in visual content. Within this act of seemingly democratic photography was the most clear-cut intervention of all, the frame separating and disconnecting place, and its referents with it. The out-of-place or uncanny nature of the subject matter (implicated by the frames severing of context) may contradict my straightforward 'hands-off' approach. It is this paradox of strategy that heightens the sense of tension in the work. For example in Figure 24, the non-descript container reading 'Danger Explosives' seems isolated in the environment, a randomly-placed object. It is in fact situated on a quarry site. This information would instantly provide the viewer with an explanation for the presence of the container, but since this is not disclosed it leaves room for tension to develop in this image.

With all of the photographs I was making (refer to Figures 26 - 33) I was both observing and interfering in the same instance.



Figure 25. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Visual Diary* page. Examples of shoot contact sheets, horizontal development.



Figure 26. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*. From Balclutha street and people investigation.



Figure 27. Samantha Matthews (2012), *Untitled*. From Gore alleyway investigation.



Figure 28. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*. From a Balclutha walking exploration shoot.



Figure 29. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*. From St Bathans exploration shoot.



Figure 30. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*. From Senior Citizens Centre shoot.



Figure 31. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*. From Pukeawa Hall shoot.



Figure 32. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*. From Finegand shoot.



Figure 33. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*. From a Balclutha walking exploration shoot.

PART THREE: REFLECTIVE COMMENTARY

Tensions Arising

The following dialogues with tension reveal that the discourse with my research was being driven not only by my personal relationship with my practice, but more importantly by the visual content of the photograph: the subjects, objects, and signifiers within the frame. The tension I was exploring was embedded in what the photographs were depicting. I had become seduced by the visual content of the photographs I had made, succumbing to the persistence of the referent like Barthes had prescribed, “The persistence of the referent (the subject), makes it difficult to understand photography” (1981/1993, p. 77). The tension present in the photographs stagnantly spoke from their referents, chained to their signifiers and indexical nature. The juncture that I thought that had been a key part of tension’s relationship to the photograph had become overpowered and hidden from my view. I needed to step back and reconsider the imagery I had made.

The way in which the visual content of the image communicated with the space beyond the frame then became a space for juncture and tension to dwell. Up until this stage in the research it laid concealed, the referents restrained in the boundary of the frame were the only initial activator of tension. Residue was either present in a literal sense or lost under the weight of other conversing referents. Resistance was hidden with it, and the void ironically was void itself, missing from the imagery. The tension needed a way out. It was now apparent that the photographs which had produced the visual content, and the disciplined approach and my thinking on photography as a conceptual artifice was the only place where I could find a solution.



Figure 34. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Physical editing*. Process of small prints, undertaken after digital file analysis.

Stephen Shore writes in *The Nature of Photographs*, “Photography is inherently an analytic discipline. Where a painter starts with a blank canvas and builds a picture, a photographer starts with the messiness of the world and selects a picture” (2007, p. 37). Following my initial and subsequent investigation, Shore’s statement highlights a point I felt the research had reached. A collection of photographs selected from the “messiness of the world” had been formed by a disciplined approach. ‘I’ the photographer had started out with the “messiness” and was now fully entrenched in the field that I was trying to decipher. Tensions were arising not only in the works I had made, but also in my own relationship and responses to them. By returning to the main collection of photographs I could see that the isolation of subject matter was a key process for my dealing with tension and the photograph (see Figure 34). From the moment of selection, the photograph is constantly reviewed: on the back of the camera, in contact sheets, in its Raw file, and in Photoshop, isolated and disconnected from its context (but in no other way manipulated except for the frame). What I thought I had created with my “messiness” of photographs was actually a ‘mess’ of isolations, connected by their inherent disconnectedness yet another paradox I found in my practice.



Figure 35A. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Visual Diary* page. Physical editing process.

