BEYOND THE FORENSIC AND HEROIC:
Exploring new narratives in palaeontological field photography

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We don't see the past so much as look for it.

(Bohrer 2011, 7)

Figure 1 Photographer Unknown Cellar in the Headquarters building (praetorium). Excavations at Segontium led by Sir Mortimer Wheeler c. 1920s, Amgueddfa Cymru Photography Department, National Museum Wales.
ABSTRACT

Since the early nineteenth century photographers and palaeontologists have worked side by side in the field. However, this relationship—while intimate—has been unequal (Bohrer 2011; Hauser 2007; Smiles and Moser 2005). According to art historian Frederick Bohrer (2011), there is the assumption—albeit a gross overgeneralisation—that archaeological and palaeontological photographs are by necessity artless, forensic, and depersonalising. That is, the critical role of the photograph in contributing its own interpretive and expressive discourse has largely been reduced to a discussion of how it operates in the service of science, both as a forensic recording device, and an editorially and commercially picturesque illustration of heroic science stories. As such, digging is either sanitised, simplified, or sensationalised—downplaying the pictorial and anthropological idiosyncrasies of fieldwork. This is because dominant photographic image conventions favour official records over individual experience and innovative representation of fieldwork.

Therefore, while the photograph has maintained a stronghold in palaeontological and archaeological cultures, it is both a privileged position and a burden for photographic researchers wishing to go beyond standard codes and conventions of image production. In response to this, *Beyond the Forensic and Heroic* explores how photographic documentary-art practice can offer an alternative representation of palaeontological fieldwork. Three visual frameworks have informed the theoretical and visual parameters of this research. The first framework focuses on retrospective historiographic inquiry, or the artist as historian mode of research. This approach partners photographic artmaking with historiographic practice (here, the historical-scientific practice of palaeontological fieldwork), to consider new ways of representing the study of history. The second framework calls for immersive, authentic, yet autonomous photographic practice that unfolds through visual, ethnographic immersion in digging communities. The third framework acknowledges the phenomenological centredness and reflexivity of embodied, visual research. This encompasses my personal response to the digging sites as I move about and encounter them. It explores how I choose to photographically reconstruct the digging spaces
through post-production image combinations that challenge the seamless, predictable, and depersonalised photographic record.

Working with both the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum and the Queensland Museum Geosciences Department has enabled me to explore the strategies outlined and create new possibilities that reconsider the forensic and heroic traditions of the field photography genre. The remote Central Queensland township of Winton and the towns of Rockhampton and Nebo in Northern Queensland are dynamic hubs of activity where palaeontologists and volunteers alike gather at restricted sites to dig for prehistory. It is towards these communities of diggers—along with the by-products of their labour, and the fossil forms they excavate—that my camera is focused.
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed) ..............................................

Elise Margaret Hilder
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***

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While interest in fieldwork photography began on a Greek archaeology dig in 2011, the desire to dig and photograph took root much earlier. As a girl, I would spend hours in nature digging up mum’s garden looking for carcasses of dead animals and broken shards of old flower pots. Thanks for tolerating my desire to destroy your garden Mum! As I grew older—and somewhat more civilised—the digging obsession transformed into a photographic one and I began documenting all things historical with my trusty Kodak 35mm roll film camera. I was fortunate to spend parts of my formative years travelling around Australia and overseas, and spent many hours engrossed in photographing museum artefacts, fossils, ruins, and historical sites. In 2012, I made the decision to formalise my love affair with history, digging, and photography: I became a doctoral candidate at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, and in the process teamed up with the Queensland Museum Geosciences Department (Brisbane), Capricorn Caves (Rockhampton), and the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum of Natural History (Winton). Photographing in the field with these museums forever changed the way I look at landscape, history, and the photographic image itself.
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have gone before us. You have taught me how the vision of an artist can transform little ideas into big statements. You have also taught me to never stop asking questions and always hold those matters that are close to my heart open to scrutiny. Thank you, Burragun, for helping me along my journey and letting me walk for a time with you along yours.
INTRODUCTION

A lot of people are fascinated by excavating the past, the slow painstaking process, the allure of discovery. But it appears in report form; the experience is lost and hardly evoked ... Yet excavation is all about process, unfolding, growth, the cultivation of ideas and prospects ... Might this work in progress not be captured?

(Shanks 1992, 183)
What does digging up the past look like as a photographic image? What does doing visual research within the context of palaeontological fieldwork—that is, surveying and excavating the fossil record—entail? After eight years digging and photographing on both archaeology and palaeontology dig sites in Australia and Greece, I have become accustomed to the ways photographs are created, deployed, valued—and also devalued—in the historical sciences. Completing degrees in both history and photography has also meant that my perspective of digging sites is shaped by an interest in both the historical-scientific process and visual storytelling. Importantly, however, this photographic practice-led research and accompanying written exegesis positions fieldwork within a visual research framework rather than an historical or scientific one.

Postmodern theorists Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari have all taken the position that archaeology—the study of the human past via artefacts, remains, and structures—is a symbol of mystery, because its belated uncovering and fragmentary nature today represents the “limits of our understanding” Wallace 2004, 24–25). In palaeontology, which is the study of much older “ancient life” in the form of the fossil record, this limit is compounded further by the concept of deep time that posits Earth’s history is billions of years old (Sanz 2002, 35; Tattersall 2010, 3–4, 7, 80, 81). Such deep, geological time—to which the dinosaurs, megafauna, and prehistoric flora photographed in this research can be traced—signifies what American palaeontologist Stephen Jay Gould (2001, 2, 4, 66, 68) calls an “immense past,” and what geologist and naturalist James Hutton once referred to as an infinite “world without a beginning or prospect of an end.” Considering this, it could be argued that prehistory has a somewhat incredible, intangible connection to the world today, accessible only through scientific conjecture or the popular imagination. Yet, while metaphors of deep or distant time may make the past seem remote and fanciful, the physical acts of surveying and excavating prehistory—what archaeology theorist Michael Shanks (1992, 9, 15; 2012, 9) calls the “mechanics of fieldwork”—are very tangible, contemporary undertakings. After all, at its core, historical science—which broadly encompasses both archaeology and palaeontology—involves the study of the past via its physical remains, worked on by people in the present (Shanks 2012, 9). Therefore, the type of fieldwork photography I have produced for this research involves much more than just
photographing physical objects in-situ. Rather, I visualise how these objects are connected to the people working on them in the land. It is towards this embodied, physical labour, with its slow, concentrated looking, relentless fieldwalking, diligent digging, and retrieval of obscure looking objects from the landscape, that my camera is focused.

During the 2011 archaeology season at Paliokastro on the Greek island of Kythera, just prior to undertaking this doctoral research, I participated, observed, and began to visually explore archaeological digging spaces. Charged with the task of photographing Hellenistic and Byzantine buildings, pottery, and other artefactual remnants being worked on across three excavation trenches, certain interesting features began to emerge. The first aspect of fieldwork to capture my attention was the bizarre juxtaposition of an open excavation trench filled with ancient objects and modern dig tools set against the surrounding landscape of contemporary Kythera. The second was the slow pace of digging and the meticulous, tender care taken by the diggers to pick, dig, dust, extract, and clean every artefact. Third, was the unpredictable and transient nature of fieldwork, and the way the dig site was in a constant state of flux—very slowly, but nonetheless continually, transforming. The fourth feature was the pride taken by the diggers in getting dirty and the formal beauty found in the grubby, often abstract, forms nestled in the dirt. Fifth, was the comradery and social aspects of digging culture, and sixth, was the constant looking and scanning of the workers over the site: hinting at the intense intellectual rigour involved in observing every new layer of earth peeled back for excavation. Lastly, was the omnipresence of the camera itself in fieldwork. Operated by scientists and volunteers alike, cameras were used as both official and vernacular recording devices to document evidence and site details, and to produce personal snap shots of the dig experience as a keepsake and token of participation for the diggers.

BEGINNINGS AND OPENINGS

Upon returning home from Greece I began to think about a photographic aesthetics of digging. My use of the term aesthetics, however, does not imply simply capturing the artistry of digging or capturing the pictorially striking features of fieldwork. Rather, it concerns the way the
individual photographer communicates their experience of being on site photographically. So, I began to ask the big questions: how could I photographically interrogate these spaces, photographically propose questions, and attempt to answer them in kind through a specific type of photographic language? What was underrepresented in the pre-existing image culture and how could I respond to the underrepresented and create a new visual narrative in a thoughtful, critical, and uniquely photographic way? I began to do some theoretical and visual digging of my own. However, my investigation into archaeological photography in both the literature and image surveys confirmed my suspicions: the majority of discussion on fieldwork photography concerned its role as a technical apparatus for recording evidence destined for scientific reports or archives (Witmore 2007, 86). This was completely at odds with—and inadequate for encompassing—all I had experienced in Greece.

Other image types encountered in this preliminary phase of research included commercial illustration, the vernacular snapshot, and press photography promoting scientific discovery in the field. None of these photographic image types seemed to engage with photographic theory, photographic history, art process, or social documentary practice. Yet, these were the main image types appearing in my visual analysis. There was no discussion at all about palaeontological fieldwork photography as conceptual art, and only a few examples in the context of archaeology. How could this be the case in an age of critical visual theory? In fact, most fieldwork photographs seemed to be descriptive and regarded for the information they provided about scientific context, and not for their status as pictures or how they visually communicated ideas about these spaces. Certainly, the photograph was rarely discussed as an aesthetic object capable of generating its own visual discourse or independent research (Bohrer 2011, 26; Colin Renfrew in Russell and Cochrane 2014, 11; Ryan 2013, 16). Put another way, conventional fieldwork photographs are not looked at as pictures, they are looked through to the scenes they record:

At its most scientific, archaeology seeks to approach the photographic image as document, not to look at the photograph so much as to look through it to the object pictured (Bohrer 2011, 26).

As such, philosopher Richard Wollheim’s concept of “twofoldness,” which is viewing an image as both a picture surface and a depicted scene, is not widely apparent in fieldwork photography
The issue of twofoldness is, of course, amplified by the fact that the particular image in question in this research, is a photograph whose very identity is tied up in both its indexical capacity to record things (referents) in the real world and its status as a constructed picture (Barthes 2000 [1980], 88; la Grange 2008, 76). In his seminal text *Camera Lucida*, semiotician, and literary/visual theorist Roland Barthes (2000 [1980], 6), describes what happens to the photograph when its indexical connection to a referent becomes its overriding purpose:

> Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see. In short, the referent adheres. And this singular adherence makes it very difficult to focus on photography.

Art historian Kitty Hauser (2007, 65) contends that a photograph’s indexicality does not diminish its status as a picture, nor is its expressive quality oppositional to a direct, indexical connection to the world. However, she does highlight that it becomes problematic when the photograph is viewed simplistically as one or the other. This is a difficult issue for fieldwork photography—undertaken in a largely scientific domain—because it is the overriding indexicality of photography that has ensured its longstanding relationship with the historical sciences: the inescapable trace of a referent in every frame confirms the photograph’s value as evidence (Bohrer 2011, 106; Lyons et al. 2005, ix, 4, 22; Shanks 2012, 103).

I began to consider how I could re-imagine excavation sites and separate the camera’s utilitarian function as an adjunct to science from its potential value as a form of arts-based research. Historical archaeologist Travis Parno (2010, 123), has suggested that archaeological photographs are often viewed as “dispassionate recordings.” He continues that such propositions disregard the central human element of fieldwork: both the people engaged in archaeological practice and the people taking the photograph. Therefore, while still appreciating the intrinsic value photographs provide for scientific research, I wanted to move away from a forensic and dehumanised exclusivity and create an equally valued, simultaneous space for visual ethnographic narratives. This meant carving out a new space for photography that could explore scientific fieldwork without succumbing to its modes of image production. I wanted photography to maintain its intimate connection to digging culture, while also operating outside the formality
of technical and official image conventions. That is, I wanted the photograph to function as a picture, while at the same time embracing its indexical closeness to fieldwork culture.

**THE PALAEONTOLOGICAL IMAGE**

The decision to shift from archaeological to palaeontological documentation as the subject of this research was both a practical matter of site access but also, more importantly, a response to the complete absence of the palaeontological field photograph in contemporary art discourse. I knew I was not the first nor would I be the last photographer to attempt to photograph the archaeological landscape of Greece—as Australian photographer’s Rowan Conroy and Bob Miller have recently demonstrated in the *Travellers from Australia: Artists in the Ancient Pafos Theatre* exhibition (Barker and Wood Conroy 2017). However, photographing palaeontological fieldwork was another matter entirely. Also, as a Queenslander, the shift was also born out of a desire to explore my own backyard and to investigate the unique palaeontological communities working in some of the State’s most remote regions.

In the last two decades, there have been many impressive dinosaur and megafauna discoveries made in Queensland by the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum and the Queensland Museum. However, the photographs accompanying these excavations have been confined to very specific modes of visual production and only circulated in scientific domains. Aside from officially regulated press imagery and technical photographs in scientific reports, the digging of dinosaurs has been a restricted zone to the outside world. This is not just a Queensland problem, the lack of scholarly research on palaeontological field photography is a global issue. While I do not wish to conflate the practices of archaeology and palaeontology into one generic visual investigation, the lack of existing literature on palaeontological field photography means that I will at times need to rely on the literature on archaeology.

Theoretically, the principals of stratigraphic succession and excavation grids are quite similar across the two historical-scientific disciplines but philosophically, historically, culturally, and visually, palaeontology and archaeology are worlds apart. There is a challenge with palaeontology—and the photography connected to it—that what is being studied goes far
beyond human time (Shanks 2012, 117). Unlike archaeology, which deals with the human past (Parno 2010, 117), palaeontology operates on “deep time” with a vastly different geological agenda, that as previously mentioned, is quite difficult to grasp (Shanks 2012, 117). Further, when fossils are excavated, they are not necessarily pristine, attractive, or even recognisable. The obscurity of the fossil trace is amplified by its seemingly inhuman quality. For, unlike human artefacts, human skeletons, and buildings, petrified organic matter often looks abstract and indecipherable.

Yet it is this same visual obscurity that motivated me to consider palaeontology. Tied to the notion of obscurity is W.J.T Mitchell’s claim (2005, 167) that the fossil record—or natural objects—are paradoxically both “other” and “not other at all.” What he is describing is the discipline of palaeontology, which can be seen unfolding in the field in an early illustration by palaeontologist and artist Arthur Lakes (fig. 2). While the oversized (or sometimes undersized), fragmented, alien, ancient, and obscure animal “other” could mistakenly be seen to have no relevance to our contemporary, human lives, palaeontological communities make them relevant.

**Figure 2** Arthur Lakes *Antediluvian Remains Discovered in the Rocky Mountains* 1878
by bringing them into the contemporary world for contemplation. As Mitchell (2005, 167) suggests:

Fossils are thus even more radically “other” ... because they signify the lost, nonhuman worlds of natural history and deep, geological time ... They signify species death, the utter vanishing of an entire class of living things ... Fossils are, at the same time, not Other at all, but creations of modern science and objective rationality. Fossils are our thing.

Therefore, while the fossil record and its excavation might be visually challenging subject matter, it has so much cultural and ecological relevance to who we are today: both in the way palaeontologists immerse themselves in it and in the messages these natural objects carry. Mitchell (2005, 167,182) alludes to this when he states that fossils fascinate not only because of their “rarity value” but also because of their “symbolic warning of extinction and obsolescence” (Mitchell 2005, 167, 182). He describes how fossils have become metaphors for our own human history and carry much currency in our environmentally conscious age (Mitchell 2005, 177). What is more, as a photographer with a research interest in landscape practice, I am also fascinated by the way natural history visually nestles itself in the contemporary landscape and the way in which it is fastidiously tended to by people in that landscape.

IN THE FIELD: THE FORENSIC GAZE AND THE HEROIC GAZE

My experiences on palaeontology fieldwork sites from 2012–2015 in Winton, Rockhampton, and Nebo reinforced those early observations made in the archaeological context of Greece. Palaeontology similarly has its own image typologies that correspond with the technical, vernacular, commercial, and press paradigms of archaeological fieldwork. Palaeontological photography is likewise governed by mandates to objectively record, reveal, simplify, praise, promote, or sensationalise fieldwork. Embedded in this visual culture are two dominant photographic modalities: the forensic gaze and the heroic gaze. Technical photography (fig. 3) underscores the capture, preservation, and interpretation mandate of the scientific method (Bohrer 2011, 15; Mitchell 2005, 179; Shanks 2012, 18, 44). The primary agent of this process is what art historian Frederick Bohrer (2011, 9, 48, 104) calls the “forensic, depersonalised gaze.”
Forensic vision promotes objective, didactic, truthful, neutral, detached, “plain-style” photographic observation, and is often accompanied by infographics in report form (Bohrer 2011, 127). Hauser (2007, 84), similarly refers to the crime scene aesthetic of archaeological fieldwork as the “forensic eye,” which corresponds with photographic theorist Liz Wells’ (2009, 13) description of the “dispassionate” photograph as one that coldly undermines the sensuous, affective, and lyrical potential of an otherwise expressive medium.
The forensic gaze also frequently intersects with heroic narratives, through what literary and visual theorist W. J. T. Mitchell (1998, 166) describes as a type of “scientific shamanism.” In this scenario, the scientist, the impressive specimen, precision digging (staged/dressed sites), rugged/beautiful landscapes, and epic moments of discovery are all employed as visual tropes of the heroic (figs. 4–6). In such cases, the scientist is often portrayed as an explorer, cowboy, hunter, shaman, sage, and metaphysical detective.

![Figure 4 Mike Hettwer Green Sahara Archaeology 2008](image)

The photographs that depict these protagonists boast stories of noble individuals pitting themselves against the elements, using their intellectual, physical, and prophetic powers of insight to recover lost worlds (Ryan 2013, 8; Hauser 2007, 42–43). Heroic narratives are also frequently supported by pretty or dramatic landscapes, using predictable strategies of the picturesque landscape tradition to seductively frame pleasant views like the obligatory sunset framing the swaggering scientist moving towards the horizon at the end of a physically gruelling work day seen in figure 4 (Giblett and Tolonen 2012, 15). Heroic narratives, like the forensic gaze,
are also geared towards recording, revealing, praising and promoting. However, the main output of heroic imagery is commercial/editorial illustration and sensational press stories that announce eureka moments of discovery to the world (Bohrer 2011, 54).

Figures 5–6 Mike Hettwer Dinosaur Hunting with Paul Sereno nd.

EMU BOBBING AND SURFACE SCRATCHING IN QUEENSLAND: THE ANTI-FORENSIC AND THE ANTI-HEROIC IN THE FIELD

My response to the overrepresentation of forensic and heroic narratives in palaeontological fieldwork culture has been to photographically deconstruct and create anti-heroic and anti-forensic counter narratives. *Emu Bobbing and Surface Scratching (Skull, Limbs, and Ironstone)* (fig. 7) is a multi-panelled photographic landscape that offers one such example of this strategy. It redirects the viewer’s attention away from what they expect to be shown: evidence. There are no big dinosaurs perfectly framed and emerging from the ground. There are no forensic close-up details to analyse, and there is no one dominant and centrally positioned digging protagonist. Rather, it presents a democratically occupied working environment in which the visually unspectacular activity of surface collection and preliminary digging (referred to as scratching) takes centre stage.