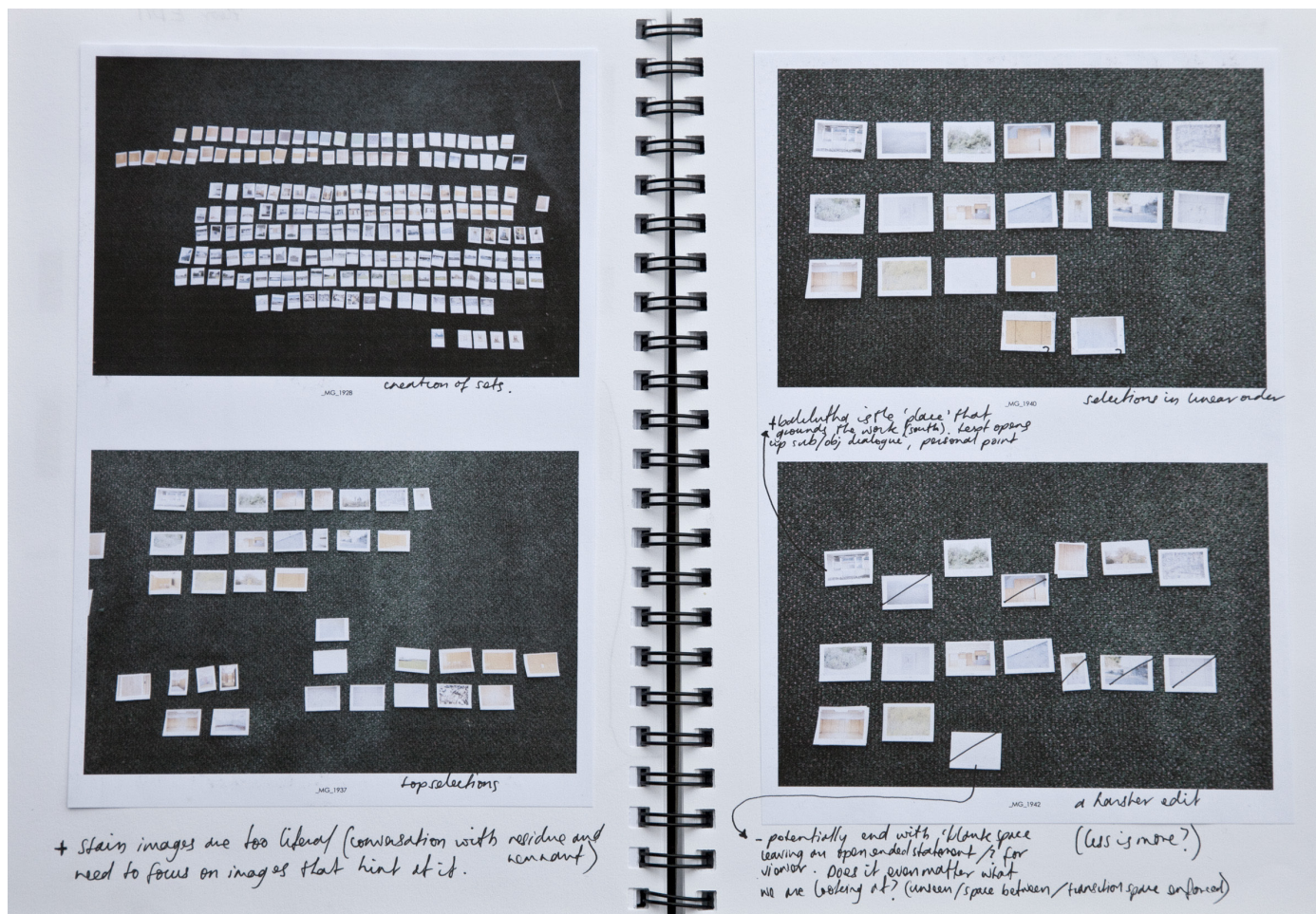


Figure 35B. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Visual Diary* page. Physical editing process.