The term emu bobbing is associated with the local feathered emu inhabitants of this area that similarly constantly bob their heads up and down in the surrounding fields while pecking and prodding at the soil. Landscape has also been brought in as an alternative organising point of view to expand and lift the frame away from the downward facing forensic gaze. Responding to
the opening quote by Bohrer (2011, 7) that, “we don't see the past so much as look for it,” this triptych focuses on all the seemingly insignificant, in-between moments of diggers working, sitting, or looking. The understated importance of looking has effaced revelation, seeing, and the filling in of gaps. Importantly though, while adopting a distanced perspective it still explores actual labour, genuine connection to land, and the anthropologically driven nature of fieldwork.

Figure 7 Elise Hilder Emu Bobbing and Surface Scratching (Skull, Limbs, and Ironstone) 2015

With an underpinning narrative of the anti-forensic and anti-heroic, Emu Bobbing also represents a temporal and spatial photographic reframing of a particular type of palaeontological fieldwork activity. Fieldwork is re-presented through the way I have chosen to look at it, reassemble it, and offer it to audiences—not as it would be presented for technical reports or glossy commercial illustration. It is a fragmented scene that places together a series of in-between, subtle, beyond moments that almost line up—but not quite. The distant mesa plateau seen in the first two panels disappears abruptly in the third, and the cropped shadow in the middle panel does not align with the first panel. They are modest inconsistencies that are left unresolved to maintain a sense of disequilibrium and separateness among them, challenging the seamless pristine vistas of commercial fieldwork photographs. The multiple frames also signify a build-up of time, space, and movement that echoes artist and researcher Mary Modeen’s (2013, 138) suggestion that,
“the combinant image implies the passage of time—the time it takes to move bodily from one position to another.” The reassembled photographic space thus connotes multiple time, but it also testifies to a physical manoeuvring of myself within the scene. There is a photographic authority and a phenomenological encounter behind its construction. Art critic Rosalind Krauss (1979, 50, 55) calls this process of combining or reordering images “antinatural” because it shows a deliberate “spatialization of the story.”

**ART AND EXCAVATION: A CANON OF IDEAS**

Several visual artists have responded to ideas and metaphors associated with the archaeological through faux digging performances, such as Mark Dion’s *Tate Thames Dig*; museum as muse residencies, such as Justine Cooper and Hiroshi Sugimoto’s interventions in the American Museum of Natural History; and even personal excavations connected to an artist’s memory of a certain place seen in Stephanie Valentin’s photographs. However, this doctoral research is specifically interested in photographic practice within the largely restricted and authentic context of historical-scientific excavation. In this framework, a small community of international photographers, including Jeff Wall, Richard Barnes, Simon Callery, and Paul Nash have managed to infiltrate archaeological digging spaces with the deeper engagement of a conceptual photographic art approach. In addition to this, photographer David Webb has created an online *Alternative Diggers Archive* that documents archaeologists in the field through a series of constructed portraits. Australian photographers Anne Ferran, Bob Miller, and Rowan Conroy have also investigated archaeological sites ranging from ancient Greece to colonial Australia through to the most recent field of contemporary archaeology in the contemporary urban environment.

Outside photographic discourse, archaeologists Michael Shanks and Aaron Watson have experimented with photography in the fringe areas of scientific research known as post-processual and phenomenological archaeology. Further afield and away from historical science altogether, photographers Anne Noble and Sanna Kannisto have positioned their visual practice within scientific research stations in Antarctica and the Central and South American jungle.
respectively. While not specifically connected to historical-scientific fieldwork, these two photographic artists nonetheless pursue strategies that challenge the dominant image conventions associated with exploratory science and biological fieldwork. Their work has been invaluable in informing my own photographic research methodology. However, I have not found any photographic artists working within the specific context of palaeontological excavation. Therefore, despite a few isolated examples of photographic interventions on archaeology sites, overall it would seem photography suffers from a crisis of identity when it comes to its mode of operation in historical-scientific fieldwork spaces. I would argue that such a crisis, in part, stems from what Bohrer (2011, 141) claims is the raison d’être of official field photography, that “its images are artless, distinct from art’s proper realm.”

Similarly, within art theory, archaeological fieldwork photography is under-theorised with the notable exceptions of research conducted by art historians Kitty Hauser (Shadow Sites: Photography, Archaeology, and the British Landscape 1927–1955, 2007) and Frederick Bohrer (Photography and Archaeology, 2011), and art curators Dieter Roelstraete (The Way of the Shovel: On the Archaeological Imaginary in Art, 2009) and Mark Godfrey (The Artist as Historian, 2007). While Bohrer looks at the relationship between photography and archaeology as an historical survey from 1840 to the present, Hauser makes a specific art historical analysis of British Neo-Romanticism (natural Surrealism) and how it influenced representations of prehistoric landscape in Britain in the 1930s–1950s. While not exclusively considering photography, Roelstraete and Godfrey both look at the implications of working in various fields of history research as an artist and its impact on contemporary art practice more generally.

Each of these authorities helps move creative research away from the historical sciences and into visual art discourse; however, none specifically focus on the most undernourished image of all, the palaeontological field photograph. Associate Professor of historical and cultural geography James Ryan (Photography and Exploration, 2013), and English and Art History Professor William J.T. Mitchell (The Last Dinosaur Book: The Life and Times of a Cultural Icon, 1998 and What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images, 2005) offer brief glimpses into palaeontological imagery. Ryan provides an historical survey of exploration photography and mentions historical
science and the early twentieth century expeditions of the American Museum of Natural History. Conversely, Mitchell focuses on popular imagery associated with palaeontology in *The Last Dinosaur Book*, and in *What Do Pictures Want* he discusses the curious nature of the fossil and the fossil image. I considered all these issues, gaps, histories and conventions as I began to move into the image making phase of my own research.

*Figure 8* Elise Hilder *Isisfordia Duncani, Out Barcoo Interpretation Centre, Isisford 2012*  
*Figure 9* Elise Hilder *Austrolovenator Wintonensis, Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum, Winton 2012*

**DINOSAURS THAT ROAR TOO LOUDLY**

In the early stages of my research, I became aware of a prevailing irony that while palaeontology fieldwork was seemingly underrepresented in photographic art research, there was an overabundance of photographs depicting dinosaur bodies in museum displays and in popular culture. Therefore, the first obstacle in researching and representing anything to do with palaeontology is the issue of the dinosaur’s pervasive status as either an icon of popular visual culture or as a museum centrepiece. During my first year photographing in Central Queensland, I too became enamoured by the impressive physicality and iconicity of the dinosaur and other prehistoria on display. I detoured and obsessed over the bigness and the plastic-fantastic bodies of the dinosaur—its hyperreal presence in the form of reconstructed models or its immaculate presence in the form of pristine museum specimens. I began a photographic documentation of fibreglass dinosaur models and museum displays found in the streets, museums, and interpretation centres of Central Queensland in the rural townships of Winton, Richmond, Hughenden, Isisford, and Muttaburra (figures 7–8). I became interested in the way fossil-bearing
communities invested in these heritage drawcards as a way of sustaining their remote townships, particularly when some of the dinosaurs and other ancient reptile specimens were namesakes to the towns themselves, such as *Isisfordia duncani*, the crocodyliform from Isisford (fig. 8), and *Australovenator wintonensis*, the theropod from Winton (fig. 9) (Long 2002; White et al. 2017).

![Image](image1.png)

**Figure 10** Mark Dion *Toys ‘R’ U.S. (When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth)* 1994

**Figure 11** Wim Wenders *Dinosaur and Family, California* 1983

Such a focus reinforced what Mitchell (1998, 2), calls the dinomania, dino-craze, or dinosaur fetish of our times; a predicament in which sensational bigness, reconstruction, and hyperreal dinosaurs function as a form of pervasive entertainment. In figure 10, Mark Dion’s mixed media installation *Toys ‘R’ U.S. (When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth)* creates a parody of dinosaur fetish on display in a fictional child’s bedroom (Mitchell 1998, 265; Sanz 2002, 41, 45). In figure 11, photographer Wim Wenders documents dinosaur simulacra in the street, observing the touristic allure and fascination with these plastic icons in American popular culture. Running alongside the popular dinosaur narrative is the artist-led museum intervention. Focusing on museum archives, exhibitions, and curatorial practices, artists set about celebrating or critically deconstructing material found in these institutional spaces under the banner of museum as muse or institutional critique (McShine 1999, 6). For example, while Carl De Keyzer (fig. 12) humorously critiques the way audiences passively consume history as if in a theme park, Australian photographer Justine Cooper explores the behind-the-scenes culture of collection at the American Museum of Natural History (fig. 13) (Barrett and Millner 2014). Yet, the question I began to ask was, if the museum is a site of critical visual interest, then why is fieldwork not considered with similar interest?
Archaeology theorist Gavin Lucas (2000, 13) suggests it is because fieldwork is often deemed the museum’s silent partner and is subordinate to its public profile, hegemony, and prestige. Lucas (2000, 12) calls this the politics of practice, where the fieldwork phase is seen as “knowledge akin to factory production.” It is the dirty work after all, the physicality of which often involves back-breaking labour, tedious surveying and looking, meticulous and tender care of remains, and housekeeping duties such as cleaning, measuring, and bagging evidence. Conversely, the laboratory and museum are more contained, predictable, relatable, and accessible places where theory and interpretation transform fragmented data into coherent narratives. That is, they fill the gaps in our knowledge, providing tangible pictures to help us understand our natural or cultural heritage (Lucas 2000, 13). A consequence of such representational imbalance is that the museum as muse and reconstructed dinosaur overshadow the everyday realities of excavation, to the point that audiences are left with a very distorted image of actual palaeontological fieldwork. Even though photographing aspects of heritage tourism and the museum was an important part of my research journey in the early stages of this project, the story I really wanted to tell was the one most will never have access to: the palaeontological dig site. Therefore, I refined my focus to consider the representation of the dinosaur as it is rarely seen: dirty, fragmented, and in-situ.
DIGGING PREHISTORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BEYOND

[W]orks of art make us revise how we see the original context/setting and at the same time open up our sense of what is possible when words/images are resituated.

(Parry and Wrathall in Parry 2010, 5)

Moving beyond traditional forensic and heroic narratives through art-based, practice-led photographic research repositions the palaeontological excavation site, first and foremost, as a critical pictorial space where photography offers a new mode of engagement with fieldwork culture. It also appeals for more photographic autonomy both in the field and in theoretical discussion, which requires a new, third space of operation. Australian artist and art theorist Graeme Sullivan (2010, 38–40) calls it a middle ground or an “in-between space”—a postdisciplinary variation of Homi K. Bhabha’s hybrid “third space” theory (Ikas and Wagner 2009, 2). In this postdisciplinary space, photography and palaeontology are two distinct “cultures” that come together via inter-cultural communication (Ikas and Wagner 2009, 2). I use the term postdisciplinary instead of cross-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary because “post” suggests more than borrowing and collaborating. Rather, it resituates practice outside all existing frameworks and disciplines, and traverses the unknown in practice to create new responses that are relevant to specific contexts and issues of visual production (Sullivan 2010, 111–112). Importantly, I propose that photography is the provocateur and active agent of research in this space. This means photographic practice can move beyond its traditional role as an applied branch of science and direct its own new points of entry into fieldwork. Archaeology theorist Doug Bailey (2017, 695) similarly talks of a potential “disruptive” art/archaeology that creates counter-narratives to dominant archaeological representational conventions. Importantly, he advocates moving beyond conventions of both archaeology and art to do this (Bailey 2017, 694–695, 700). I will return to this example in more detail later in the discussion.

Choosing to conduct photographic research in an environment that already has an entrenched photographic culture is certainly a challenge because it requires understanding, negotiating, and re-negotiating photographic codes and conventions in a process of revision or resituating. Yet, rather than being problematic, theorists Joseph Parry and Mark Wrathall (in Parry 2010, 5) echo
Bailey by positing that such revision and resituating is part of art’s power to create and communicate new ideas. Photographic documentary-art research offers one such way of “revising” how the excavation site is interpreted and represented; namely, through anti-forensic and anti-heroic approaches to visual storytelling. Art, with its suggestion of transformation, subversion, subjectivity, aesthetics, allegory, lyricism, and slow looking is partnered in this research with documentary practice, which is connected to notions of authenticity, integrity, immersion, ethnography, “depth of research,” and storytelling linked to real world events and people (Bate 2009, 45; Crombie 2006, 14; Kember 2003, 215; Manovich 2003, 252).

To explore such an approach, I have crossed disciplinary boundaries; undertaken theoretical, historical, and visual analysis; interwoven aspects of science culture with arts-based photographic practice; gained access to restricted sites; worked within an immersive expeditionary program; reinterpreted and reframed specialised subject matter; and displayed photography for a new audience in a gallery space. However, because palaeontological fieldwork photography as a form of creative visual research is unchartered territory, archaeological photographic examples have often been used and applied to palaeontological contexts. Further, it is important to clarify that there are two separate forms of fieldwork at play in this research: the palaeontological fieldwork culture I encountered, and the photographic fieldwork methodology I created. Photographic fieldwork has certainly drawn on visual anthropology and visual ethnographic practices, but it has also involved creating my own documentary-art fieldwork methodology to adapt to the unique environment of palaeontological excavation. Ultimately, a new conceptual, theoretical, and practical toolkit had to be assembled for this project to achieve what Sullivan (2010, 58, 195) describes as “thinking through art making in a purpose-driven process.”

Broadly speaking, my visual practice has drawn from art history and landscape traditions, photographic theory, the historiographic turn in contemporary art practice, photographic social documentary practice, visual ethnography, interpretive narrative archaeology (also called post-processual archaeology), and phenomenological philosophy associated with the embodied experience of the researcher. From these broad discourses, specific concepts, processes, and
strategies have been extracted and grouped into three main working frameworks for this research:

- aesthetics, possibility, and the artist as historian
- unfolding fieldwork through the criticality of slowness, immersion, connection, and the subtle ethnographic beyond
- phenomenology and the photographic “I” in fieldwork.

These visual frameworks ultimately place the artist as historian, the strategy of immersion, and the photographic authorial at the centre of the research. They also inform the main modes of practice that play out across the research in opposition to the forensic and heroic. Each framework will be explored in the next two chapters: first in the way they connect to current literature and photographic examples, and then in their incorporation into my own specific, practice-led research.
CHAPTER 1
DIGGING AND SURVEYING WITH A CAMERA: VISUAL AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR FIELDWORK PHOTOGRAPHY

Excavation photographs represent the culmination of a complex series of negotiations between individuals, the archaeology they seek to create, and the social and physical landscape in which they reside.

(Jonathan Bateman in Smiles and Moser 2005, 200)
THREE VISUAL FRAMEWORKS

AESTHETICS, POSSIBILITY, AND THE ARTIST AS HISTORIAN

Aesthetics, possibility, and the artist as historian is the first framework that grounds this research in visual art practice by focusing on the sensuous detail, lyrical storytelling, and indexical closeness achieved through a photographic presence in fieldwork. It considers those inherent aspects of photography that are valued in science—indexicality, testimony (thereness), and detail—but explores how these qualities can be redirected away from the usual subject matter of excavation and into other areas (or details) of the digging space. Such an approach embraces the paradox of photography as being both picture and index, and does not reduce the photograph to one or the other. Instead, the issue becomes a matter of what palaeontological fieldwork details I want to explore through my camera. Or more to the point, what underrepresented details of fieldwork I want to provide a new visual platform for and through what type of photographic expression. Both Roelstraete (2009, 21–22) and archaeologist Colin Renfrew (2003, 42) have separately highlighted the importance of and need for further visual investigation into historiographic “excavating and unearthing,” or the “aesthetics of excavation.” This recognition of an aesthetic dimension to historical-scientific fieldwork became the catalyst for my own development of a practice-based photographic research methodology. As such, concepts and practices drawn on in this framework include the retrospective historiographic mode (artist as historian); critical visual theory; and photographic landscape as an organising point of view (the found archaeological landscape, Neo-romanticism and natural Surrealism, and the contested landscape).

UNFOLDING FIELDWORK THROUGH THE CRITICALITY OF SLOWNESS, IMMERSION, CONNECTION, AND THE SUBTLE ETHNOGRAPHIC BEYOND

Historical-scientific fieldwork is not solely about recording evidence or reconstructing the past. It is an embodied, visually rich encounter with ancient things unearthed by people working in contemporary landscapes today (Parno 2010, 132). Unfolding fieldwork through the criticality of slowness, immersion, connection, and ethnography builds on the previous framework but incorporates the anthropological (people-centred) dimension of fieldwork and the ways labour,
the by-products of labour, and the social community supporting such labour manifest through visual ethnographic strategies. Connected to visual ethnography is a consideration of the slow process, unfolding, and growth that takes place in fieldwork day in, day out over the course of lengthy in-field expeditions:

A lot of people are fascinated by excavating the past, the slow painstaking process, the allure of discovery. But it appears in report form; the experience is lost and hardly evoked ... Yet excavation is all about process, unfolding, growth, the cultivation of ideas and prospects ... Might this work in progress not be captured? (Shanks 1992, 183)

Through participant observation and art making over the course of four years, the prospects and underexplored details of fieldwork have taken the shape of what visual and historical anthropologist Elizabeth Edwards (1999, 59) refers to as the “subtle beyond.” That is, while certain overlooked physical dimensions of fieldwork might seem insignificant to one photographer, they become wholly important to another. The subtle beyond features of excavation are all those minutiae details or suggestive moments that normally escape official field records. With its focus on slow process and slow looking, this framework also responds to archaeologist, journalist, and artist Christine Finn’s concern that journalism and press photographs produced during fieldwork visits are out of sync with the real pace of digging (Clack and Brittain 2007, 17). She advocates a slow journalism that counters the speedy, sensational press culture and allows time for connection and the unfolding of ideas to occur.

**PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE PHOTOGRAPHIC “I” IN FIELDWORK**

The photographic “I” is a term I have created for this research. It draws from phenomenological philosophy with an emphasis on the embodied experience of the researcher through the concepts of reflexivity and “self-others-things” (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 127). This refers to the way photographic research evolves from the experiences and reflexive responses of the photographer to their research environment; here, palaeontological fieldwork. Additionally, the phenomenology of photography itself advocates an affective and compositional way of looking, framing, and thinking about the world (Wrathall in Parry 2010, 11). I respond to these combined aspects of phenomenological philosophy in my visual practice through the following strategies and concepts: thinking through practice (reflexive thinking and art making); the cult of
antiquarian anecdote; and antinatural spatialization of story. These all support my individual approach to representing fieldwork and reflect my experience and interpretation of being on site.

WHY PHOTOGRAPHY?

Could this research have been produced through other modalities; that is, a painting, a sketch, a sculpture, an installation, a performance, or the moving image? Perhaps, but I am particularly interested in the unique and longstanding relationship that exists between the historical sciences and the photographic still image. Photography and palaeontology intersect in a number of interesting ways. They both emerged as professional disciplines in the nineteenth century, both are time-based disciplines and, importantly, both rely on direct connection to physical referents in the world (Hauser 2007, 59). I have identified five ways the photograph operates as a potent form of research in re-presenting fieldwork: the embeddedness of photography in scientific fieldwork culture; its direct, indexical, and testimonial connection to objects, people, and events; its ability to explore sumptuous detail; its static mode of operation and ability to “stop the flow of time,” and “keep moments open to scrutiny” (Parno 2010, 118; Shanks 1997, 102; Sontag 1977, 112); and lastly, its ability to operate as a picture and thinking art object.

EMBEDDEDNESS

The embeddedness of photography in the historical sciences extends back to the nineteenth century Age of Enlightenment and Age of Science, and was further fortified in the twentieth century during the eras of hard “processual” science (Clack and Brittian 2007, 53; Hamilakis et al. 2009, 285; Hauser 2007, 58; Morgan 2016, 2–4; Russell and Cochrane 2014, 1). According to Lyons et al. (2005, 22), photography not only rose in tandem with the historical sciences, it helped legitimise them. In bearing witness and recording detailed information during the excavation process, the photograph helped show the world what archaeologists do. It certified their professional existence and promoted their exploits (Lyons et al. 2005, 22). Bohrer (2011, 27) similarly argues that photography contributed to the rise of archaeology, and by extension palaeontology, as formal disciplines. Photography not only has deep historical roots in establishing the forensic gaze, but also in cementing the heroic narrative tied to the politics of
digging, the personas promoting it, and ultimately to the politics of the image representing it. Therefore, photography is well positioned to take up the challenge of reconsidering how fieldwork is represented as a form of visual practice-based research.

INDEXICALITY

While archaeologist Jonathan Bateman (in Smiles and Moser 2005, 192) claims such embeddedness creates the impression that “archaeology has an intimate, almost loving, relationship with photography,” Bohrer (2011, 22) suggests this relationship carries with it “the burden of objectivity.” This is because a photograph is an indexical record of something directly encountered in the world (Barthes 2000 [1980], 76; Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 18). Using the fossil object as an example of a referent, literary theorist Walter Benn Michaels (2007, 447) states that, “you do not need a fossil to make a painting of a fossil; you do need one to make a photograph of it.” As such, photography is fundamentally embraced in archaeology and palaeontological fieldwork for its direct connection to real world objects and, by extension, for its fidelity as a messenger of science—truthfully and objectively documenting the world and its ancient objects (Mulvey 2000, 139). What this burden of objectivity fails to acknowledge is the constructedness and expressive intentionality of the photographic act. This “paradox of photography,” and its dual status as both picture and index, creates tension in the fieldwork environment (Barthes 2000 [1980], 76; Duve 2007, 110; Mulvey 2000, 141; Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 18). Bohrer (2011, 29) contends that this paradox has profoundly affected the way the photograph operates in the historical sciences, stating that, “writ large, the history of archaeological photography is a history of the response to the fundamental paradox of photographic truth.” While this paradox is frequently reduced to an overriding indexical authority in this environment, it is a completely different matter in visual art discourse.

In studio art research, notions of photographic truth, the innocent eye, transparency, and objectivity—with their emphasis on indexical purity—have long been critically debunked by the postmodern crisis of representation (Mulvey 2000, 139; Renfrew et al. 2004, 94; Shanks 1992, 184; Smiles and Moser 2005; Wells 2003, 12). There is a wealth of critical visual theory asserting
the photograph’s twofoldness in terms of its informational value (the scene it depicts) and status as a picture. For example, visual theorist Susan Sontag and film theorist Andre Bazin have both argued that photographs are simultaneously traces and interpretive representations of the real (Hauser 2007, 65; Sontag 1977, 154). Visual academics Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright (2009, 17–18) suggest that while photographs can be “expressive, affective and magical,” they can also be viewed as informative, “cold proof.” In his seminal essay on the phenomenology of photography, French aesthetics philosopher and art historian Hubert Damisch (1978, 70–72) identifies both record/inscription and art/essence as qualities associated with the photographic experience.

What these authorities are suggesting is that neither a photograph’s expressive or indexical qualities can be separated from the medium; however, in certain contexts, one aspect may be given more value at the expense of the other. Such is the case with palaeontological fieldwork photography, where the information-bearing status of the camera is prioritised over its expressive potential. According to photographer and art theorist Allan Sekula (in Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 18), when the photograph is seen as a truthful document it becomes a type of “fetish object” that is sought after in various contexts by certain disciplines and institutions for its information-bearing qualities. This has certainly been the case with photography’s role as a recording apparatus in the historical sciences. In fieldwork culture today, the prerogative to look through a photograph to the information it provides means its materiality is frequently bypassed. Having said that, it is important in the context of this research to maintain the sense of directness and connection photographic indexicality provides, but instead of focusing on the photograph’s indexicality at the expense of its pictorial dimension, I position them to simultaneously work together. Rather than focusing on the expected referents of fieldwork (i.e., evidence), other subtle beyond details unfold and become magnified instead.

**THERENESS**

A large part of photography’s pervasive role in fieldwork today also relates to its witnessing capacity (Parno 2010, 118). The field photograph is not only indexically connected to objects, it
also serves as a visual testimony of the fieldwork event (Smiles and Moser 2005, 2). As Lucas (2000, 10) states, the field photograph proclaims, “I was here and witnessed that this was also found here.” Film and photography theorists Andre Bazin and Roland Barthes have both suggested that the real allure of the photograph is connected to this very sense of being there—its “thereness,” as film theorist Laura Mulvey adds (2000, 142). But what sort of witness or testimony is the fieldwork photograph actually providing? Art critic John Berger (1971, 179–180) contended that, “photographs bear witness to a human choice being exercised in a given situation” and photography is, in fact, “the process of rendering observation self-conscious.” Such a statement implies that witnessing is subjective, intentional, and ultimately framed. As is the case with indexicality, to view the photograph as a subjective, partial, constructed testimony dramatically changes the way it functions in fieldwork.

NOT-SO-TRIVIAL DETAIL

Photographic detail is another of the medium’s key features alongside indexicality and testimony (Szarkowski 2003, 100). Stepping out of an historical-scientific framework, indexical closeness, directness, thereness, witness, and detail could work in a completely new way, as photographer and curator John Szarkowski (2003, 100) suggests:

The compelling clarity with which a photograph recorded the trivial suggested that the subject had never before been properly seen, that it was in fact perhaps not trivial, but filled with undiscovered meaning.

What this means is the detail preserved in photographs through the clarity of good optics, can either be useful or counterproductive to science, depending on the detail chosen for photographic consideration. For example, the detail of a fossil fragment would be useful to palaeontologists, but the detail of a digger’s hand or a blade of grass or the texture of the plaster moulds used to wrap bones—the subtle beyond—would not. Like all things to do with photography, detail is selective. Yet, photographic detail has also been historically used to validate the camera’s presence in fieldwork and other areas of scientific and historiographic research. In addition to recording the features of artefacts or specimens, photographic detail also possesses what Hauser (2007, 63) identifies as the “fantasy of referentiality”; that is, when photographs record things the human eye cannot see. This is particularly true in archaeological
field photography where the so-called fidelity and precision of the lens is deemed more reliable than the artist’s eye or the scientist’s memory of the site as written in field notes. However, and importantly for this research, detail is also found in non-scientific forms, whereby the details that are normally glanced over become the new subjects of investigation.

**STASIS, THAT-HAS-BEEN, AND KEEPING THINGS OPEN**

According to Shanks (1997, 89), photographs “turn the now into the past.” The positive by-product of this process is that a photograph can “keep things open which are passed over in an instant” (Shanks 1997, 102). Photography arrests time but also turns the moment gone into a photographic artefact that no longer belongs to the “flow of time,” what Barthes calls photography’s essence: the “that-has-been” (Barthes; 2000 [1980], 76–77; Hauser 2007, 66; la Grange 2008, 90; Szarkowski 2003, 102). For authors Tony Schirato (culture/media studies) and Jen Webb (creative practice) (2004, 46), the freeze effect of photography responsible for such arrest or stasis of real time is unnatural because it is not the way we experience the world. Yet, this unreality is part of the photograph’s power because it “jolts us out of our complacency about our lived environment and its spatial dimensions; such photographs trouble us because they show us the world in a way that we don’t (think we) actually see it” (Schirato and Webb 2004, 46). Put another way, stasis enables a contemplation that is not possible during the constant barrage of imagery experienced in film/the moving image (Sontag 1977, 17). This is one of the reasons I chose a photographic still mode of representation over film or other mediums. The still photograph, as Sontag (1977, 112) suggests, “keeps open to scrutiny instants which the normal flow of time immediately replaces.” She contends that while a still image “imprisons” reality, it also has the potential to “enlarge” realities that are remote to us (Sontag 1977, 163). It is this enlargement of the remote with which this project is concerned.

**PHOTOGRAPHY AS A THINKING ART OBJECT: CRITICAL VISUAL THEORY**

The last aspect of photography I identified as significant to this research project is its ability to function as a picture and as a thinking art object; that is, how it operates as scholarly practice-led arts research. In the context of palaeontological fieldwork, the photograph’s ability to critically
communicate ideas at a material and conceptual level is severely underexplored. According to archaeology theorist Ian Russell (2006, 7), the two main reasons fieldwork photography often escapes critical theory today is first, because of its continued embeddedness and familiarity in science discourse—that is, Sekula’s “fetishized object”—and second, because of its unvetted circulation in a myriad of different environments, including vernacular and commercial realms (Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 18). These two barriers subsequently became the very catalyst for my research, reflecting Sullivan’s (2010, 196, 208) suggestion that identifying a representational problem or idea and finding a new visual mode of engagement with it is the very foundation of critical visual art research. As such, I have endeavoured to bring critical visual theory and reflexive art practice into palaeontological fieldwork environments where they did not previously exist.

To move beyond pre-existing codes and conventions informing palaeontological fieldwork photography, I first needed to understand them. I did this by adopting two strategies of critical theory that include discursive inquiry and deconstructive inquiry, which examine “areas of emphasis and omission” (Sullivan 2010, 108). While discourse analysis identifies and “emphasises” what types of ideologies, conventions, and codes already exist in particular institutional frameworks, deconstructive analysis reconsiders what is underrepresented and how such an “omission” can be redressed or contested. Deconstructive inquiry features in the visual strategies adopted by myself and other photographic artists, and will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. Discursive inquiry, or discourse analysis, is partly influenced by Michel Foucault (Rose 2012, 191) and examines the structures and codes of thought, language, behaviour, and practice that underpin various discourses (Rose 2012, 190). For this research, the discourses of photography, palaeontology, and archaeology were examined. My discursive analysis involved textual and image analysis of photographic, archaeological, and palaeontological journals, scientific reports, art historical literature, exhibition curatorship, contemporary art literature, image banks, and digital archives. The following section outlines what I found.
IMAGE HISTORIES: EXPERIMENTATION, ROMANCE, SURREALISM, AND SCIENCE

Representations of historical-scientific fieldwork have photographically evolved over time. Romantic and metaphysical evocations of lost pasts gave way to straight photography, followed by a surrealist abstraction of the displaced and found object. By the 1950s, hard science had reduced the photographic act to a forensic pursuit. While the heritage industry in 1980s introduced a commercial picturesque aesthetic boasting “beautiful, predictable” and passive picturing of marketable scenes for mass audiences (Bate 2009, 94; Ryan 2013, 91), hard science continued to hold sway. Today there is a renewed interest in archaeological fieldwork in the broader contemporary art context but when it comes to the palaeontological image, art has no critical footing or contemporary framework from which to operate.

ANTiquarian EXPERIMENTation

This is interesting to note, because while still in its period of infancy, the archaeological and palaeontological fieldwork photograph was largely influenced by personal styles, experimental science, Romanticism, and the antiquarian sensibility. The separation between science and art was not distinct, which meant the mixing of scientific information with personal photographic expression and storytelling was not uncommon (Ryan 2013, 78). Antiquarianism ultimately advocated a subjective and personal approach to accumulating historical objects and recording personal “anecdotal” impressions of history and sites of history (Karol Kulik in Clack and Brittain 2007, 113). For Shanks (2012, 42), much of the nineteenth is underpinned by an antiquarian sensibility, which can be seen in the differing personal styles of photographers such as Auguste Salzmann, Gabriel Tranchard, and William Henry Jackson. Tranchard’s calotype of a French archaeological excavation party (fig. 14) and Salzmann’s salt print of the uncovering of a Judaic relief (fig. 15) both reflect the tendency in early photography not to show forensic detail, processes of excavation, or the labour involved in digging. While Salzmann demonstrates a gentle interest in the deep shadows and representation of a vacant worksite, Tranchard highlights the beginnings of an anthropological presence in fieldwork (Bohrer in Smiles and Moser 2005, 189). However, while Tranchard integrates people into his field images, they are nonetheless posed,
and the archaeology becomes more of a “backdrop of a stage” rather than the central subject matter (Bohrer in Smiles and Moser 2005, 189). Yet, while Tranchard’s tableau conveys a more informal posing next to the work site, Jackson’s tableau (fig. 16) is overtly narrativised.

Figure 14 Gabriel Tranchard Excavations of Victor Place at Khorsabad 1853
Figure 15 Auguste Salzmann Remains of Judaic Sculpture 1854

Figure 16, *La Veta Pass, Colorado*, combines Realism and Romanticism through a “tableaux of field science” that meticulously builds a narrative of fieldwork reminiscent of a social gathering (Ryan 2013, 83–84):

The white tablecloth, cups and saucers, and presence of women suggest a leisurely and civilized picnic, but the botanical collecting equipment, plant specimens and camp tent in the background indicate a more serious enterprise. Using props from nature and field science, Jackson marked out each individual’s authority, social status and relative place in the expedition.

This photograph was produced for the U.S. Geological and Geographical Survey expedition under the leadership of Ferdinand Vandeveer Hayden (Ryan 2013, 8). It is idealistic in its portrayal of survey fieldwork and the figures appear to be acting the part of characters in a story about fieldwork. In romantic and pictorial traditions, such *mise en scène* evokes a mood or a story rather than a reality (Ryan 2013, 84). It encapsulates Jackson’s projected narrative into the space of fieldwork, reframing authentic objects, people, and fieldwork locations into an idealised and theatrical visual account.
BIG SPACE AND BIG YEARNING: ROMANCE IN THE FIELD

Romanticism also advocates unfulfilled yearning “for what is missing” (Anita Brookner in Gregg 2011, 8). According to art historian Robert Rosenblum (1993, 74), landscape was considered the key conduit of romantic expression as, “landscape or, more cosmically put, nature, was the site of countless original romantic meditations on ultimate mysteries.” Of further interest to the palaeontological context, is his additional comment that the organic world, lost worlds, and deep time prehistory added to the romantic unattainability of the past (Rosenblum 1993, 76). It is not difficult, then, to understand why the romantic landscape and the portrayal of the lone wanderer searching for the past was taken up by certain field photographers (Gregg 2011, 4), as fieldwork is undoubtedly connected to a quest for truth. Such a sentiment can even be found in the digital archives of the American Museum of Natural History.
In figure 17, palaeontologist William John Sinclair is depicted by co-worker Walter Granger surface collecting fragments of the *Systemodon* specimen during a palaeontological expedition in Wyoming in the early twentieth century. The image withholds the impulse to show palaeontological detail and instead evokes a sense of place and the pastoral through the inclusion of the expedition horses and surrounding landscape. Yet, the quiet worker caught in this place is fossicking for prehistoric jaw fragments. While the specimen cannot be seen, we know there is work being done as Sinclair has adopted a head down, digging position. This lone figure of science subtly indicates occupation; however, it is not an aggressive or overtly heroic occupation, rather a quiet probing and contemplation.

**Figure 17** Walter Granger Dr. Sinclair collecting *Systemodon* jaws, Big Horn Basin, Wyoming 1911
Similarly, in figure 18, cinematographer James B. Shackelford—the one example of palaeontological photography identified in the literature by Ryan (2013)—depicts the actions of fieldworkers. The miniscule figures positioned in the landscape are also tending to the land, suggesting a type of palaeontological communion with nature. There is a romantic undercurrent of searching and yearning in these photographs, despite the seeming futility of finding anything in such a boundless landscape (Gregg 2011, 8). However, the lifting of Shackelford’s camera to include the landscape is not just about romantic distance and antiquarian wanderings through vast space, it is strategic as well. This is an image about discovery, land, and imperial possession (Mitchell 1998, 111, 166; Shanks 2012, 31; Silberman 1995, 249–250), and the romantic suggestion of noble endurance promotes the activities of the American Museum of Natural History (Ryan 2013, 105; Szegedy-Maszak 1989, 41–42). It also produces the sentiment of manifest destiny—a term suggesting a type of justified scientific imperialism or colonising eye over other lands (Ryan, 2013, 105).
Attached to this notion of manifest destiny and conquest is the promotion of big personalities. When Shackelford photographed the Central Asiatic Expeditions in Mongolia for the American Museum of Natural History in 1916–1929, he adopted a quasi-romantic reporting style that focused on a central protagonist, palaeontologist Roy Chapman Andrews, as he excavated fossilised dinosaur eggs, velociraptors, and proto ceratopsians in Mongolia (Ryan 2013, 105). The figure of Roy Chapman Andrews—equipped with binoculars, guns, bullet belts, boots, and a ranger’s hat in figures 19–22—connotes a cowboy persona and a narrative of heroic, dangerous adventure (Ryan 2013, 105).
EMERGING REPRESENTATIONS OF SCIENTIFIC PROCESS AND LABOUR

Romanticism did not disappear overnight. At the beginning of the twentieth century, field photography was slowly transitioning from earlier eighteenth and nineteenth century European (German) Romanticism—with its emphasis on experimental natural philosophy, idealism and particularism (the individual, personal, subjective, and anecdotal), and connecting to the deep past through metaphysical yearning—to French liberalism (Gregg 2011, 221, Shanks 2012, 10; Trigger 1995, 263). In the latter scenario, positivism, rationalism, and universalism allied with science to objectively present facts and place them into overarching “universal” theories about the world (Morgan 2016, 4; Shanks 1992, 19; Trigger 1995, 267). Anything that could not be empirically tested, proven, and placed into a quantifiable, unbiased, universal mindset was ultimately viewed negatively and labelled “unknown” (Barthes 1970, 151; Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 17).

Interestingly, at the time Shackelford was working with Chapman, the Romantic and positivist paradigms would have both been intersecting in the field. Figures 18–24 embody a mix of the departing Romantic tradition of antiquarianism, the modernist camera eye for purity of detail and form (straight/pure photography), and the beginnings of the forensic, objective gaze (Bate 2009, 97; Solomon-Godeau 2003, 156; Wells 2009, 15). Figure 23 attests to the forensic penchant for looking directly down on to evidence, which necessitates removal of the surrounding context.
and landscape. Inclusion of the specimen dusting brush and pick also signifies work and measurement, as the brush is used to compare the scale of the evidence against an object with known metric dimensions.