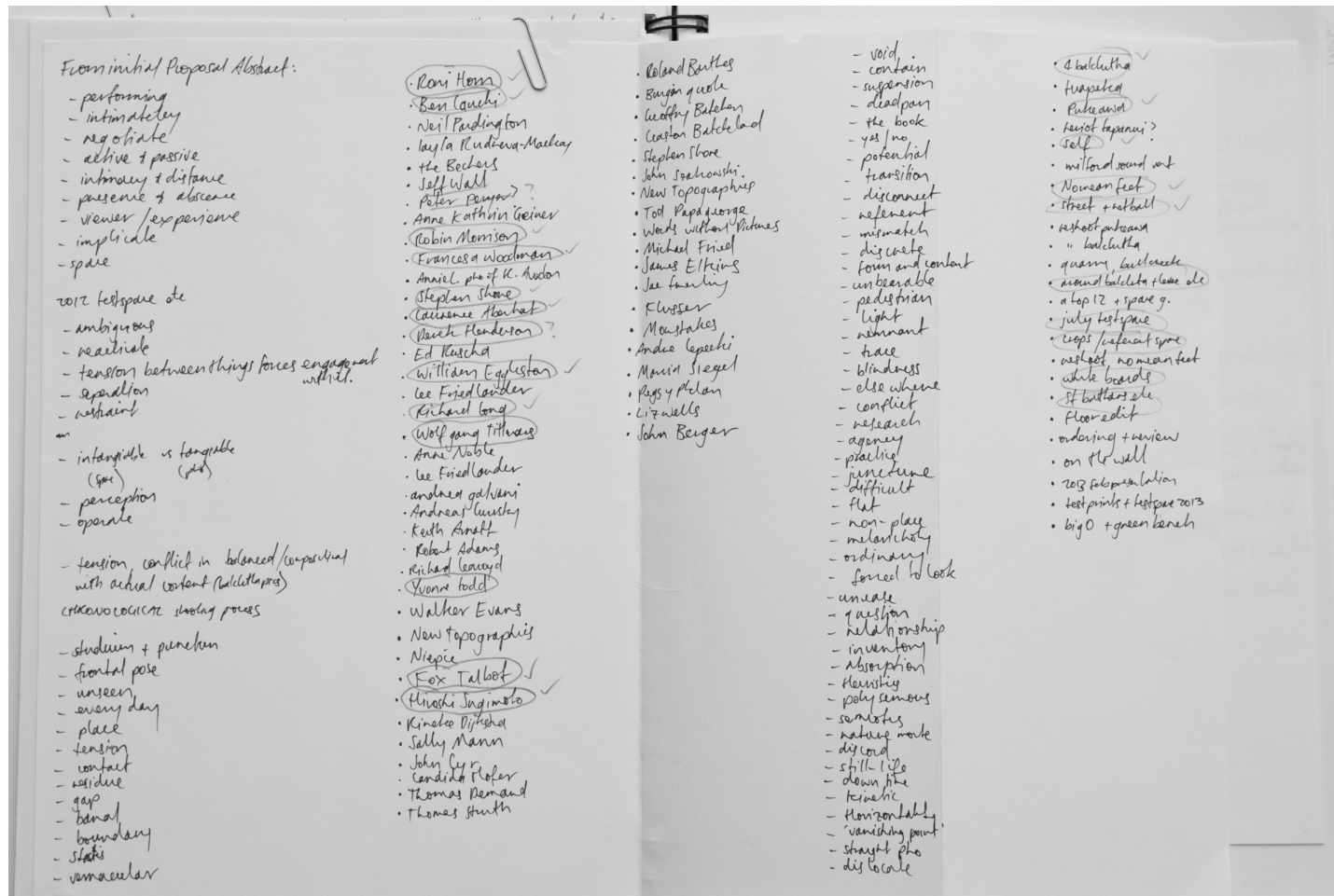


Figure 36. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Visual Diary* page. Review of concepts, practitioner research, key theories, words and shoots.

With this acknowledgement of paradox in mind, I set out by decoding the photographs into sets of shoots, from 1–15. From there they were divided into interior (halls, churches, rooms, etc.) and exterior sets (streets, fields, trees, rivers, etc.). I found the only way I could gather an objective sense of the work I had actually made was by physically printing out the top selections from the sets for the edit review. Original intentions were reflected upon, such as the planned shoots and unplanned explorations, the division between interior and exterior space (which for a time led to an exploration of binaries and oppositions), the decision to exclude people (because of their personal or portrait connotations) and the reoccurrences of physical residue. The sheer size of the collection of photographs the “messiness” of the work needed to be cut through and made clear. At this point, the active review of my Visual Diaries alongside the re-editing process was crucial in order to get my head around the work in chronological order in relation to my theoretical and conceptual research.¹⁴

Slowly but surely the tensions in my critical framework began to arise, initially being identified between the interior and exterior groups of photographs, then in sets of referential motifs (refer to the following Figures 38 - 50).



Figure 38. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*. Test space installation at AUT University, off-campus residency 2012 (first incarnation of disconnected interior and exterior photographs, which were reconsidered during 2013 review process).



Figure 39. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*.

The photograph in Figure 39 is a unique example within this research that deals with the disconnect between the interior and exterior within a singular photograph; and therefore tension in the relationship between the two. The disconnect is facilitated by the window, which offers the viewer a direct outlook of the exterior scene on the other side of the glass. It acts like the viewfinder of the camera itself framing and separating content, creating a distance in the untouchable view, which can only be accessed by the act of looking. The window implicates a sense of distance, a subtle resistance in the separation between viewer and content, yet that resistance is subverted by the clarification of the glass, which invites and displays the banal scene rather than denying the viewer its existence. It is a paradoxical function of connecting and disconnecting, similar to the action of the void, yet here there is no void, only explicit transparency.

Another photograph that deals with resistance and residue is Figure 40, through its representation of boarded-up windows, which serve to protect but also hide. In Figure 41 the photograph of a wall of rock is resisting the act of looking, presenting us seemingly with nothing. The scrape marks where the rock was hewn from the cliff face are visible in the vertical lines punctuating the linear formations of the rock. There is a tension that is drawn from the 'wall' resisting view; the photograph acts as a block rather than an exposure of space, subverting its own operation as a vehicle for revealing subjects. In the interior image of Figure 42, the block is not as prominent as the rock in Figure 41. In this photograph we are presented with a series of flat blank walls. The texture of the wood offers up a faint light stain in the centre panel. The function of the interior space is ambiguous, creating a conceptual residue to be found in the blankness of the walls, not in visual content alone. The three panels are separated from the shell of the building (blue background), seemingly standing on their own accord. This gives the photograph an uneasy quality because of their attached yet freestanding ability; like the window previously discussed, these multiple layers of connotative meaning of the visual content are again paradoxical, creating a gap where tension can reside.



Figure 40. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*.



Figure 41. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*.



Figure 42. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*.



Figure 43. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*.

One set of images (see Figures 43 and 44) surfaced through their representation of subtle sites of resistance through the curtain. The curtain, unlike the preceding images where the wall is overtly blocking, implies the potential for resistance through the flexibility to show or hide. They are therefore a loose incarnation of the void making them an even looser implication of tension.



Figure 44. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*.



Figure 45. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*. Whiteboard study.



Figure 46. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*.

Reflections offered another venue for both conceptual and physical residue to speak to each other (refer to Figure 46). Working in the opposite way to the window and the blocking wall or curtain, the reflection distorts the original referent, becoming a site for a combination of visual content. This reverse transparency has a quieter relation to resistance, layering perception within the photograph back onto the photograph itself, beginning a discourse with disappearance.

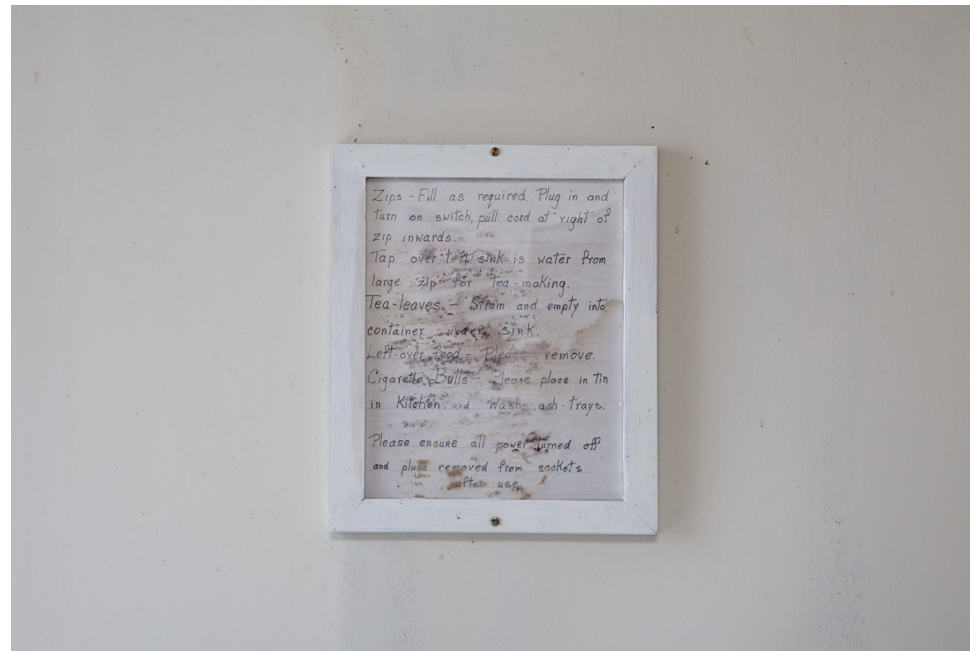


Figure 47. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*.

Text is one of the more literal forms visual content can take. Its presence in an image adds another layer to the discussion on the ultimate overpowering problem with the transparency of the referent, by it being one of the most direct representations of an object (for examples see Figures 12, 14, 24, 33, 47 and 48). When the purpose of the text is arbitrary however, it can act as residue a hint to something not fully resolved and this is where its relationship to the subject context becomes important; it is ambivalently literal.



Figure 48. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*.



Figure 49. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*.



Figure 50. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*.

Then there is actual residue¹⁵ in the form of marked spaces that have changed from their previous incarnations, remainders and traces (see Figures 45, 47 and 49). They are either easily identifiable as physical residue (see Figure 50, the overwhelming ivy leaves), or a conceptual residue that is anchored by the photograph's presence (in Figure 49 the residue is not so explicitly defined).

Once I had reconsidered my reviewed photographs I could reassess the works that came to the surface in *Tensions Arising* to produce my final selection of photographs. Part of this process involved new criteria for selection that involved the development of a chain of my critical framework (refer to Figure 51). This was a simple map for how I understood my concepts around tension and the photograph operated. It facilitated my decision making with my final works.