Figure 24 conveys a different visual narrative altogether, as this photographic landscape is less about the romance of metaphysical pursuit or the forensic eye of hard science, and more about a modernist, photographic “New Vision” (Bate 2009, 97). The extreme composition and tonal drama almost abstract the worker’s tents in the frame, giving the photograph a formal momentum. That is, they help to reveal the essence of place through photographic mastery over the medium and the space, through contrast, light, form, line, space, exposure, focus, and composition. This is ultimately a photograph about seeing photographically (Bate 2009, 97; Solomon-Godeau 2003, 156; Wells 2009, 15). Conversely, figures 25–26 begin to closely document labour, palaeontological process, and the anthropology of people digging. Figure 26 is particularly relevant to my research because it also hints at something just beyond labour, such as the beautiful formal symmetry highlighted between the human figure and the Protoceratops skull, and the almost surreal quality of the displaced head laying in an open field being brushed with tools of modern science.

Figure 25 James B. Shackelford Albert Thomson and Chinese men covering bones of “Baron Sog monster” with burlap and flour paste, Mongolia 1928

Figure 26 James B. Shackelford "Buckshot" taking out dinosaur skeleton and skull, Mongolia 1925
SURREALISM AND HISTORY: THE FOUND OBJECT, AND THE FOUND LANDSCAPE

Surrealism or the sur-real, refers to that which is “beyond the real,” and during the peak of Modernism the Surrealism movement was associated with concepts such as displacement, disembodiment, transformation, unfamiliar juxtaposition, chance, the found object, and/or the uncanny return of the dead (Boettger in Denson 1987, 6; Krauss in Denson 1987, 3–4). However, in archaeology and palaeontology, “beyond the real” does not imply some sort of grotesque gothic fantasy, rather it concerns the transferal of things “found” into a different register than the ones they originated (Denson 1987, 18; Krauss in Denson 1987, 4). Underpinning this retrieval of the found object is the notion of chance, in which possibility and unpredictability heighten the drama of digging. Even well-known twentieth century archaeologist Sir Mortimer Wheeler stated that, “chance and salvage govern our labours” (Clack and Brittain 2007, 116).

Figure 27 Giorgio Sommer Plaster Casts of Bodies, Pompeii 1875

Krauss (in Denson 1987, 4) regards the surrealist object as something that has been “loosened from its singular identity.” For example, ancient ash-embalmed bodies (fig. 27), partially excavated fossil vertebrae (fig. 28), and architectural ruin emerging from the ground (fig. 29) all signify things that have endured demise, displacement, and transformation. They are found objects, but they also signify lost historical time and the return of the dead: temporal
displacement. They possess an inherently surreal character because they expose the hidden and the unfamiliar; that is, things that no longer fit neatly into contemporary life (Evans in Renfrew et al. 2004, 114). As Shanks (1992, 104) observes of the surrealist quality of archaeology:

Archaeology has its immediate surrealist elements: juxtapositions of fibula and querntson, gold ring and ox scapular in sifting through the cultural rubbish tip; the strangeness of some of those things which mystify archaeologists.

Figure 28 Smithsonian Institute Discovery of fossils, Dinosaur National Monument 1923

Building on the ideas of earlier continental Surrealism, the 1930s ushered in a unique neoromantic movement in British art that saw archaeology, landscape, Romanticism, and Surrealism unite (Smiles and Moser 2005, 146; Evans in Renfrew et al. 2004, 103). Distinct from the original avant-garde Surrealist movement—with its emphasis on progress, newness, the grotesque, and/or pure abstraction—British natural Surrealism instead reworked the surrealist found object and combined it with British prehistory and landscape practice to create a new visual paradigm. Such a paradigm was based on the natural archaeological found landscape, or what contemporary archaeology theorist Christopher Evans has termed the archaeological “landscape of chance” (Evans in Renfrew et al. 2004, 103, 110, 115; Hauser 2007, 2–3, 6, 281; Bill Brown in Roelstraete 2009, 262). Natural Surrealism, a term coined by modernist artist Paul Nash, was
intrinsically tied to both historical and “natural occurrences” in the land, and things retrieved and collected from the land (Hauser 2007, 15). I have been influenced by Nash, natural Surrealism, and Neo-Romanticism through the way withholding/abstraction/delay, anecdotal storytelling, landscape, and an emphasis on searching rather than filling in gaps build counter narratives to traditional fieldwork recording. I am also drawn to the way both archaeology and palaeontology possess an inherently surreal quality. I will explore the photographs of Nash in the following section, examining his modest documentary approach to the found landscape.

Figure 29 Paul Nash Steps in a field near Swanage 1935

HARD SCIENCE AND THE LOSS OF ART PHOTOGRAPHY

By the mid-twentieth century, Romanticism, Surrealism, antiquarian curiosity, New Vision, and abstraction were all disappearing in fieldwork representations. The late 1950s ushered in the era of hard science, allied with processual archaeology (universal processes proved through scientific rigour) (Kulik in Clack and Brittain 2007, 118–119; Morgan 2016, 4; Trigger 1995, 263). As a result, the de-aesthetised, depersonalised, and forensic gaze of photography emerged to produce banal typologies and didactic visual facts (Russell 2006, 7; Shanks 1997, 92; Szegedy-Maszak 1989, 41). Photography served a function. It was deemed efficient, and “effortless and objectively true” (Datson and Galison in Bohrer 2011, 28). Not surprisingly, film historian Karol Kulik (in Clack and Brittain 2007, 119) adds that during this time, images of archaeology appearing in the media
rapidly decrease. Instead, such images find new homes in archives and scientific reports. Field photography as an art enterprise came to a grinding halt and photographs produced in the field either conformed with the stringent archaeometric codes of scientific realism or the commercial picturesque promotion of discovery and adventure set against pretty, marketable landscapes.

PHOTOGRAPHIC TYPOLOGIES TODAY

Today, photographs of historical-scientific fieldwork can take on various guises depending on who is positioned behind the camera, what their aim is, and where the image is going. Ryan (2013, 165) suggests that because fieldwork photographs have “their own particular geographies of circulation,” trying to locate and consolidate them in one epistemological framework is problematic. Anthropological archaeologist Timothy Clack and archaeologist Marcus Brittain (2007, 31) contend there are four broad types of contemporary archaeological communication: intraspecialist (academic publication/empirical data), interspecialist (between related specialisms and where this research could be located), pedagogical (educational), and popular (metaphor, sensationalism). Other suggested image classifications are archaeologist Jonathan Bateman’s formal/official or personal/social photographs, and Shanks’ three main photographic image types, the record shot (visual notetaking), the picturesque (neutrally documenting and praising the important or providing ambience), and the travelogue (cultural heritage and tourism) (Hamilakis et al. 2009, 288; Smiles and Moser 2005, 193; Shanks 1997, 76). Notably, these image classifications are formulated by archaeologists, not visual researchers.

After conducting my own discursive analysis, I arrived at a revised set of seven discursive formations or image typologies. These were identified through reoccurring regularities, what Foucault calls discursive formations, of compositional, conceptual, and institutional/social functions (Rose 2012, 191). They include technical, commercial, vernacular, editorial, press, science play, and documentary-art. While it is not within the scope of this research to unpack each typology in great depth, I provide a brief context for each here. Importantly, however, each of the typologies are in some way affected by the forensic and/or heroic gaze.
Figure 30 Michelle Pinsdorf and Steve Jabo A weathered and broken tooth of a tyrannosaurid dinosaur 2015

Figure 31 Antoine Bercovici Two dinosaur ribs, two very different fates. The lower one has been found just in time and is almost intact, while the upper one has been weathered into small pieces that even the most skilful puzzle master would not dare to tackle 2015

Figure 32 Antoine Bercovici Another outcrop shows different types of sediment. The lower part of the outcrop is made of light and coarse sandstone deposits that are clearly angled. These rocks were not tilted, but deposited by a large meandering river system. As the river turned, sediments were deposited at an angle on the edge of the meander, forming a point bar in a process called lateral accretion. Later, the river channel either moved or dried up, and the point bar was topped by a sequence of floodplain and paleosol sediments deposited in the horizontal layers, visible above the black line 2015

The technical photograph refers to the official site record and adopts a de-aestheticised quality known as “plain-style” (Bohrer 2011, 127). The photographer is required to capture and preserve the exact appearances of things, ranging from close-up details of specimens to the comprehensive documentation of sites for archives, scientific reporting, and later reconstruction (figs. 30–32) (Bohrer 2011, 111; Shanks 1997, 78). Even landscape is regarded for its informational value, providing topographic and/or stratigraphic detail for mapping and geological
context (fig. 32). Technical photography is also bound by codes and conventions such as structured archaeometric (measuring instruments/rulers) and compositional (direct, frontal) protocols (Bateman in Smiles and Moser 2005, 194). If people are present, it is likely because they have been staged to look productive or provide human scale for comparison with the specimen/artefact. Conversely, the vernacular photograph is a personal memento of one’s experience, and as Shanks (1992, 144) states, “the aspiration of a snapshot is not to be a great picture, to display its aesthetic qualities. It is to stand for something, to quote something which means something to me.” These types of photographs testify to “participation” in an event (Sontag 1977, 10). Also referred to as the personal snapshot or social record, the unregulated vernacular photograph has been defined by photography historian Geoffrey Batchen (2000, 262) and journalism researcher Lynn Berger (2011, 175) as repetitive, predictable and amateur. Most fieldwork archives and research blogs fall into this category, and include group shots, posing with specimens, holding finds, and *mise en scène* staging of work (figs. 33–36).
Commercial and editorial typologies include picturesque photographs for heritage tourism, advertising, museum didactics, magazine features, and stock photography image banks (Bate 2009, 94). Kulik (in Clack and Brittain 2007, 121–122) suggests that from the 1980s, imagery increasingly became connected to the government’s commercialisation of the historical sciences and the heritage tourism industry; thus, a rise in pictorially simplistic and pretty views of archaeological contexts and big moments of discovery designed to appeal to the masses. The picturesque beauty spot—and its sub-categories of the beautiful and the pastoral, also known as the “gentle picturesque”—is not meant to provoke, engage, or interpret space beyond the picturing of palatable, passive views (Giblett and Tolonen 2012, 15). Therefore, while much field photography is influenced by the picturesque aesthetic, its comfortable, “predictable” picturing of scenes renders it lacklustre in terms of critical, innovative, conceptual photographic art practice (Bate 2009, 94; Ryan 2013, 91). Photographic theorist Helen Ennis (2007, 51, 54) posits that the picturesque landscape is “unimaginative, unromantic, and common place.”

Figure 37 Richard Barnes Valley of the Whales 2010
Immaculately shot in the tradition of the picturesque figures 37–39 are seductively lit, with uncomplicated narratives, predictable views, pristine specimens, and heroic protagonists. The figures are wandering, pointing, and lying face down in the dirt, prying the mysteries of the past out of the ground with their bare hands as seen in Richard Barnes’ editorial spread for *National Geographic*. The picturesque aesthetic can also be seen in Diana Marsh’s promotional photograph for the Smithsonian exhibition *The Last American Dinosaurs, Discovering a Lost World* (figs. 40–41). It depicts a landscape crossing in which scientists carry dinosaur bones in a mobile stretcher, reminiscent of a battlefield or a heroic frontier crossing.

**Figures 38–39** Richard Barnes *Valley of the Whales* 2010  
**Figure 40** Smithsonian Exhibition: *The Last American Dinosaurs, Discovering a Lost World* 2017  
**Figure 41** Diana Marsh *Excavating Hell Creek* 2013

Press photography similarly selects impressive features and uncomplicated site views for audiences to digest easily; however, the news photograph lacks the formal sophistication of commercial and editorial photography. Further, these photographs are not considered visually
complex and all the subtle, in-between moments of fieldwork are ultimately subsumed by big picture stories and staged press shots that aim to speedily sum up a successful field discovery. Figure 42 highlights the emphasis on bigness and pristine specimens in an article for *The Guardian* newspaper capturing the heroic size and unveiling of the “colossal battleship-sized beast” *Dreadnoughtus schrani* (Sample 2014). The photographs also demonstrate the preference for tightly cropped frames to isolate key points of interest and emphasise the impressive size of the dinosaur bones.

![Figure 42](image)

*Figure 42* Ian Sample *Battleship beast: colossal dinosaur skeleton found in southern Patagonia* 2014

Lastly, science play is a term conceived for this research that refers to non-visual researchers capitalising on the expressive quality of photography to explore concepts relating to science, particularly under the banner of post-processual archaeology (also referred to as interpretive narrative archaeology) (Bruck 2005, 48; Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009, 69; Russell in Roelstraete 2009, 305). Post-processual archaeology is a product of postmodernism and advocates moving away from hard processual (empirical) science as the only form of
interpretation (Shanks 2012; Wallace 2004, 24). It destabilises traditional archaeological knowledge by combining fiction, storytelling, and the subjectivity of the researcher alongside traditional archaeological methods. Both Shanks (2012, 17–22) and archaeologist Ian Russell (2006, 32) call it the archaeological imagination and it has seen a burgeoning trend in archaeologist-photographers picking up cameras since the 1990s.

![Figure 43](image1.png) Fotis Ifantidis *Pendant que les champs brûlent/While the Fields Burn* 2010
![Figure 44](image2.png) Michael Shanks *Deniseburna nr Hefenfelth* 2008

However, while this image category yields more expressive visual forms and invites practitioners from other fields to participate in and expand upon the repertoire of possible narratives about the past (Renfrew and Bahn 2005, xiii), it nonetheless remains epistemologically “grounded in historical and archaeological data” (Jameson et al. 2003, 22–23). Art is used to promote a different way of valuing archaeological practice and making it relevant to wider audiences (Jameson et al. 2003, 57), but most discussion and ownership of such valuing is couched in archaeological practice, archaeological literature, and archaeological fields of circulation. The resultant photographs often reside in archaeological research blogs and rely on predictable camera tricks such as blurring or cropping compositions to mystify or dramatise fieldwork and sites of archaeological interest (figs. 43–44). The seventh and final image category for this research relates specifically to documentary-art through an examination of: recent contemporary art/contemporary archaeology trends; retrospective historiographic models of practice; visual ethnography; and phenomenological-based inquiry. This category also became the platform for my own three creative practice frameworks.
AESTHETICS, POSSIBILITY, AND THE ARTIST AS HISTORIAN
CONTEMPORARY ART, DISRUPTION, AND THE RETROSPECTIVE HISTORIOGRAPHIC MODE

Within the contemporary historiographic turn in art practice, Roelstraete (2009, 23) highlights the emergence of new frameworks under titles such as artist as archaeologist and artist as ethnographer. Roelstraete (2009, 21–22) purports that within the overarching retrospective historiographic mode, there are seven specific methodological branches of visual inquiry: the archive, excavating and unearthing (both real and faux digging), memorial, historical account, the document, the testimony, and reconstruction. Art historian Mark Godfrey (2007, 2) similarly identifies a contemporary impulse to place history, or the doing of history, at the centre of visual research, which he calls “artist as historian.”

Most recently, and introduced at the beginning of this research, art/archaeology advocate and archaeology theorist Doug Bailey (2017, 691, 695) has promoted the “disruptive” concept of disarticulate—repurpose—disrupt: a loose manifesto which encourages the use of art as a tool for recontextualising and challenging traditional archaeological narratives. While disarticulation involves the removal of an archaeological object/idea from its original context or history, repurposing focuses on how the object/idea will be reworked, reinterpreted, and given new meaning based on the preference of the individual artist: As such, “liberated from their histories and back stories, these objects become available ... for a contemporary maker-of-work to arrange and deploy as she wishes” (Bailey 2017, 696). Disruption follows as the repurposed narrative is injected into a new viewing context where it is likely to “imbalance,” “intervene,” and “affect change in the way people think.” Importantly, as identified in the Introduction of this research, he advocates moving beyond conventions of both archaeology and art to establish new field of practice: art/archaeology (Bailey 2017, 694–695, 700). There is also a political underpinning to this art/archaeology, which in many ways, seeks to overturn established codes and conventions of archaeological representation. Bailey (2017, 691) suggests that, “rather than producing institutionally safe narratives conventionally certified as truth, archaeologists should follow the lead of artists who use the past as a source of materials to be reconfigured in new ways to help people see in new ways.”
Roelstrate’s and Godfrey’s writings add weight to a disruptive creative practice as they both identify a deconstructive impulse in contemporary art where artists engage in a critical analysis of their own medium’s history alongside “history proper” (Godfrey 2007, 21). Therefore, questioning certain grand narratives that shape image types, both historically and now, is just as important in this context. According to Godfrey (2007, 23), examining the history of representation itself adds another layer of criticality to art production. For example, this project not only disarticulates—repurposes—disrupts prehistory, the fossil record, and palaeontological excavation, but also the representational history of field photography and how the photographer has historically responded to and operated within historical-scientific culture. Ultimately, examining the history of my own medium became a vital part of the process of uncovering the forensic and heroic paradigms of this photographic activity.

A consequence of exploring the underrepresented for this creative practice research project is that palaeontological fieldwork photography can be given equal footing to museum as muse art projects, moving beyond what Lucas (2000, 13) described earlier as the politics of practice between lesser known fieldwork narratives and museum metanarratives. Not only that, but within fieldwork practice itself is a series of representational hierarchies to be disrupted or deconstructed: namely the forensic and the heroic gaze. Harrison and Schofield (2009, 191) have also stated that narrative or epistemological questioning within archaeology in particular is a type of contemporary (and multidisciplinary) subaltern archaeology in which “archaeology has a major role to play in foregrounding those aspects of contemporary life at the margins which are constantly being overwritten by dominant narratives.” Subaltern archaeology could refer to particular marginalised groups of people or marginalised histories or it could refer to the marginalised aspects of fieldwork culture itself.

THE CONTEMPORARY FIELD OF VIEW

Despite the historiographic motivation to connect with history, retrospective historiographic art is paradoxically very much about the contemporary, and artists who embrace this impulse are seen to be wearing “the critical badge of true contemporaneity—a sign of firmly standing in one’s
time” (Roelstraete 2009, 21). Godfrey considers why this might be the case. Drawing on the work of philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin, he notes that the vanishing point of history is always located in the present, not the past, and that we can only ever experience the past as past present (Benjamin 1992, 247; Godfrey 2007, 6–7). This means we feel the past has just been lost to us right now and thus, we are responsible for doing something with it, reclaiming it, honouring it, and saving it (Godfrey 2007, 6). This responsibility also activates ideas of proximity, intimacy, and ownership, and the sense that the past is our past—the very premise fuelling the heritage industry. However, this desire for connection is not confined to art, nor is it a solely contemporary pursuit. In fact, Roelstraete (2009, 23) identifies a curious link between contemporary historiographic practice and the older (pre-modern) antiquarian sensibility, which he calls the “cult of antiquarian anecdote.” He argues the contemporary tendency to explore lesser known and more obscure aspects of history or historiographic process is linked to the exotic and romantic traditions of nineteenth century antiquarian collecting and displaying, in the tradition of fieldwalking journals and personal cabinets of curiosity (Roelstraete 2009, 23). With such an emphasis on unofficial/personal connections to history, anecdotal impressions, excavating and unearthing, and the artist as historian, photographic practice moves beyond official conventions of the forensic and heroic traditions. Together, these new frames of reference provide a discursive third space whereby the objectives of artmaking, storytelling, documentation, and historiography work together rather than in opposition.