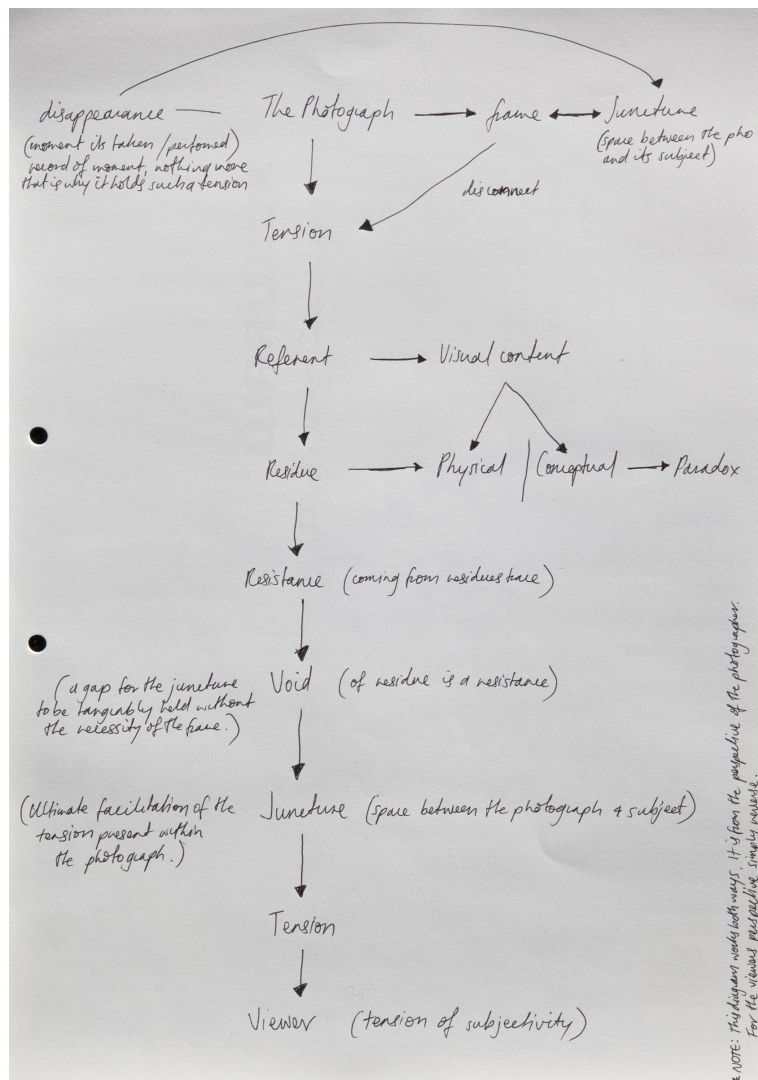


Figure 51. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Chain of critical framework*. Mapping of critical framework into operation of the photograph.

Final Works

The final works were selected for their ability to withhold a subtle yet consistent dialogue with tension. This was underpinned by a consideration of the formal concerns of my disciplined approach, the paradoxical tension in the 'non-interference' that stemmed from this, and the resultant visual content that interacted with residue, resistance, void and juncture within the frame. While taking the final exhibition venue into account for the eventual scale and number of works was important, the final six photographs stand as a completed body of work in their own right. There are layers of tension operating within each of the six images, and in their different relationships to one another. In the final exhibition space the way in which the photographs interact and react with each other in a physical space was revealed in relation to that tension.



Figure 52. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Untitled*. Inkjet print on Epson enhanced matte paper, 1100mm x 795mm.



Figure 53. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Untitled*. Inkjet print on Epson enhanced matte paper, 1100mm x 795mm.



Figure 54. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Untitled*. Inkjet print on Epson enhanced matte paper, 1100mm x 795mm.



Figure 55. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Untitled*. Inkjet print on Epson enhanced matte paper, 1100mm x 795mm.



Figure 56. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Untitled*. Inkjet print on Epson enhanced matte paper, 1100mm x 795mm.



Figure 57. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Untitled*. Inkjet print on Epson enhanced matte paper, 1100mm x 795mm.

Final Exhibition

The exhibition of the final works took place in my hometown of Wanganui, in a street front space at 62 Guyton Street (which is now an artist run gallery space). The space had been empty for a period of time before my occupation so it had a blank canvas feel upon my first physical encounter with the interior environment which I could apply my work to (refer to Figure 58C). This gave the installation process a fresh feel, which enabled an intuitive response to the space with purely my own works, a dialogue that was also informed by my photographic approach.



Figures 58A, 58B. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Empty gallery interior view*. Exhibition space, 62 Guyton Street, Wanganui.



Figure 58C. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Empty gallery interior view*. Exhibition space, 62 Guyton Street, Wanganui.



Figures 59A, 59B. Samantha Matthews (2013). *First large scale print test*.
Test space installation at AUT University off-campus residency, 2013.



Figures 60A, 60B, 60C. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Testing of installation options in gallery*. Exhibition space, 62 Guyton Street, Wanganui.

After viewing and experiencing the gallery space the final printing process of the photographs was undertaken at AUT University in Auckland. Their final paper stock and scale decisions were investigated. The photographs were able to take on a life of their own outside of my own perception, taking the intangible into the tangible realm. Part of this shift was no more apparent than in the decision for the final works to be at such a scale (1100mm x 795mm). Like horizontality, a certain scale opens the image up to being close to the human perception of seeing. The large scale pushes the referents in the visual content of the image forward, making them accessible to the viewer. In their final physical printed form the photographs were raw and vulnerable, yet they obtained a demanding presence in their relatively large scale. Now they could be hung in the exhibition space, ready to be viewed.



Figure 61. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View of gallery from street*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.



Figure 62. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View of final works through front window*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.



Figure 63. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View of works from entrance to gallery*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.



Figure 64. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View to the left of works from entrance to gallery*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.



Figure 65. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View towards front window of gallery*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.



Figure 66. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View of photographs in relation to front window of gallery*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.



Figure 67. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View towards left corner and back wall of gallery*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.



Figure 68. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Installation view*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.



Figure 69. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View of relationship between prints in left corner of gallery*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.



Figure 70. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Installation of back wall*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.



Figure 71. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View of single print on back wall*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.



Figure 72. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View towards back wall of gallery*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.



Figure 73. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View towards right corner and back wall of gallery*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.



Figure 74. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Installation of works on right wall of gallery*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.



Figure 75. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View of right wall towards door*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.



Figure 76. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View towards front window*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.



Figure 77. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View towards front window from the back of the gallery*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.

The final prints were hung with their white border intact, revealing the intention of highlighting the frame or the edge of the photograph. The white border serves as a second act of the moment of separation, as a signifier of the disconnect that the photograph has from its original referent. Through this disconnect of white, blank space it also acts to reveal the 'photographic nature' of the print as a photographic object. The white border facilitates the edge of the frame (photograph edge) and the print (paper itself) leaving space to consider the photograph as an object and the processes that surround the medium. The border also opens an interesting relationship with the white space of the gallery wall, where it comes into direct contact with the physical space at intermittent points.



Figure 78. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Final print installation view*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.



Figure 79. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Detail of final print installation*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.

The prints were fixed to the wall by two pins pierced directly through the white border of the paper. This left the photographs exposed and vulnerable yet undeniably tied down. A physical tension manifested in the hanging of the photographs between these two pins, the paper organically adapting to physical form and space through this tension. With no glass or frame to contain them they invited viewing, the matte paper enhancing this invitation even more so. The photographs were flat, soaking the ink and the light in, allowing no barrier between the image and the viewer. They could be viewed as a photographic object in its simplest form, the print. As a singular object, no glass or frame, just a print on paper, the soft paper uncurled upon the wall giving the work an intimate quality.



Figure 80. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View towards back wall and right corner of gallery*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.

Once installed in the exhibition space, the photographs could begin a dialogue with the viewer. The photographs invited viewing, they could be inspected and touched in their exposed state, yet in the relatively large scale they somewhat contradicted this way of viewing. They did not need to be viewed up close, the size of the works allowed them to be seen clearly even through the front window of the space (refer to Figures 61 and 62). My own personal dialogue with the final works in their exhibited state was dominated not only by scale, but also by the tension between the visual content of the photographs (in particular the referents within the interior images). In their final manifestation in the exhibition the interior works were somewhat distractingly engaging, seducing the eye on such a level that could not have been predicted before hand. This experience served as an example of the argument surrounding the power of the referent and how it gives rise to a tensioned reading of a photograph. Just as Barthes's had posited previously with his "persistence of the referent" (1981/1993, p. 77) my works were persisting in their own way, the content seeping through the considered straightforward photographs, the referents taking on a life of their own.

The persisting nature of these referents was confused by the fact that the photographs were hung without any titles, in such an order as to try and dispel any sense of narrative. The work could be experienced in no particular order, allowing a more transparent interaction with the viewer. A large amount of white space was left between the prints to also enable this (see Figure 80), the inherent architecture of the gallery space shaping the boundary for the viewing experience. The final works in the exhibition environment weave a web of tension between the photographs, the referents and residue, allowing the tension of the individual images to be revealed to the viewer, opening the juncture of the in-between.

PART FOUR: CONCLUSION

Tension Identified

The photograph alludes to another space or place, another time. It is disconnected from its original referent, and this disconnect is bound to the structure of every photograph. The frame, creating a space between the photograph and what it represents, disconnects contexts and generates a juncture. The frame's presence in the photograph may be blatant, or go unnoticed, but nevertheless it is there. There is a cut, a division of space. The photograph we experience is a division and a creature of the juncture. It is a point of disconnection and reception tenuously held together by tension. The photograph is caught in this in-between the never-ending juncture of the seen and to be seen.

Tension released its uneasy weight over the entire body of the research, to ultimately be enclosed within the final body of work. Essentially, photography is concerned with the implications and potential of tension. The subject is selected, camera directed and scene cut to the confines of the frame. No matter the space before the lens, juncture is ever present. Over the course of this research project it was practice that enabled me to negotiate with space, and to engage and disengage with the world around me, which then became a source of tension. Through forcing myself to come to terms with the banal in front of me, I found the space in between the photograph and what it represents. The intangible was pursued, the referent laid bare and tension mediated. Through photographic practice a new body of work was created the outcome of a research process driven and grounded by a need to investigate the photograph itself. The following are some of my findings in relation to my investigations:

The visual content of the photograph and its referential transparency is one of the core aspects of the relationship between tension and the photograph. The ability of a photograph to so easily become a powerful referent for that which it represents (in the consciousness of the viewer) is a key manifestation of tension within the image. This seducing of the referent, of it drawing you in (via the photograph) and taking you 'away' (via the visual content) is an example of the operation of the referent. Through its own being the photograph moves you away from its immediate existence, a paradox of visual experience.

This operation of the referent becomes even more interesting to consider when the concept of residue is involved. The paradoxical way that residue operates is akin to the seduction of the referent, creating another layer of tension. Residue is a product of the referential nature of the photograph, a seemingly literal representation of something that exists in the actual scene. The physical residue could potentially lead to a connotative referent a conceptual residue of a concept or idea. Therefore a more intriguing interaction with its presence and implications of its consideration photographically can be held in the final work.