Another interesting branch of contemporary historiographic art practice is its growing connection to the sub-field of contemporary archaeology. Heritage Studies academics Rodney Harrison and John Schofield (2009, 186) define contemporary archaeology as, “the archaeology of the recent and contemporary past—that is, the archaeology of places and events that relate to the period of recent or living memory.” They argue that this more recent branch of archaeological inquiry is more ethnographically charged than previous archaeological science because contemporary archaeology is concerned with “us” and how we produce, use, and value material cultures (Harrison and Schofield 2009, 196). As such, ethnoarchaeology is defined as (Harrison and Schofield 2009, 189), “the study of contemporary material culture and behaviour to interpret the archaeological record.” While ethnoarchaeology is often geared towards trying to understand
the past through how we in the present might similarly respond, contemporary archaeology adds another layer. It encourages interdisciplinary researchers to adopt an archaeological eye towards urban environments, abandoned spaces, rubbish, the everyday, and the personal record (Harrison and Schofield 2009, 190).

Before examining the work of select photographers who have been influential in informing my own research approach to the heroic and forensic paradigms, I will first provide a brief overview of a range of key contemporary artists connected more broadly to some of the archaeological frameworks mentioned here.

1999: MARK DION/FAUX DIGGING

Adopting the processes of archaeological fieldwork, interpretation, classification, and display, installation artist Mark Dion undertakes elaborate excavations (referred to as actions) that are both personal and archaeological in nature (figs. 45–50) (Blazwick 2001, 105, 107; Renfrew 1999, 14; Coles 1999, 25; Roelstraete 2009, 100). Through the processes of surveying and digging, Dion’s digs recover buried materials which are then cleaned, classified, and displayed in cabinets of curiosity within the gallery space (Renfrew 2003, 85, 88, 90). What separates his work from archaeology proper is that the classification and interpretation processes are driven by aesthetic and individual choices rather than scientific ones. For example, objects found might be grouped into taxonomies and displayed together based on colour, shape, or personal preference.

Figures 45–46 Mark Dion Tate Thames Dig 1999
What is more, Dion’s methods of excavation are more relaxed, informal, and unofficial in their approach, what Renfrew (2003, 88–89), calls “a mix of informal digging, gathering curiosities from the shore, beachcombing …” Furthermore, the types of artefacts that are targeted for excavation depend on the personal choice of the diggers. Dion briefs his diggers—members of the public who have volunteered to participate—that they are to collect anything that catches their attention: a method he calls the “scatter-gun” approach (Williams 1999, 79). While not exactly a parody of archaeology, Dion’s digs are humorous and intriguing, with the artist usurping the traditional role of the scientist and making no apology for his aesthetic priorities.

Figures 47–50 Mark Dion Tate Thames Dig 1999

In 1999, Dion beachcombed and excavated portions of the Thames riverbank in locations near the then old and new Tate Britain and Tate Modern galleries (Blazwick 105, 107; Coles 1999, 27; Renfrew 2003, 84). Entitled Tate Thames Dig, and commissioned by the Tate Gallery, Dion invited members of the public to help him dig, collect, clean, and sort material finds. The culminating
installation inside the Tate Modern consisted of a glass cupboard and drawers filled with collected artefacts from the two Thames dig sites alongside photographic portraits of all the volunteers and collaborators involved (Blazwick 2001, 108; Coles, 1999, 31; Renfrew 2003, 85). The inclusion of the volunteers in formal portraits framed and hung on the gallery wall further emphasised the human (ethnographic) aspect of digging. Coles (1999, 31), further suggests that in the vein of Dion’s prior work, the inclusion of all the assistants and volunteers as part of the artwork raised interesting questions about the “authorial role of the artist.” Dion opens up the artwork to share the meaning making with anyone who signs up to dig thus sharing in the authority of the work (Blazwick 2001, 108). This has interesting implications for archaeology itself, asking the question: who controls the way the past is interpreted and represented? In this regard, the Tate Thames Dig is a form of institutional critique—highlighting the often underrepresented anthropological and team-based nature of fieldwork and the cultural constructedness of meaning making in the curatorial process (Blazwick 2001, 108).

2009/2011: STEPHANIE VALENTIN/MEMORY, SCIENCE, AND SITE

Through a different type of faux digging to Dion, Australian photographer Stephanie Valentin explores how historical and geological science changes our relationship to landscape and what the visual interrogation of such spaces might look like as a photograph. Valentin is drawn to an aesthetics of digging, and to rituals of scientific fieldwork (figs. 51–54) (Crombie 2010, 22). In
using pictorial strategies such as time exposures and painting with light, the artificially illuminated objects in the landscape challenge the didactic representation of an excavation space as natural. Exploring the transformation of landscape as a site of geologic possibilities with deep holes, rock piles, and rainfall record books, Valentin creates a scientific space through a pictorial and personal register.

Valentin’s work is considered by curator Isobel Crombie as belonging to a contemporary Australian landscape genre associated with the desert-scape and to a trend in contemporary landscape photography that sees artists working like historians—wanting to reveal histories in the landscape (Crombie 2010, 12). Her history is part autobiographical, as she returns her father’s 1977 rain book (fig. 51) to the landscape it once recorded over 30 years ago (Crombie 2010, 22). Yet rather than evoking specific histories, her aesthetics are driven by a sustained ambiguity of the artefacts we are viewing. She is more interested therefore in metaphors associated with history and science: depth, digging, and unearthing. Her work resists a technical, didactic approach to exploring science and poses more questions as to what is happening in these landscapes than she provides answers. While her personal photographs are about historical memoir and metaphor, they none the less convey a sense that fieldwork has taken place at these locations and frames such personal digging as a physical act upon the landscape.

Figure 53 Stephanie Valentin Fieldwork 1 2011
Figure 54 Stephanie Valentin Gathering field 3 (Lake Mungo foreshore) 2009
A number of artists have seized the opportunity to deconstruct archival imagery in what art critic and historian Hal Foster (in Roelstraete 2009, 22) refers to as the “archival impulse.” Greek conceptual artist Vangelis Vlahos is one such example. He mines the archaeological archives and considers the role of foreign archaeologists in shaping Greek archaeological process and thus shaping Greek national identity (Guasch Ferrer and de Val 2014, 55, 57). Part politics, part archival, and part deconstructive visual art, *Foreign Archaeologists* (fig. 55) places photographs of archaeologists from standing to bending positions that have been acquired by the artist through archives from a number of foreign archaeology schools in Athens.

The processes of digging are apparent in this work but there is also a parodic undercurrent and criticism of international presence and foreign imperialism in the business of Greek antiquity. An issue that resounds in current foreign involvement in Greek internal affairs with international pressure scrutinising Greek economic affairs (Guasch Ferrer and de Val 2014, 57). Guasch Ferrer and de Val (2014, 57), suggest the work is more than just a political statement but also a “critical reflexivity in the banal and the factual aesthetic” of archaeological image production. A strip of

*Figure 55* Vangelis Vlahos *Foreign archaeologists from standing to bending position* (detail) 2012
images is presented on a display shelf, evoking a banal typology as seen in the works of the New Topographic photographers—whose aim was to critically strip landscapes of their aesthetic fancy and to focus on the document. The seriality of the fifty-three dig portraits highlights a sense of sameness and ubiquity in the archival record.

2013: JULIE GOUGH/PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTEFACTS

Indigenous Australian artist Julie Gough explores the politics of archaeology, dispossession, the absent object, and postcolonial repatriation (Frederick and Brockwell 2015, 8). Her video and installation work The Lost World (part 2) (figs. 56–59) photographically returns Aboriginal stone tool artefacts to the original sites they were removed from in Tasmania. The photographic installations in the landscape and the accompanying video documentation act as a gesture of symbolic, aesthetic, archaeological, and cultural repatriation for items displaced from the land by previous archaeological and museum practices. Today, the actual stone artefacts in the photographs remain housed in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA), at the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom (Frederick and Brockwell 2015, 8). They have travelled back a long way for The Lost World (part 2) (figs. 56–59).

Figures 56–57 Julie Gough The Lost World (part 2) 2013, artefact photographs by Christoph Balzar

Gough has given them a second life, through her own brand of archaeological fieldwork imbued with a contemporary ethnoarchaeological narrative attached (Frederick and Brockwell 2015, 8). An example of contemporary, subalteran archaeology, her work is certainly in line with the politically disruptive practice described by Bailey. The interesting thing to note about this creative
work is that the 35 displaced artefacts were already in a state of disarticulation when Gough encountered them. So, she is essentially adding another layer of disarticulation and repurposing in order to achieve a disruptive subversion of the colonial narrative. Gough (in Frederick and Brockwell 2015, 8) states that the work “highlights the coloniser’s conquest of place and suppression of history … [and] articulates the continued dispossession of Aboriginal people from their territories.” Interestingly, the photographic artefacts were not only returned to Australia in the form of photographs and film, but the video documenting this process was also projected back into the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge. Gough’s work demonstrates how far and wide our interaction and interpretation of the archaeological can be and how much art can play a role in shifting these narratives. Shown as part of the exhibition Ground Truthing: Artists and Archaeologists, her work is both personal but as University of Sydney archaeologist Denis Gojak (in Frederick and Brockwell 2015, 4) states, it also “brings a sense of archaeology.” He argues this sense of archaeology is increasingly tied to opening-up, democratising, “de-mystifying,” and “creating a more public archaeology” (Frederick and Brockwell 2015, 4).

Figure 58 Julie Gough The Lost World (part 2) 2013
2007–PRESENT: ROWAN CONROY/CONTEMPORARY ARCHAEOLOGY

Australian photographer Rowan Conroy produces photographs related to contemporary archaeology (urban ruin), re-photography of earlier archaeological photography projects, and impressions made on an archaeological dig in Cyprus. His ongoing series *The Poetics of Detritus* involves the photographic documentation of disused buildings and abandoned objects found in the contemporary material world. As Harrison and Schofield (2000, 189) have stated, contemporary archaeology is concerned with “us” and the recent past. Yet, contemporary archaeology is not just about material ruin it is also about new ways of looking archaeologically at things now. This series reflects the personal choice made by Conroy to record specific ruinous spaces selected by him in his own personal wanderings through the urban environment. What is interesting about his work is that “many of the places pictured in this series no longer exist”
(Conroy 2018a). Therefore, in these instances, the photographic trace is all that remains. The photograph-as-object is now the only archaeological site remaining.

In the more formalised environment of an archaeological excavation, conducted by the University of Sydney, both Conroy and site photographer Bob Miller have produced photographs for a group exhibition titled *Travellers From Australia: Artists in the Ancient Pafos Theatre* (Barker and Wood Conroy 2017; Magaritis 2016). The photographs were produced during the excavation of an ancient Hellenistic-Roman theatre in Cyprus. For Conroy, his photographs take both a personal, reflective and political tone. While he states, “I perceive the photography of sites as a memory aid, as a historical resource, as well as a reflective form of art,” there are also very strategic photographic choices that have been made that hint at an underlying epistemological challenge (Conroy 2018b). In *Paphos Theatre Full Moon* (fig. 62), Conroy chosen to photograph at night while the inactive dig site is eerily illuminated by the light of a full moon. In *Pottery Sorting Table, Apollo Hotel, Pafos theatre excavations April 2006* (fig. 63), the viewpoint and composition have been abstracted: ever so subtly hovering on an angle (and at a distance) that is neither direct nor forensically clear. The viewer’s eye is drawn to the patterns and lines and intriguing piles of fragmented terracotta, not artefact details. This anti-forensic approach is also evidence in figure 62 as Conroy (2018b) states, “an archaeological photo would never be taken under moonlight at an oblique angle, a viewpoint influenced by the archaeological sublime rather than a technical approach.”
BOB MILLER: IN THE PITS

Rowan Conroy has worked with site photographer Bob Miller on the Pafos theatre excavations for a number of years. Miller’s works however are driven by two main agendas. The first, is the effect of the digital photograph within the space of digging (fig. 64) (Miller in Barker and Wood Conroy 2017). Can the digital photograph provide more archaeological value than the analogue image? The second agenda concerns his official role as a site photographer both in Cyprus and in Pella, Jordan.
Figures 64–67 offer examples of excavation photography that present some interesting glimpses into the potential anthropology of archaeological digging. However, as an official site photographer, his photograph’s have the tendency to recycle the traditional image regimes that have been used on archaeology sites for decades: the social/vernacular snapshot, the artefact shot, and the site overview. Here, his work represents a broad survey of image typologies rather than a selective one.

**Figure 66** Bob Miller *Pel_2685 (left), Pel_2693, (right – opposite face). Janus Figurine from Trench XXX11 AA. Iron Age I (c. 1150–1050 BC) 2009*

**Figure 67** Bob Miller *Untitled nd. Travellers From Australia Exhibition*

**REFINING THE ART CONTEXT/RE-DEFINING PRACTICE**

Considering all the image histories and contemporary typologies discussed so far, along with my own ongoing experiences in the field, I began to create a visual research practice invested in photographic autonomy, artmaking, historiographic representation, and documentary immersion specifically related to the palaeontological context. Reflecting an emphasis on making rather than just taking photographs, the first visual framework of this research focuses on fieldwork’s potential aesthetic dimension, through what semioticians Peer Bundgaard and Frederik Stjernfelt (2015, 1) call an “aesthetic complex.” This includes the properties of art (processes and materiality of art objects), the experience of art (making and viewing), and the “cognitive skills and acts” informing it (art history, art criticism, and art concept) (Åhlberg 2014,
An emphasis on aesthetics also responds to both archaeologist Colin Renfrew’s (2003, 42–45) “aesthetics of excavation” (the pleasures of digging, dirt, and archaeological craft) and art curator Dieter Roelstraete’s (2009, 21–22) “excavating and unearthing” mode of contemporary historiographic art practice. Importantly, my proposed photographic aesthetics of digging is not just about the pictorial qualities of the digging site or how scientists should “turn their cameras towards their sites and their actions upon them,” as archaeologist John Cole (in Clack and Brittain 2007, 57) has suggested. Rather, how the digging site is transformed into a particular pictorial register via the photographer’s experience becomes paramount. This focus is informed by photographic process, photographic language, photographic methodology, and photographic philosophy.

**POSSIBILITY VERSUS POSITIVISM: KEEPING GAPS OPEN**

The trend in contemporary retrospective historiographic art to explore fragmentation, disappearance, loss, and the underrepresented/subaltern reflects the role critical theory and deconstructive inquiry plays in contemporary artmaking (Harrison and Schofield 2009, 186; Roelstraete 2009, 23, 25). It also reinforces Bailey’s (2017, 695) notion of an emerging disruptive practice in contemporary art/archaeology. This often sees artists working in the negative (unknown) of a more traditionally positivist framework and may take representations of historiographic practice far from its point of origin in science discourse. According to Barthes (1970, 151, 154), positivist logic (in historical discourse) refers to that which can be objectively and universally proven and articulated through positive assertion. The antithesis of positive assertion is the unknown or unquantifiable, and anything that falls outside positivist certainty is deemed negative (Barthes 1970, 151). This, of course, connects back to Shanks’ (2012, 64) suggestion that the historical sciences are based on the practice of “worldbuilding” and “filling-in-the-gaps,” which involves attempting to reconstruct the past as it was.

At this point it is also worth reiterating that while palaeontological fieldwork is supported by empiricism—that is, observable, testable, provable certainty or warranted assertibility—visual art, on the other hand, creates aesthetic responses out of that which is not necessarily known or
assertible in any way other than through visual inquiry and personal experience. It advocates possibility, not certainty (Boyle 2014, 17; Sullivan 2010, 35–36). While not simply a matter of pitting the objective against the subjective, nor art versus science, it cannot be ignored that empiricism and positivism have had a profound effect on how images related to archaeology and palaeontology are produced.

**DECONSTRUCTIVE INQUIRY AND PHOTOGRAPHIC WITHHOLDING**

Deconstruction opens the possibility for grand narratives or metanarratives associated with certain image histories and modes of image production to be critically reconsidered (Godfrey 2007, 23). Deconstruction is a postmodern term coined by French philosopher Jacques Derrida to suggest a “pulling apart” or dismantling of seemingly universal and fixed narratives (Wells 2009, 21). Derrida contends that through a post-structuralist framework, signs and meanings are not fixed or stable, but multilayered and open to new interpretations through exploring (or exposing) the other side of its metanarrative (Foster 1984, 193; Smiles and Moser 2005, 6). He calls this relationship between the metanarrative and the marginal or underrepresented narrative one of binary opposition (Foster 1984, 197).

For example, in Antarctica, photographer Anne Noble deconstructs the heroic expedition narrative and associated landscape myth of pure wilderness by focusing her lens on polar tourism and science occupation. Richard Barnes uncovers the institutional privileging of certain histories through an archaeology site accidently found underneath the Palace of the Legion in San Francisco. Sanna Kannisto challenges both the forensic and depersonalised gaze with her embodied intervention and focus on concealed evidence at biological research stations in the Americas. Jeff Wall deconstructs the single decisive moment in field photography and the truth value of photographs on a First Nations archaeology site by blending photographic frames together to make one, necessarily decisive moment. Simon Callery appropriates and repositions the act of archaeological measuring as an aesthetic choose your own adventure styled photographic installation.
Deconstructive inquiry has also redirected my own photographic practice away from the dominant metanarratives of heroic revelation and forensic description in palaeontological fieldwork culture. To deconstruct (or avoid) the forensic and heroic show-and-tell approach evident in much fieldwork photography, I subsequently decided to adopt a withdrawing and withholding strategy. However, to withdraw and withhold raises a pertinent question: how can you turn away from dominant aspects of fieldwork and still authentically represent palaeontological digging culture? My visual strategy subsequently became invested in redirection, the subtle beyond, and moving away from the expected or familiar details and events of dinosaur digging onto other, less forensically and heroically charged aspects of excavation. Withholding and redirection also came about as an organic response to my own time in the field where countless hours of looking for fossils with scientists without necessarily finding anything symbolised another type of natural withholding of evidence. Bohrer’s (2011, 7) statement, “we don’t see the past so much as look for it,” hints at the reality of much fieldwork. Looking often dominates over seeing and showing the past as it was. This is after all an environment where Wheeler, Evans, and Nash have all highlighted the chance nature of found archaeological digging scapes. Slow looking, possibility, chance encounter, and the exploration of unfolding fieldwork processes become more important than revealing scientific end products.