From this residue comes resistance. The nature of residue of not being 'whole' but a part of something constitutes the withholding of its being. Thus resistance can become present from residue. This resistance is in contradiction to the purpose of the photograph (to show something to be seen), accentuating the paradoxical relationship of referent and residue with tension.

Void is an absence of something, and is therefore contradictory to the nature of residue. Its resistance and refusal to be seen opposes the illumination (the light of the photograph). In the contemplation of the void, one engages with the space outside of the frame, leaving an area in which disappearance and the juncture can be tangibly held without the necessity for the frame.

The photograph acts as a record of an instant, nothing more. That is why it begins to contain such a tension, it is a juncture of disappearance. The photograph is a referent for that moment that is now gone; through its creation it embodies disappearance. This disappearance is present in each and every photograph, yet it is even more prevalent when it is anchored by the void.

Tension Suspended

The photographs where all of these elements in the chain of my critical framework come together open a space to converse with everything compressed within the frame, and consequently everything outside of the frame. The final photographs produced from this complicated process are deceptively simple ones. They are empty and sparse yet filled with detail. In their formal referential nature they stand as testimonials to the spaces and places they depict and to the people that inhabit and encounter them. There is tension in the realm they occupy that is not clearly defined. It is a tension in that they do not necessarily connect. There is no obvious narrative running through the series resulting in a search for the link. They have an ambiguous purpose fuelled by the gap that separates their immediate view; yet they are direct and unassuming in their intent.

These photographs give as much as they deny, and only in their physical form, installed in their final exhibition space were they experienced by the viewer. An unresolved tension rested in the photographs until this time, suspended in a state of dormancy, waiting to be awakened by their audience. By investigating how tension is manifest and operates in the photographic image, the work seeks to not only converse with the tension existing in the photograph, but also propose a space for discourse with the medium of photography itself. They sustain a notion of the photograph as residue, as a remainder of something other than itself. In their physical printed form the photographs were raw and vulnerable, yet they obtained a demanding presence. The images presented a sense of resistance, some blocking rather than exposing a scene. This paradox of viewing speaks to the operation of the photograph as a creature of juncture and disconnect. The space between the photographs became almost as important as the images themselves; a void from which to look back upon the image that seems to disappear the more we encounter it. Each and every photograph is caught in this in-between, and here is where tension lies, suspended in the never-ending juncture of the seen and to be seen.

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Figure 39. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*.

Figure 40. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*.

Figure 41. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*.

Figure 42. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*.

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Figure 44. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*.

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Figure 47. Samantha Matthews (2012). *Untitled*.

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Figure 51. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Chain of critical framework*. Mapping of critical framework into operation of the photograph.

Figure 52. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Untitled*. Inkjet print on Epson enhanced matte paper, 1100mm x 795mm.

Figure 53. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Untitled*. Inkjet print on Epson enhanced matte paper, 1100mm x 795mm.

Figure 54. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Untitled*. Inkjet print on Epson enhanced matte paper, 1100mm x 795mm.

Figure 55. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Untitled*. Inkjet print on Epson enhanced matte paper, 1100mm x 795mm.

Figure 56. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Untitled*. Inkjet print on Epson enhanced matte paper, 1100mm x 795mm.

Figure 57. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Untitled*. Inkjet print on Epson enhanced matte paper, 1100mm x 795mm.

Figures 58A, 58B and 58C. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Empty gallery interior view*. Exhibition space, 62 Guyton Street, Wanganui.

Figures 59A and 59B. Samantha Matthews (2013). *First large scale print test*. Test space installation at AUT University off-campus residency, 2013

Figures 60A, 60B and 60C. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Testing of installation options in gallery*. Exhibition space, 62 Guyton Street, Wanganui.

Figure 61. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View of gallery from street*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.

Figure 62. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View of final works through front window*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.

Figure 63. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View of works from entrance to gallery*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.

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Figure 66. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View of photographs in relation to front window of gallery*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.

Figure 67. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View towards left corner and back wall of gallery*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.

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Figure 70. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Installation of back wall*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.

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Figure 72. Samantha Matthews (2013) *View towards back wall of gallery*. Final Exhibition, August 2013

Figure 73. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View towards right corner and back wall of gallery*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.

Figure 74. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Installation of works on right wall of gallery*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.

Figure 75. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View of right wall towards door*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.

Figure 76. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View towards front window*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.

Figure 77. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View towards front window from the back of the gallery*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.

Figure 78. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Final print installation view*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.

Figure 79. Samantha Matthews (2013). *Detail of final print installation*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.

Figure 80. Samantha Matthews (2013). *View towards back wall and right corner of gallery*. Final Exhibition, August 2013.