This idea subsequently underpins a photographic aesthetic of withholding. The emphasis is therefore on exploring details and experiences without necessarily revealing evidence or moments of big discovery. In this way, withholding does not mean obliteration of all detail; rather, it offers a redirection or reconsideration of what sort of detail the fieldwork photograph focuses on. In this case, photographic detail is non-evidence-bearing and redirected at unheroic details. The photographic referents are land, labour, the by-products of labour, and anything else in-between the official photographic record. When I look through the camera lens, I see the excavation site as a visual smorgasbord in which the changing qualities of light, the spacing, colours, placement of objects, the comings and goings of communities of workers, and the surrounding landscape create a visually rich, contemporary, anthropological space that slowly unfolds over time.
I use the term withholding in two ways. First, to suggest the way the landscape inherently hides/denies/withholds evidence—dinosaurs do not just appear ready for the taking, and for every successful moment of discovery there are countless hours of unsuccessful looking and surface scratching. Second, photographic withholding also suggests that a choice has been made to deny/redirect/obscure certain visual details. Here, I am influenced by art historian Susan Best’s use of the term “withholding” to describe a sense of visual and historical absence in Australian photographer Anne Ferran’s series *Lost to Worlds*.

**LOST TO WORLDS: ARCHAEOLOGY, WITHHOLDING, AND ANNE FERRAN**

Ferran challenges the indexical fidelity or show-and-tell approach to representing archaeological subject matter. On first encountering her series *Lost to Worlds* years ago, I was baffled by the lack of historical trace and visual detail in its representation of a former nineteenth century colonial factory for women convicts in Ross, Tasmania (Best 2012, 333; Crombie 2010, 8). Ferran presents viewers with a minimal archaeological landscape of grass, sky, camera light leaks, deep shadows, and peculiar mounds alluding to something buried underneath them (figs. 68–73). The vacancy of archaeological signifiers creates a more affective or suggestive narrative and invites new perspectives on how the archaeological record could be represented outside scientific discourse. Best (2012, 326, 334) refers to the lack of physical presence in Ferran’s photographs as “emptiness,” “belatedness,” “absence,” “pictorial modesty,” “withholding,” and an “aesthetics and ethics of refusal.”

Withholding information in this context is a critical pictorial choice that not only evokes metaphors associated with a sense of loss or unknowability about the past, but also highlights both the piecemeal nature of the surviving archaeological record, and the inability to witness what has already gone (Best 2012, 326; Crombie 2010, 9). Best (2012, 325–326, 328) argues that withholding thereby gives a higher priority to the affective qualities of the photograph, rather than showing ruin, history, and time-past:

[Ferran] remains committed to photography as a truthful representation of what can be historically excavated, even when that can be little more than a mood, a disturbance, a feeling of loss or destabilisation.
Working with ideas of history in the landscape, denial, loss, and the self-referential acknowledgement of the camera’s materiality through the ghostly camera light leaks across the frame (Best 2012, 335), Ferran transforms depiction of the archaeological site into an exploration of how the photographer personally encounters it. Moreover, she demonstrates that while withholding permits the camera to selectively unsee certain evidence and/or details, it does not equate to pictorial nihilism. In fact, *Lost to Worlds* is full of sensuous detail in light, contrast, tone, and the abstract forms pushing up at the earth’s surface. Such withdrawal and redirection challenges the indexical priority underpinning historical-scientific discourse, but not that of photography itself. From a contemporary art perspective, the representational strategy of withholding corresponds with Roelstraete’s emphasis on gaps and voids in the retrospective historiographic mode whereby intentionally avoiding show-and-tell illustration works against the positivist declarations and revelations of historical science.

*Figures 68–73* Anne Ferran *Untitled 1–6 (Lost to Worlds Series)* 2008
IN-SITU/IN-LANDSCAPE: AN ALTERNATIVE ORGANISING POINT OF VIEW

A particularly interesting form of withholding takes place through landscape practice. The landscape is strategic and mediated (Crombie 2010, 15). It offers a certain way of looking at, experiencing, and framing the land—what photography theorist David Bate (2009, 89) calls an “organising point of view.” Art historian Judy Annear (2011, 4) contends that what distinguishes a critical landscape photograph from a passive, descriptive one is whether the formal qualities (the structure) of the photograph contribute to its meaning or whether it simply records or illustrates a scene. Palaeontological fieldwork landscapes traditionally fall into the latter category, offered up as pleasant backdrops destined for National Geographic or, alternatively, as scientific sources of geological information in field reports.

Annear’s distinction ultimately led me to consider how I could use the photographic landscape strategically. Mitchell’s (1994, viii) contention that “the landscape imperative is a kind of mandate to withdraw, to draw out by drawing back from a site” provided a valuable starting point. Certainly, the withdrawing mandate plays a key role in my anti-forensic and anti-heroic aesthetic, allowing a simultaneous withholding-while-withdrawing to take place. Put another way, because the landscape view often requires looking up, moving back and “withdrawing” it challenges the orthodox closeness of the direct, frontal, and tightly cropped technical record.

Landscapes that challenge—also referred to as “contested landscapes”—often use parodic humour or critical derision to contest past landscape ideologies such as the beautiful, the picturesque, or the sublime (Wells 2011, 107). They can also challenge myths and practices associated with the land, such as the excavation and surveying processes involved in historical-scientific fieldwork. For this project, both the ambient/picturesque and the evidence-bearing landscape come under scrutiny. Landscape became important to this project for another reason. As fieldwork takes place in-situ, landscape implicates the centrality of the land in the fieldwork narrative and implies that fossils mean something to a specific place. Art curator Isobel Crombie (2010, 12) calls this “history in the landscape.” It’s further meaning comes from having been worked on by communities of people to retrieve it from that place. As such, landscape becomes
strategic in framing the digging act and the subsequent \textit{genius loci} of place to which the excavated objects belong.

Ultimately, this research proposes that from a photographic point of view, fieldwork landscapes can be active rather than passive in the following ways: by withholding evidence through the mandate to withdraw; by drawing on art historical strategies such as natural Surrealism (with its own connection to neo-romantic withholding and yearning); and through the photographically constructed combination landscape. The combination landscape refers to the way I alter/multiply/extend landscape in post-production by joining multiple photographic images into larger combination works. By creating my own, new landscape configurations, landscape moves from being a depictive documentation of site to a uniquely photographically constructed landscape: what Rosalind Krauss (1979, 50, 55), in relation to photographic grids, refers to as the antinatural spatialization of story. That is, bringing single photographs together to make new, spatially and temporally arranged narratives.

The way certain artists incorporate landscape into their photographic fieldwork practice is also important. For example, an anti-heroic deconstruction of wilderness, sublimity, and heroic polar exploration can be seen in Anne Noble’s photographs. The following section explores how Noble, alongside Simon Callery, Jeff Wall, Paul Nash, Richard Barnes, Sanna Kannisto, and Aaron Watson, have responded to the presence of scientific intervention in the land. The first group of fieldwork landscapes placed together for discussion in this research will be examined in relation to their anti-forensic aesthetic, while the second group demonstrate a more specific response to the undermining of heroic fieldwork representations. Before such an investigation, a brief recap of the forensic and heroic gaze is provided.
THE FORENSIC GAZE

Photographs of archaeological sites are very like "scene of the crime" photographs, and they demand a similar kind of attention from the viewers. In order to divulge the information they may possess, both kinds of image require a "forensic eye."

(Hauser 2007, 84)

The forensic gaze is geared towards reconstructing the scene of a crime. In the case of palaeontology, a prehistoric crime. Like detectives, archaeologists and palaeontologists look, walk, fossick, survey, dig, mark, map, record, and reconstruct evidence. In this process, photographs themselves become primary evidence and visual documents for the scientist-detective, "standing in for the thing photographed" (Shanks 1997, 74). Such an idea forms the central crux of the "fantasy of referentiality"; that is, the notion that the camera can reveal evidence more accurately than the naked eye or the human memory (Hauser 2007, 63).

Figure 74 Ruben D.F. Martínez et al. Disposition of the type specimen of Sarmientosaurus muscachioi gen. et sp. nov. (MDT-PV 2) upon discovery. (A) Articulated skull in ventral view, showing close association of ossified cervical tendon (arrow) with occipital region of cranium. (B, C) Two views of articulated skull and partial cervical series in ventral view, showing considerable craniocaudal extent and consistently narrow diameter of ossified cervical tendon (arrows). (D) Relationship of a cervical rib (white arrow) with the ossified cervical tendon (black arrow) 2016

Figure 75 Heinrich Wolf-Dieter et al. 1.2. Surface finds of sauropod limb bones in the Upper Saurian Bed: about 1 km south of Tcndaguru Hill. 3. Tooth of a crocodile (Bernissnrtin sp.) from the Middle Saurian Bed (bone bed Wj) at Tcndaguru Site dy in occlusal (above) and lingual view (below): MB.R.2970. 4. Exterior view of left valve of the oyster Actinosfreon hennigi from the coral-oyster hiostrome; about 7 km northeast of Tendaguru Hill; MB.M.1503. 5. Crossfield cells of G/"vptosfrubosylo1n1. sp. (fusain) from the lower part of the Upper Saurian Bed; MB.Pb.19991595 2001
This proposition diminishes the authority of the photographer through what Bohrer (2011, 7, 104) claims is a depersonalising and “cold-bloodedly objective” paradigm, in which “the photographer’s human presence, and artist’s tendency to subjectivity, [are] held in check by his (sic) mechanical apparatus.” Most photographic fieldwork images produced in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries subscribe to this lingering empirical ethos. Capitalising on the photograph’s indexical quality, the field photographer’s mode of operation is geared towards creating quick, unary, plain-style visual inventories of forensic evidence (figs. 74–75), with the potential for infographics to be layered on top (fig. 76). As such, landscape, the anthropology of digging, and the subtle pictorial minutiae are left out (Bohrer 2011, 9, 106).

![Figure 76](image)

**Figure 76** David M. Martill et al. *Cliff exposures at Lavernock Point, National Grid reference ST 187681.* (A) The base of the Jurassic showing a series of alternating limestones and mudstones. The new specimen is most likely from the higher of two limestones indicated in yellow that contain a thin shelly horizon, but it was recovered from the fallen blocks in front of the exposure. The upper of the two matches most closely the bed thickness of the slabs with the dinosaur bones. (B) The same beds in stratigraphic context with the highest occurrence of conodonts, the lithological base of the Jurassic and the first occurrence of the ammonite *Psiloceras planorbis* indicated 2016

While figure 76 uses infographics to fill in the gaps about the fossil-bearing stratigraphy found at this location, figure 77 demonstrates how landscape, specimen, and site are broken down into photographic taxonomies that reveal different informational aspects of the excavation space. Section E includes surrounding landscape to provide contextual information about the site and
its geology, Section F shows a close-up of specimen fragments with a north arrow recording orientation, and Sections A–C utilise the downward facing forensic record shot to document the specimens in-situ in a direct, frontal style. The inclusion of arrows and connecting lines between the images also adds a diagrammatic and archaeometric quality to the photographs and serves to highlight aspects of the images not immediately clear to the viewer or central to the argument being presented in the report (Michaël Jasmin in Russell and Cochrane 2014, 159). Further, Sections D and G show the specimens photographed offsite in a photographic studio environment, where flat, even lighting helps to preserve as much detail as possible.

Figure 77 Joseph E. Peterson et al. Fossils and characteristics of the Cleveland-Lloyd Dinosaur Quarry and the Johnsonville site. A) A photogrammetric reconstruction of the North Butler building of the Cleveland-Lloyd Dinosaur Quarry (CLDQ), illustrating the locations from which sediment samples were taken for IBF and geochemical analyses. Scale bar equals 1 m; (B) Arrow annotating the location where approximately 30 kg of sediment was collected for analyses. Sediment was collected following the excavation of a series of theropod thoracic ribs. Scale bar equals 10 cm; (C) Arrow annotating the location where approximately 30 kg of sediment was collected for analyses. Sediment was collected following the excavation of a theropod femur and tibia. Scale bar equals 10 cm; (D) Allosaurus manual ungual (left) and Allosaurus pedal phalange (right) as examples of bone preservation from the CLDQ. Scale bar equals 5 cm; (E) Photograph of the Johnsonville (JONS) site, with arrows annotating the locations from which sediment samples were taken for IBF and geochemical analyses. Scale bar equals 1 m; (F) Sauropod caudal vertebra collected from JONS. Scale bar equals 10 cm; (B) Shed theropod teeth (left), crocodilian vertebra (centre), and turtle shell (right) as examples of fossils commonly collected from JONS. Scale bar equals 5 cm 2017
Most photographs featured across figures 74–77 employ what, in 1954, archaeological photographer Maurice ‘Cookie’ Cookson called the optimal “high” viewpoint (Bohrer 2011, 51). Such a photographic viewpoint became the standard in fieldwork practice because it enables the photographer to see clearly into the trench to secure the most information. Figure 78 depicts the high viewpoint in action, as Agatha Christie (married to archaeologist Max Mallowan) is shown photographing an Assyrian statue in the manner of the forensic gaze. This image not only demonstrates the constructedness or formulaic nature of the field photograph, but also its central place in fieldwork as the securer and preserver of information. Importantly, Christie’s selective perspective—that is, her decision to look down—excludes all the surrounding anthropology of the dig site.

The strategy of frontal photography, achieved either by looking down onto the evidence or looking in line with it, ensures a direct connection that also minimises the chance of perspective distortion and loss of detail. The importance of objectivity and verisimilitude is central to technical photography. While rulers, calibration apparatuses, and correct viewpoints establish a scientific agenda, another way objectivity is maintained is by removing the authorial integrity of
the photograph. It is common in fieldwork photography for the identity of the photographer to be withheld as photographs are frequently attributed to an organisation, labelled stock photo, left anonymous (photographer unknown) or courtesy of participant. Sometimes anonymity is a consequence of not all excavations employing photographers, so any number of the dig participants are charged with the responsibility of photographing the site (Bateman in Smiles and Moser 2005, 194). As such, the photographer’s vision is not photographic but instead regarded as a natural extension of what the scientist sees (Bateman in Smiles and Moser 2005, 194). Gideon Harman’s photograph of anthropologist Natalie Munro (fig. 79) interestingly, presents a double forensic vision: first in the way Munro photographs cave artefacts from directly above, and second in the way this viewpoint is repeated in Harman’s photograph of Munro. Several of my photographs in chapter 2 similarly explore the representation of the photographic act as a central anthropological presence in fieldwork culture, having been drawn to the idea of looking at looking and photographing the photographic act itself.

Figure 79 Gideon Hartman Natalie Munro, associate professor of anthropology, photographing a grave thought to be that of a shaman at the archaeological site of Hilazon Tachtit Cave in northern Israel 2008
**SIMON CALLERY: THE ART OF MEASUREMENT**

One way photographic art has responded to the forensic gaze is through its appropriation, deconstruction, and abstraction. Here I use the examples of Simon Callery, Jeff Wall, and Paul Nash. In 1996, British sculptor, painter, and photographer Simon Callery, with the assistance of aerial landscape photographer Andrew Watson, photographed and installed the entire surface of a 20 x 40 metre archaeology trench into a chest of draws in Storey Gallery, Lancaster (figs. 80–81) (Callery in Renfrew et al. 2004, 65). The installation was the culmination of an artist residency at the Iron Age Segsbury Camp excavation site in Oxfordshire, England. Callery participated in the archaeological dig to generate new representations of the digging space (Renfrew et al. 2004, 69). Much of Callery’s archaeology work is ultimately a response to the sheer volume of data, measuring practices, detail, and collection that takes place daily in fieldwork practice and how that data can be measured and viewed in another way (Renfrew et al. 2004, 65). So, Callery’s (in Renfrew et al. 2004, 69) work at Segsbury was largely focused on artistic equivalents to the scientific process of measuring and the high viewpoint of aerial photography:

> I felt that a major factor in understanding my relationship with the excavated landscape ... was enhanced through an act of measuring. This type of measuring did not involve the use of tools or instruments. I was the recording equipment and my senses were the registers ... the scale of Trench 10 meant that its physical dimension was impossible to ignore. To walk in front of it is to be engaged in a constant act of measuring.

At first glance, Callery’s desire to measure could be mistaken as an example of the forensic gaze. After all, using science apparatuses such as pole mounts, levels, and measuring tapes, Callery and Watson recorded the entire surface detail of the trench at a “controlled” height of 2.25 metres every 1.5 square metres (figs. 82–83) (Callery in Renfrew et al. 2004, 65). Yet, while his meticulously measured recording used a systematic, scientific approach, Callery was consciously using the processes of technical photography as a deconstructive act before reconstructing the measurements in the exhibition installation. That is, what began as a photographic documentation of site, ended up as an interactive chest of draws containing a choose your own adventure style photographic exploration. The photographic data from the archaeology trench was therefore fragmented, destabilised, and recontextualised as a photographic art enterprise.
The way the photographs were displayed appropriated the aesthetic of the archaeological archive, with a chest of draws containing two detailed topographic photographs of every square metre of the digging trench per drawer. Printed at a scale of 2:1, each of the 378 black and white photographs measured 60 x 60 cm (Callery in Renfrew et al. 2004, 65–66). Therefore, the entire trench was carved up and contained within the enormous chest of draws. As such, the trench site becomes an aesthetic object and draws attention to the way we look at field photographs. The images are much larger than they would appear in a scientific report and when opening the draws to see the photos, the sensuous detail and sense of closeness to the pit surface is an experience that connects the viewer to the original site beyond the scope of technical reporting. Even the way audience members are invited to open the drawers and explore the re-presented site invites a privileged kind of access that only diggers are normally privy to. The viewer searches to make their own connections and meanings rather than being told this is a trench and this is what is in it. They are invited to fossick through the draws, piecing photo compartments together like diggers piecing together evidence from the original site. There is a symmetry here despite the juxtaposition of two vastly different regimes of looking and recording (Callery in Renfrew et al. 2004, 65–66).
Callery’s work also comments on duration, as his work takes time to make and time to view: “it's not about communicating in the quickest possible way, it is about communicating in a distinctive way” (Bailey in Russell and Cochrane 2014, 234). This emphasis on the slowness of artmaking correlates with Christine Finn’s (in Clack and Brittain 2007, 17) earlier call for an end to speedy journalism and superficial photographic recording of digging sites for the news media. Above all, Callery is interested in appropriating and deconstructing processes of representation used in archaeological fieldwork by producing art that explores archaeological measurement in another representational register:

We were not concerned with finds. Adopting a strategy borrowed from observing the process of excavation, we set out to communicate aspects of excavation entirely in a visual form (Callery in Renfrew et al. 2004, 65).

It also speaks to the experience of being on site: traversing 30 x 40 square metres of potential evidence and responding to the way people digging in that space make a meticulous record of every aspect of the ground’s surface (Bailey in Russell and Cochrane 2014, 234).

Figures 82–83 Simon Callery Segsbury Project 1996-97
JEFF WALL: THE DECISIVE MOMENT IN FIELDWORK?