1. For the purpose of this exegesis the terms ‘photograph’, ‘photographic image’ and ‘image’ are somewhat interchangeable (so the word photograph is not incessantly repeated throughout the writing). The word ‘image’ is used throughout this exegesis specifically referring to the photograph, not any other visual art (such as drawings or paintings), which also constitute themselves as ‘images’. These terms refer to the photograph as a visual and physical being, where a camera has captured the visual content. The photograph at its core being is an output of light or lens-based media.
2. The word tension means, “a situation or condition of hostility, suspense or uneasiness” (Collins English Dictionary, 2013). Tension is not only a feeling or phrase to wrap around our response or relationship to something, but it is an instigator and core aspect to consider in relation to the photograph for this research project. As Christoph F. E. Holzhey (2010) posits, “Political and aesthetic tension, mechanical and electrical tension, muscular and psychological tension: these are but some examples for the many uses and contexts of the deceptively simple term ‘tension’. Tension often involves an unstable equilibrium on the verge of transformation, providing the condition, energy, and direction for processes that can be productive as well as destructive. Undecided in multiple ways, states of tension do not leave us indifferent. Their indecision promises us the possibility - and often therefore also the duty - to intervene” (p. 7).
3. In this exegesis, frame refers to its action as both a cropping device (while photographing), and severer of context. The frame is a marker for the nature of the photograph being tied to this separation of contexts.
4. I use the word creature here because of the nature of the juncture the photograph has. I find that a photograph is akin to a living being that shifts and changes depending upon its state of being viewed or not.
5. Here the term ‘photographic object’ refers to the physical nature of a printed work.
6. See comment above.
7. Cyr’s developer tray series’ underpinning idea aims to associate the residual with the owner of the tray through the titling of the text. In looking at the photographs, it reveals information on the trays’ users (here the identification of the subject through the titling of the image is key to our reading of it). Through our acknowledgement of their owners they are lifted into significance beyond their practical use.
8. In his book *Exhausting Dance* (2006) Andre Lepecki raises many interesting concepts embedded in the practice of dance and performance. When viewed in context with the nature of the photograph it opens up another way of engaging with the ambiguous tension and resistance that underscores both practices. Choreography is the boundary of a dance and the container of movements worked out and organised before it is set in motion by the body. As Lepecki explains, “choreography is the proper name given by a Jesuit priest to the technology of ‘writing down movement’ *lest one forgets them* [emphasis added]” (2006, p. 52). In a similar vein, the very act of photography comes from the want or need to record something “lest one forgets” it. Photography is a “writing down of movement”, of something either moving before the lens or of the photographer’s own movements through space. As choreography is a representation of a concept through movement, the photograph is a representation of an idea through the visual medium. The body anchors the two practices together because they both operate in the field of negotiating space. There is an uncanny connection between the two practices, which feeds the concept of tension that this research project investigates because it relates to my own personal background in dance.
9. The move to a small South Island town anchored the investigation in a way not conceived at the moment of writing the proposal. The shift of personal location offered up new experiences and a new context in which to work. With the benefit of hindsight I find that this changed and shaped my investigation in a way I could never have predicted. It drove and formed my initial explorations because I was drawn to photograph my new environment.

10. See the book *The South Island of New Zealand From the Road* (1981). I found myself encountering much of the same subject matter as Robin Morrison did, which reinvigorated my inspiration and respect for his work, which was influential when I first started photography dealing with my relationship to identity and place through 35 mm film photographic practice.
11. See the book *New Topographics*. This book and accompanying exhibition *New Topographics: photographs of a man-altered landscape* (1975) paved the way for much of the straight or banal contemporary photography that is now commonplace today. It was unique for its time in the eight photographers' formal and somewhat austere topographical treatment of the landscape, which was translated to a highly formalised exhibition where each artist exhibited the same number of works in the same uniform print size.
12. See Derek Henderson's work in the book *The Terrible Boredom Of Paradise* (2005) which fits into the historical canon of New Zealand photography instigated from Robin Morrison's *The South Island of New Zealand From the Road* (1981).
13. Refer to the monograph book *Aberhart* (2007) a wide-ranging collection of Aberhart's predominantly 8 x 10 large format camera photographs.
14. This enforced the importance of my Visual Diary process within the entire structure of the research, enabling me to objectively reconfigure with what I was trying to achieve with my research. From this review I developed a clearer mind map of my critical framework in relation to my photographs and was able to finally put everything into place (see Figure 37).
15. I also attempted to deal more intently with the concept of residue through the photographing of actual light stains. This developed from a discourse with residue and the photograph explained earlier in Part One. The photographs were of a light residue, and the marked spaces where unknown objects once hung upon the wall of a senior citizens' centre. Instead of being overpowered by content, these photographs were instead overpowered by a pure saturation of colour and total abstraction. They retreated further away from the visual content of the photograph that had grounded my conversation with the referent up until that point, paradoxically resisting a

conversation with tension through only dealing exclusively with residue in their visual content. Because they were a departure from the photographs that had previously dominated my research, they gave me an alternative space from which to reflect upon the extensive body of work I had produced, allowing me to think more critically of what I was trying to achieve with my research. It was not exclusively residue that I was investigating; therefore these works did not hold the answer I was looking for.

SAMANTHA
MATTHEWS

2013

This exegesis was designed by the author