Seen from on high through a forest clearing, an American archaeologist kneels among two trenches, in the never-ending recording process of scientific archaeology. Far from a pristine site image, many accoutrements of excavation are present: orange site tags and buckets for removing soil, a trowel, brushes and different-coloured dustpans for more detailed work, plastic bags for artefacts and soil samples, the threads that define the trenches in a grid, and wooden 'mats' for the researchers to kneel without disrupting the soil layers. Looking into the trench, one can make out strata of differently textured soils, and even protrusions of the remains of a former structure. (Bohrer 2011, 161)

The American archaeologist referred to above is Anthony Graesch—the miniscule worker kneeling in Jeff Wall’s photograph Fieldwork (fig. 84). This image depicts the archaeological excavation of a Sto:Lo First Nations site run by the University of California’s Archaeology Department in 2003 (Bohrer 2011, 161; Egan 2013, 238; Fried 2008, 82). The impressive scale of the photograph, which measures almost three metres in length and is presented as a lightbox transparency, means the exquisite detail of the dig site has been preserved for visual contemplation. However, as Bohrer (2011, 161) suggests above, the items chosen for focus and contemplation are not the usual suspects of technical photography: the colours, shapes, and textures of excavation, the tools and digging debris, and the surrounding landscape fill the frame. In addition to this is an emphasis on the everyday, the mundane, and the absurdity of fieldwork’s less striking and decidedly unheroic side—looking into a pit, notetaking, and watching the notetaking (Fried 2008, 84). Importantly, while much of Wall’s work is known for its meticulous construction of everydayness—what he calls the everyday aesthetic, near-documentary, or cinematographic practice—Fieldwork is an authentic excavation where Wall joined a team of archaeologists to produce impressions of the digging space (Barrett-Lennard 2013, 30; Campany 2008, 136; Egan 2013, 216, 245; Fried 2008, 63). Having said that, there is more to this image than meets the eye, as the singular, decisive moment is actually a series of decisive (or undecisive) moments.

Fieldwork is significant to my own research project for two reasons: first, for the way it treats photographic time, and second, for its portrayal of the subtleties of labour within digging culture.
In terms of photographic time, Wall ultimately seeks to undermine assumptions about the truth value of a photograph’s instant, decisive moment (Mulvey 2000, 148). While seductively presented as one image, *Fieldwork* is actually a composite of multiple photographs produced by Wall during his three weeks in the field (Bohrer 2011, 161; Fried 2008, 82). Wall had the image digitally composited from many near identical frames to achieve maximum sharpness across the image, thereby playing the game of technical photography with its preference for crisp sharpness, detail, and clarity (Fried 2008, 83).

Figure 84 Jeff Wall *Fieldwork*. Excavation of the floor of a dwelling in a former Sto:lo nation village, Greenwood Island, Hope, B.C., August 2003, Anthony Graesch, Dept. of Anthropology, University of California at Los Angeles, working with Riley Lewis of the Sto:lo band  2003

*Fieldwork* produces the illusion of the decisive moment (Mulvey 2000, 148), although the decisive moment, or camera as witness, is replaced by a tableau—the constructed, decisive moment in
the tradition of art historical paintings (Bate 2009, 64; Fried 2008, 17; Van Gelder 2007, 79–80). In doing this, the layered photograph undermines both the scientific gaze, and the singular heroic decisive moment, and replaces them with a subtly reconstructed post-production *mise en scène*. Wall (in Egan 2013, 237) describes his approach as being both committed to and critical of documenting the real by putting “the factual claim in suspension while still creating an involvement with factuality for the viewer.”

*Fieldwork* is also pivotal for its exploration of digging processes: yet it holds back on showing too much and instead positions the workers going about their mundane activities in a distanced manner. It speaks of the desire to show something of the digging space but at the same time to withhold and not reveal too much. There is no eureka moment of discovery being flaunted here, and that is the strength of the photograph. Further, Egan (2013, 240) claims that by including the date of excavation in the title of *Fieldwork*, it is also highlighting the contemporaneity and centrality of the digging act. Art theorist Michael Fried (2008, 84) argues that Wall is not interested in history proper, but the patient labour involved in digging it today and how it is represented through the temporality of the photograph. As such, *Fieldwork* is a photograph about looking, picture making, the layeredness of time, and the depiction of labour (Barrett-Lennard 2013, 30). It is a contemplation of digging culture but also self-consciously an image:

The subject of this work is the measured, calm, routine and profound work of archaeological research. It plays out in a dialogue of observation: Graesch examining the trench, Riley examining both, and, of course, the photographer/viewer looking down upon this scene from a constructed scaffolding (Bohrer 2011, 161).

Moreover, the emphasis on photographic time, layering, labour, and withholding is particularly revelent to my work because these strategies reject a forenisc close-up of evdience and involve withdrawing to include the landscape. They also photographically reconstruct the site through layered images rather than depicting the site as a single illustration.

**PAUL NASH: BRITISH ARCHAEOLOGY, NATURAL SURREALISM, AND A NEST OF MONSTROUS EGGS**

For surrealist painter and photographer Paul Nash, Neolithic standing stones, ancient chalk cuts, and archaeological excavation sites were all important visual motifs for tapping into a landscape’s
deep history (fig. 85) (Evans et al. 2004, 108). Nash was a key figure not only in producing art, but also in articulating an archaeological imagination associated with the British landscape during the 1930s–1950s. He coined the term natural Surrealism, as he believed connection to prehistoric formations and archaeological excavation sites was a matter of connecting to landscape (Hauser 2007, 15). Therefore, instead of the found objects of continental Surrealism, Nash’s Surrealism explored found landscapes. When he did work with found objects, they were often objects retrieved and photographed during walks in the landscape. The term Neo-Romantic was first used to describe Nash’s photography because natural Surrealism incorporated both surrealist ideas and the tradition of Romanticism associated with the British landscape (David Mellor in Hauser 2007, 5).

Figure 85 Clare Neilson Paul Nash with a megalith in the Forest of Dean 1939

In 1935, Nash produced photographs and paintings of Sir Mortimer Wheeler’s archaeological excavation site at the Iron Age hill fort of Maiden Castle (Hauser 2007, 17). His approach
prefigures Roelstraete’s retrospective historiographic mode and Godfrey’s contemporary artist as historian framework in which one is drawn to the obscure and unofficial:

I was not particularly interested in the archaeological significance of the discovery. But the sense its dramatic elements had, indeed, an awful beauty. The sun beat down on the glinting white bones which were disposed in elegant clusters and sprays of blanched springs and branches. Or some seemed to be the nests of giant birds; the gleaming skulls like clutches of monstrous eggs (Nash in Evans in Renfrew et al. 2004, 103).

Here, Nash is referring to the freshly excavated human remains photographed at Maiden Castle and, in the surrealist spirit, he transposes new associations onto them by referring to the find as “clutches of monstrous eggs on the nests of giant birds” (fig. 86) (Evans in Renfrew et al. 2004, 103; Hauser 2007, 17).

![Figure 86 Paul Nash Nest of Skeletons, Maiden Castle 1935](image)

In *Nest of Skeletons*, the photographic viewpoint is low but slightly elevated and tilted upward against the direct, downward facing, forensic gaze. The field of view has also been subtly opened to include surrounding holes in the ground produced through excavation test pits. Such scars in
the land would normally be considered extraneous clutter by official standards, but in Nash’s photographs they add to the peculiarity of the space and signify labour, time, and archaeological process—a sense that work had to be done to find these skeletons and they did not just appear this way. Instead, they were the product of both chance and hard work. Sometimes Nash’s photographs tease the viewer with a glimpse of the corner of the excavation pit where a barely discernible peg and flag are the only visible subject matter (fig. 88). His photographic framing is often harsh and abrupt, cutting off reality and abstracting details of the digging space and historical landscape (fig. 87). Whether at Maiden Castle, further afield at the prehistoric White Horse chalk cut at Uffington, or the standing stones of Avebury, Nash’s photographs operate beyond the information-bearing record. Instead, his photographs displace, abstract, and disorientate, by drawing the viewer’s attention to the subtle minutiae of history and subtle beyond of historiographic process.

![Image of archaeological dig and rock recessed in grass]

**Figure 87** Paul Nash *Archaeological dig, Maiden Castle, Dorset* 1935

**Figure 88** Paul Nash *Rock recessed in grass* nd.

Evans (in Renfrew et al. 2004, 110) observes Nash’s trademark style of shooting at low angles. This meant the horizon line could be either lifted or removed, enabling him to focus on “the rhythmic solidarity of the hillfort’s massive ramparts or the abstract angular distortion of the chalk cut horse” (figs. 87, 89). Such language suggests his photographic style was an affective and lyrical engagement with the spirit of place and an appreciation of the sites’ aesthetics qualities and peculiar forms. It was not a “deep archaeological context” he sought or a detailed rendering of site for illustrative or didactic purposes (Evans in Renfrew et al. 2004, 114). His whimsical, anecdotal, subtle beyond photographic impressions of history in the land are not concerned with
neatly summing up evidence and context. Smiles (in Smiles and Moser 2005, 151), notes that Nash was ultimately “opposed to the sterility ... associated with empirical method.”

Further, while appearing out of place, the inclusion of a car and grazing cow in figures 90–91 hints at the antiquarian tradition of collecting anecdotal impressions connected to historical sites. As such, geography, people, community, nature, and anything else the photographer encountered on their travels has relevance to creating a sense of genius loci or history of place. Above all, it is Nash’s emphasis on collecting anecdotal impressions, alongside his interest in history, and his abstraction of detail (fig. 92), that has been instrumental in informing my own strategy of reframing the excavation site.

Figure 89 Paul Nash The white horse at Uffington, Berkshire c.1937
Figure 90 Paul Nash Avebury, Wiltshire 1942
Figure 91 Paul Nash Cow, Swanage nd.
Figure 92 Paul Nash Avebury stone (double exposure) 1933
THE HEROIC GAZE

The 1993 Hollywood film *Jurassic Park* begins with Dr Alan Grant leading a group of palaeontologists in the excavation of an impressive looking dinosaur (figs. 93–95). The usual heroic tropes are present: a perfectly preserved specimen staged and framed by the downward facing forensic gaze; the cowboy-scientist as lead protagonist; and the scientist as metaphysical detective or retrospective prophet drawing meaning out of evidence no one else can see (Hauser 2007, 41, 44; Shanks 2012, 65). While popular images of palaeontological fieldwork are not as abundant as other image types, this inherent heroic Hollywood message circulates in the commercial, editorial, and press realms (Russell 2006, 171).

*Figures 93–95 Steven Spielberg *Jurassic Park* 1993*
The heroic myth operates on three levels: picturing people as heroic, landscapes as heroic, and specimens/artefacts as heroic. Such heroism is often strategically used to promote and legitimise archaeology and palaeontology practice, or to simplify and sensationalise the excavation process to generate popular appeal with wider audiences. Chief among the heroic archetypes is the “cowboy of science” (Shanks 2012, 22, 25; 1992, 56). The cowboy has deep historical roots in American culture and, by extension, American archaeology and palaeontology. Mitchell (1998, 63, 166) and Ryan (2013, 84) both identify concepts of the frontiersman and manifest destiny apparent in early twentieth century field photography. The palaeontological frontiersman was a dinosaur-wrangling hero of the wild West claiming their Anglo-Saxon rite to conquer and collect. Shackelford’s photographs for the American Museum of Natural History previously demonstrated the connection between Romanticism, heroism, nationalism, and imperialism (Mitchell 1998, 111, 166; Shanks 2012, 31; Silberman 1995, 249–250). This connection between the cowboy and palaeontologist as adventurer and conqueror persists today and is similarly seen in Robert Walters’ illustration for Sharon Faber’s book The Last Thunder Horse West of The Mississippi (fig. 96).

Figure 96 Robert Walters Illustration for The Last Thunder Horse West of The Mississipi by Sharon Farber 1988
Figure 97 Mike Hettwer Dinosaur Hunting with Paul Sereno nd.
It is further reinforced by editorial photographer Mike Hettwer’s depictions of Professor Paul Sereno in the field (figs. 97, 99). Not equipped with horses and guns, Sereno instead wields a tape measure on his belt and directs a dinosaur emblazoned land cruiser through challenging terrain to the site of digging. The struggle or drama of this epic journey is reinforced through Hettwer’s dramatic low camera angle (fig. 97).

![Figure 98](image1.jpg) **Figure 98** Steven Spielberg *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* 1989  
![Figure 99](image2.jpg) **Figure 99** Mike Hettwer *Spinosaur - Bigger than T. Rex* 2014

So, what does a cowboy of science look like? Kulik (in Clack and Brittain 2007, 15, 123) suggests Indiana Jones (fig 98). The “Indiana Jones effect” creates a charismatic protagonist—a seeker, sage, or prophet—who battles the odds and elements to unravel the mysteries of time. In other words: revelation, praise, and promotion through a type of sensational filling in of the gaps. With extraordinary powers of intuition and physical strength, the retrospective prophet can crack through solid stratigraphy and read the land for clues of “what happened here” (fig. 99). Hauser (2007, 42–43) notes that this quality of being retrospectively prophetic or having extraordinary powers of deduction is based on the writings of Thomas Henry Huxley and is associated with the popular identity of the detective; hence, the heroic term metaphysical detective. Consequently, the cowboy-as-detective became connected to ideas of exploration, discovery, adventure, revelation, conquest, danger, and endurance (Kulik in in Clack and Brittain 2007, 15, 123).
According to Clack and Brittain (2007, 15), regardless of gender, the hero as cowboy is usually presented as a hyper-masculine figure, a hunter of relics or dinosaurs. For archaeologist and historian Neil Asher Silberman (1995, 252), the fable of the archaeologist as hero is problematic because, “the heroic narrative pattern deeply colors the general public’s understanding of all archaeological work.” Such a problem is likewise apparent in editorial, commercial, and press journalism, where photographic practice outside technical recording is weighed down by heroic archetypes. The cowboy-as-sage or retrospective prophet emphasises forensic pursuit combined with intuitively heroic detective personas. Where they point, we look. Where they look, we look closer. Without their inner forensic compass, the past would never be rescued from the dirt (figs. 100–103).

Sereno and his team are frequently framed as quintessential heroes undertaking dangerous yet important, and ultimately successful research. Dramatic low camera angles create an imposing
larger-than-life Sereno and the danger of digging in the Sahara is signalled by the presence of military personnel. These motifs and strategies work to support the heroic gaze and enhance the drama of digging. These heroic representations of speedy digging and rock star scientists form the mainstay of photography destined for the pages of National Geographic. They praise individuals, reveal evidence, and promote the digging endeavour with accompanying picturesque landscapes. While the panoramic view guides the viewer along the journey into the field in figure 104, it functions as a backdrop for Hettwer’s field portrait of palaeoanthropologist Maeve Leakey (fig. 105). These landscapes boast comfortable, grand views and function as pretty backdrops to evoke a sense of ambience, vastness, and remoteness. Further, Leakey’s staged gazing out and over the big landscape suggests a type of ownership, connectedness, or conquering of such space.

*Figure 104* Mike Hettwer *Dinosaur Hunting with Paul Sereno* nd.
*Figure 105* Mike Hettwer *Archaeology with the Leakeys* nd.

**HOLDING THE KEY**

Press photography also frequently reports on fieldwork with the heroic in mind, focusing on the biggest, best, most complete, or most revelatory excavation. Nicole Bond’s (2017) article and accompanying photographs for ABC News taken in Winton, where this project was also produced, emphasises heroic extremes rather than subtleties. Bond’s (2017) article, *Dinosaur Discovery in Winton Could Hold Key to Sauropods Diet*, presents fieldwork as a place of discovery, revelation, big bones, and impressive dinosaurs (figs. 106–109). However, no one is doing work in her photographs and the viewpoint is low to exaggerate the size of the bones and elevate the overseers to a position of more prominence.
The photographs show success, not the experience and process of actual dinosaur digging. Having participated on these digs for three years, I cannot help feeling let down by these images. They convey nothing of the authentic experience of digging, the relationships between the people, or the connection of this site to the Winton environment. They aim to fill in the gaps by showing evidence of big finds, but they miss the mark in terms of genuinely engaging with the anthropology and unfolding processes of fieldwork. They shortcut the process and project palaeontology as something that spontaneously materialises in front of the camera.
**MISE EN SCÈNE**

Bond’s photographs also highlight the problem of “dressing the site.” The *mise en scène* staging of fieldwork, known as “dressing the site,” refers to the strategic clearing of clutter and unnecessary detail from the digging site and/or the simultaneous positioning of people in static stances that signify work being done (Clack and Brittain 2007, 58; Levin 1986, 34–35; Parno 2010, 123; Shanks 1997, 83). Its purpose is to sanitise, simplify, and/or sensationalise fieldwork for official records and promote the importance of what has been found (Morgan 2016, 3). The resultant image is polished, pristine, and offers up successful end-products for visual consumption (figs. 110–111). However, real digging stops for photography in this scenario and is replaced with pre-visualised notions of what the site should look like—its scientifically or commercially ideal self:

Even at its most seemingly straightforward, then, archaeological photography records how a site virtually never looks, but rather how its directors want it to be for the record. It is the product of a field decision that effaces as much as possible the fieldwork, the human presence itself (Bohrer 2011, 84).

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**Figure 110** Kristian Remes et al. *Spinophorosaurus nigerensis*, holotype skeleton GCP-CV-4229 in-situ during excavation in the region of Aderbissinat, Thirozerine Dept., Agadez Region, Republic of Niger 2009

**Figure 111** Mike Hettwer Dinosaur hunter Paul Sereno excavates the huge leg of the sixty-foot long, plant-eating dinosaur Jobaria. Over 10,000 dinosaur bones were found in this area, Marandet, Niger nd.
Likewise, Bateman (in Smiles and Moser 2005, 194) adds that, “the nature of the photography dictates that work stops whilst the photographs are taken.” In figures 110–111 the pristine specimen is similarly positioned as the centrepiece of the dressed site. There is no evidence of real labour beyond the obligatory holding of a work tool, nor is there any trace of other tools around the digging area. The surrounding soil has also been flattened, smoothed out, and cleared to reveal the specimen outline and surface detail. In short, the dressed site reinforces the idea that fieldwork is a space where treasure abounds, simply requiring the right discerning eye or retrospective prophet to pluck it from obscurity (Hauser 2007, 43).

ANNE NOBLE: ANTARCTIC FIELDWORK AND PICTURING THE POST-HEROIC LANDSCAPE

Fieldwork and landscape both take on a strong “contested, parodic and anti-heroic” quality in Anne Noble’s polar photographs (Crombie 2010, 5). For Noble, the chief concern is deconstructing myths associated with Antarctic exploration; that is, heroic frontiersmen battling yet enduring sublime, polar wilderness (Crane et al. 2011, 10; Wedde 2011, 101). Noble (2009, 72), states that, “at the heart of my project is a desire to disturb the way Antarctica is imagined and represented.” In work produced as part of a series of visits to Antarctica with the U.S. National Science Foundation and the New Zealand Science Program, Noble focuses her camera on the way “the activities and culture of science” today reshape the Antarctic landscape (Crane et al. 2001, 10; Noble in Mossman 2005, 39).

In parodic fashion, Spoolhenge (fig. 112) pokes at the way science has re-occupied the space of a once supposed pristine Antarctica with massive wooden cable spools at one of the science bases stacked and discarded. She photographs them like still life sculptures and gives them undue prominence (after all, they are rubbish). Yet this is part of its parodic power and reflection on scientific work having occupied a place in the land. In contemporary culture, parody is broadly associated with the postmodern critique of earlier modernist metanarratives (John Docker in Denith 2000, 157; Roelstraete 2009, 17). Joan Schwartz and James Ryan (2003, 2) support this perspective, stating that, “parody is a means to deconstruct metanarratives associated with place.” In this way, Noble uses the very tropes associated with the heroic landscape and heroic
exploration, both modernist constructs, to debunk them. Even the title *Spoolhenge* imbues the rubbish heap with a parodic sense of aura and stature by referencing the archaeologically famous Neolithic/Bronze Age standing stone formation of Stonehenge.

![Image of Spoolhenge](image1.jpg)

**Figure 112** Anne Noble *Spoolhenge South Pole* 2008/9

However, while anti-heroic or post-heroic, Noble’s work also highlights the central place of scientific fieldwork in today’s Antarctica and its role in re-establishing new tropes associated with photographic landscape practice. The heroic, sublime landscapes of expeditionary photographer Frank Hurley, who accompanied polar explorer Ernest Shackleton on the Antarctic *Endurance* during 1914–1917, paints a picture of Antarctica as sublime wilderness (Wedde 2011, 102). Aligning with notions of adventure and danger, voyage and conquest, and void and terror, these images portrayed the heroic feats of explorers attempting to tame inhospitable and largely inaccessible lands on Earth’s last frontier (fig. 113) (Ryan 2013, 98–99, 101; Wedde 2011, 96; Martinsson et al. 2014, 133). Today, Noble, presents a very different polar frontier, occupied by strange forms of human habitation and scientific ritual. Her series *Ice Blink* moves between the museum site, tourist landscape, and scientific fieldwork. Her critique is visible in the way tourists are rendered passive consumers of polar experience in Antarctic centres (fig. 114), and in the
post-heroic depictions of unsightly scientific occupation and futile looking fieldwork (fig. 115) (Wedde 2011, 97).

Figure 113 Frank Hurley Out in the Blizzard, Winter Quarters, Main Base, Cape Denison, Adelie Land 1912

Literary and media theorist James Meffan (2011, 31) argues that the critical role of photographic discourse in challenging certain myths about Antarctica has become an important signpost of the postmodern anti-heroic agenda. Depictions of Antarctica have long capitalised on ideas of isolation, immensity, enigma, awe, wilderness, adventure, danger, endurance, elitism, and the heroic. Such notions interestingly draw strong parallels with the privileged and off-limits nature of palaeontological and archaeological fieldwork. While the original heroic period associated with Antarctic exploration was concerned with reaching the South Pole alive, the post-heroic era is about a different type of conquest: scientific research (figs. 115–117) (Glasberg 2011, 227-8, 237).
Figure 114 Anne Noble The Barne Glacier, International Antarctic Centre, Christchurch, New Zealand, 2004

Figure 115 Anne Noble Wind Measurement 2002
In *Wind Measurement* (fig. 115) and *Field work* (fig. 116), the landscape is being prodded and work is being done; however, the viewer is not entirely sure what that work is. Both Noble’s scientific and photographic (fig. 117–118) fieldwork representations suggest any work done here is in fact either a farcical dance or a futile, solemn affair. What could these researchers possibly be doing in the vast expanse of nothingness? Yet, despite their scientific absurdity, these images of fieldwork are pictorially subtle and engrossing, reiterating Best’s discussion of pictorial modesty and withholding.

*Figure 116* Anne Noble *Field work* 2002
*Figure 117* Anne Noble *Deep field #3, Antarctica* 2008
*Figure 118* Anne Noble *Photographing Antarctica* 2002
The anti-heroic depiction of Antarctica as somewhat defiled by various forms of occupation can also be seen in Noble’s series of six photographs titled *Piss Poles* (figs. 119–124). These images focus on the urination sites of field workers marked by yellow flags. Not only presenting an undignified and very unheroic aspect of fieldwork, these toilet pit stops parodically use the very markers (bamboo poles with flags) that signified conquest during the heroic era of polar exploration (Noble in Martinsson et al. 2014, 135). The marking of the South Pole has now been reappropriated by the marking of urination zones.

*Figures 119–124* Anne Noble *Piss Poles* #1 – #6 2008

**RICHARD BARNES: THE POLITICS OF EXCAVATING A MUSEUM COURTYARD**

Richard Barnes’s photographic work spans the gamut of archaeological and palaeontological image types, ranging from editorial work for *National Geographic* (seen at the beginning of this chapter), technical field photography, museum work, and art making that reflects more personally and critically on excavation sites (Barnes, 2009; Nickel 1997, 25). *Still Rooms and Excavations* is a photographic series that documents the chance discovery of a nineteenth century burial site during refurbishments to the Palace of Legion of Honor, a branch of the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco now called the Legion of Honor Museum. Challenging the museum
as muse tradition, Barnes examines the types of images not institutionally or officially endorsed on excavation sites and proceeds to experiment in kind with his camera.

Barnes’s story begins in the 1990s when the building underwent extensive renovations. During 1992–1995, 800 burial sites from the 1850s–1890s gold rush era were discovered in the plumbing network under the building’s foundation level (fig. 125) (Nickel 1997, 25). It is believed that many of the graves, in addition to belonging to gold miners, were also potter’s fields for the poor and for Chinese immigrants (Barnes 2009). The cemetery was later covered over as the area became used as an industrial medical waste dump, before being cleared again to make way for the Neoclassical palace, built in 1924. Thus, this excavation site provides a palimpsest of bizarrely contrasting histories: medical instruments and hospital refuse lay beside older grave sites.

Figure 125 Richard Barnes Museum with Excavated Courtyard 1994
occupied by unnamed and forgotten individuals, overlayed with Neoclassical architecture and its plumbing system (figure 126).

*Figure 126* Richard Barnes *Burial with Plumbing* 1994

Working on *Still Rooms and Excavations* as an independent photographic artist, Barnes developed counter narratives that stood independent of official records, and emphasised the unknown, the unofficial, the forgotten, and the less heroic narratives of history and excavation. This reflects Barnes’s interest in archaeological methodology and what he describes as “the pathos that goes into an excavation site” (Barnes 2009). Dirt, tools, remains, diggers, holes, and mounds abound. Even dirt is sprinkled onto the usually pristine background of the artefact photographs in figures 127–128. Barnes, therefore, is interested in all those ambiguities and idiosyncrasies that authentically connect to the experience of excavation (Nickel 1997, 25).
There are two conceptual layers to the work: one is a critical questioning of museum practice, and the other a critical questioning of archaeological photographic representation. Both are forms of institutional critique. With regards to critiquing the museum, Nickel (1997, 25) purports that the photographs juxtapose the official “to-be-seen” aspects of documentation with the “not-to-be-seen.” Therefore, the exposed and probed human remains from the potter’s field underneath the museum are set against the interior rooms of the museum where pristine statues and artworks lay carefully wrapped and removed from their glass vitrines, hanging spaces, and plinths (figures 129–132):

This is a project about sorting: sifting artifacts from dirt, separating bodies from burial sites, recording the meaningful and destroying the irrelevant, commemorating one group and adulterating another, putting a certain kind of object on public display and another safely in a drawer (Nickel 1997, 25).

The European artefacts are delicately protected in shrouds from the surrounding renovation work while the photographs of exposed skeletons and artefacts redirect the viewer’s attention to the archaeology underway outside, where human remains are laid bare in the dirt with tools of the trade and plumbing infrastructure partially obscuring their bodies. The delicate care given to the inanimate European relics inside is not transferred to what looks like the rubbish heap of
history’s forgotten outcasts outside. Such a juxtaposition hints at the political business of history and the politics of digging.

Barnes uses these two very different narratives of the Palace against each other to deconstruct the institutional privileging of certain histories at the expense of others. Not surprisingly, the museum initially objected to exhibiting Barnes’s photographs of bodies strewn across the front courtyard of its grounds (Nickel 1997, 25). The museum’s objective was for Barnes to produce photographic material for press releases on the building’s architectural refurbishment, but as Barnes (2009) stated, “my interests were much different.” As a form of institutional critique Still
Rooms and Excavations asks the question of whose history is more important, and why (Barnes 2009). It also points to the political nature of digging and the implications of excavation in the lives and practices of people and institutions today. Barnes’s second conceptual layer is concerned with the visual record in archaeological excavation. While editorial images often portray excavation as a sanitised, dressed space in which pristine objects are offered up for the camera, it does not reflect the reality of photographing on an active excavation site:

The camera in fact always appears to be struggling to look through something, be it topsoil ... protective mylar, security ropes, measuring tools ... these pictures suggest that visual access is a relative effect (Nickel 1997, 25).

Figure 133 Richard Barnes Still Rooms and Excavations 1994

Therefore, the obstruction or interruption of evidence is conceptually important, as it counters the idea that the past emerges naturally from the ground with minimal effort. Importantly for my research, obstruction also works as a form of withholding, producing anti-forensic visual detours of the main digging action. Figure 133 presents a seemingly innocent pile of dirt.
However, the mound of excavated topsoil not only functions as a striking aesthetic and formal element in the picture, it also suggests a larger interruption of the view of official history as the voluminous mass, accented by the shadow looming over it, obstructs the architectural viewing of the museum building.

Figure 134 Richard Barnes Burial, Angled with Backhoe 1994
Figure 135 Richard Barnes Vertical Triptych with Shroud 1996

Figure 135 takes this obstruction of the excavation site even further by physically altering the spatial and temporal makeup of the photographic image into a vertical triptych. Through a layering of different trench views, it creates a photographic stratigraphy that, while scientifically illogical, visually suggests both displacement and depth. Compared to figure 134, the Vertical Triptych with Shroud demonstrates the difference between depicting stratigraphy and photographically creating stratigraphy. This example is useful for my research because figure 135 promotes an active photographic reconstruction of the digging space akin to Krauss’s antinatural spatialization of story. This photographic series was also chosen for examination because it emphasises the tension between the “seen” and the “not to be seen”; that is, the official versus the unofficial fieldwork photograph (Nickel 1997, 25). It pinpoints withholding or obstruction as one key way to undermine official narratives.
The second key framework of my core visualising practice is the unfolding of fieldwork through the criticality of slowness, immersion, connection, and Edward’s ethnographic subtle beyond. Such a framework has involved finding a new way into palaeontological fieldwork as a documentary artist—visually exploring the slow, arduous, tender, social, and sometimes mundane processes of surveying and excavating in-situ and in-progress. However, while this idea has been crucial to informing my own work, it has been difficult to find examples of this slowness and ethnographic immersion in palaeontological fieldwork culture represented through photographic documentary-art practice. The earlier quotation from Shanks suggests that when we look at the excavation site, slow process, unfolding, and growth are more important than simply recording evidence with a shot gun approach. This slowness and immersion also tempers heroic sensationalism and the forensic gaze (Finn in Clack and Brittain 2007, 17; Mitchell 1998, 166). The pace of excavation itself is a very important aspect of fieldwork and only apparent after spending extensive time in the field. Such a durational awareness separates speedy journalism from slow art making and ethnographic immersion:

the back-breaking work of clearing space next to the sanctuary from debris left there by the first excavators, gave him a sense of the work involved in producing a 'site'. Simultaneously, however, it altered him to the tempo of manual work, which was measured in this case by cartloads of soil and punctuated by cigarette-breaks. The duration of manual work thus perceived, created a sense of temporality that was contained in the same site as other temporalities such as the 'official' record of archaeological strata, and the everyday temporality of the archaeologists (Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009, 77).

In my photographic practice, connecting to fieldwork through an exploration of its durational pace is both a symbolic and literal opening and unfolding of fieldwork narratives. However, connection is also about responding to the landscape environment, the digging processes, labour, and the people. That is, fieldwork is an embodied, sensuous, social, and aesthetic encounter—not just a collection of facts (Parno 2010, 132; Tilley in Lucas 2000, 3).
Framing historical-scientific fieldwork as social, material, and cultural activity means photography is primarily interested in what Shanks (1992, 130–131; 2012, 12, 19) calls “actuality”; that is, focusing on cultures of digging, people, and the doing of history as a contemporary endeavour. Actuality is about the present. Even the past is present in fieldwork. Anthropology is the study of human culture and ethnography is its working arm. It involves data collection through participant observation and representation through graphic means (Bruck 2005, 54; Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009, 75; Shanks 1997, 100). It is the graphic quality or visual ethnography that is of interest to this project. However, while visual anthropology theorists Sarah Pink and Elizabeth Edwards both highlight the importance of photography as part of the “sensory turn” in anthropology, Rutten et al. (2013, 460) also highlight the rise of an “ethnographic turn” in contemporary visual art practice. Though, as I have already noted, when it comes to historical-scientific fieldwork, photography is always discussed from the scientific or anthropological perspective. Rarely is fieldwork photography discussed from the point of view of contemporary photographic art practice.

I have identified the concepts of critical reflexivity, total ethnography, and the subtle beyond as potential ethnographic methodologies for the fieldwork artist. Critical reflexivity considers the subjective position of the ethnographer—here, the artist—in how information is interpreted and presented. It also promotes methodological practice that continually adapts, and which can be modified to suit the unfolding and unpredictable nature of fieldwork research (Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009, 74). Total ethnography—in the context of archaeological ethnography—refers to the opening up of research to include an examination of archaeological culture and archaeologists themselves. Traditionally, the field of ethnoarchaeology was concerned with how past societies lived but archaeological ethnography as a form of sociocultural anthropology turns its attention to the people who work on excavating those past societies (Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009, 66). In doing so, total ethnography refers to all those social ethnographic features observed that go beyond the auspices of official information:
The archaeological ethnography that we propose here is, in some ways, a total ethnography, not an ethnography dealing exclusively with archaeology and the material past ... On the contrary, we refer to the social anthropological tradition of ‘participant observation’ in as many areas of social life as possible. The researcher must strive to familiarize him- or herself with all aspects of the life of the communities he or she is studying, not simply their relationship with the material past (Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulou 2009, 78).

Building on this is Edwards’ (1999, 59, 67–68) concept of the “expressive subtle beyond,” which picks up on things that exceed the realist record. It may refer to a memory, allegory, or a single detail that appears insignificant to one person but “singularly significant to another” (Edwards 1999, 59, 67–68). Put another way, the subtle beyond embraces the minutiae, the negative detail, the anomaly.

![Photographer Unknown Leonard and Katherine Woolley excavating grave material, Ur 1929-30](image)

**Figure 136** Photographer Unknown *Leonard and Katherine Woolley excavating grave material, Ur 1929-30*

Plucked from the archives of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Penn Museum) early in my research, figure 136 presents an interesting example
of the subtle beyond. This anonymous photograph institutionally functions as an archival record, and yet the formal composition, deep shadows, and soft, painterly focus render it more in line with the tradition of photographic pictorialism (Bate 2009, 97; Solomon-Godeau 2003, 158). The viewer is brought extremely close to the archaeological digging action in this documentation of Leonard and Katherine Woolley digging in Iraq at the Mesopotamian site of Ur. Yet, there is no scientific evidence on display. This is interesting because this site is known for numerous key discoveries, including the royal Sumerian cemetery that inspired Agatha Christie’s novel Murder in Mesopotamia (Pezzati 2002). However, this site is not dressed. It is chaotic, crowded, and consumed by bulging shadows, including the complete loss of detail in Leonard and Katherine’s faces, and yet it is these technically offensive elements that create its evocative quality. Artefacts are dotted across the photograph and intricate, indecipherable work is being carried out in the soil, but it is the delicate placement of Leonard and Katherine Woolley, back-to-back, hunched over, and seemingly inadequately dressed for manual labour that draws the eye. I am not suggesting the photographer who produced this image did so with an expressive subtle beyond in mind, but as an archival museum record it stands apart from the orthodox plain style photograph. It possesses a more affective and lyrical quality to documenting digging than an information-bearing one. Moreover, the focus on people both scratching and looking in the dirt, coupled with the busyness of objects being transported out the pit by workers, ultimately speaks of the embodied anthropology of the digging space.

STARTING POINT: DAVID WEBB AND THE DIGGERS ALTERNATIVE ARCHIVE

Via the online Diggers Alternative Archive, contemporary photographer David Webb explores the material and social aspects of archaeological fieldwork culture. Webb (in Witmore 2007, 86) claims that archaeology has forgotten to document itself, that the people doing archaeology have been neglected in the pursuit of artefact recording. Therefore, he has chosen to focus on the anthropology of digging; that is, the embodied aspects of fieldwork often sidelined or relegated to “background noise” (Witmore 2007, 86). For Webb, the most important part of digging is the diggers themselves, as he claims they normally only exist as a “cloaked force of highly skilled labour” (Witmore 2007, 86). In shifting the focus away from evidence and towards the diggers,
Webb is challenging photography’s traditional role in fieldwork to capture the final products of labour and not the labourers themselves.

Yet, while he uncloaks the diggers with a direct, frontal portrait style reminiscent of the New Objectivity photographer August Sander (figs. 137–138), who Webb identifies as one of his photographic inspirations, there is a disconnect between the diggers and work itself. Work has stopped. An ethnography of digging should not dictate that work stops when the camera comes out. Therefore, as engagements with the socially embodied aspects of digging, the images fall short. As portraits, they challenge the facelessness or anonymity of archaeologists in photography (Bohrer 2011, 76), but with a degree of contrivance or superficiality (Witmore 2007, 86). Witmore (2007, 86, 88) notes that the diggers are usually smiling, static, and clearly posed. As Webb refers to his own photographs as showing the “tremendous achievements of the diggers,” they risk falling into the promotional, commercial realm—the very “hygienic” and “orthodox” imagery Webb claims to challenge (Witmore 2007, 86). Bateman (in Smiles and Moser 2005, 197) suggests these posed portraits of diggers might be parodies of the traditional workers’ portrait. While this may be the intention, it is not made clear by Webb himself.

Figure 137 David Webb Diggers Alternative Archive nd.
Figure 138 David Webb J______ G______ stands on the baulk nd.
Figures 139–144 form part of Webb’s *Cambridge North West* series, which appear as a document attachment on his *Diggers Alternative Archive*. The document resembles a site report; however, instead of technical data, Webb provides photographs of excavation culture. Even though the flow of dig activity seems to have been stifled by the photographer’s presence, overall, the photographs offer an alternative to the “back-of-the-head record shot” (Bateman in Smiles and Moser 2005, 197; Witmore 2007, 86). Webb states that he is looking for a platform for photography that is neither “official” nor “tucked away” (Witmore 2007, 88). However, his work largely circulates in archaeologically orientated realms, published in the journal of the UK Institute of Field Archaeologists, *The Archaeologist*, or viewed online on the *Diggers Alternative Archive* or the *Archaeologist/Photographers* Blog. Interestingly, when his images appeared in *The Archaeologist*, they were criticised for misrepresenting the profession (Witmore 2007, 87).
PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE ALLUSIVE PHOTOGRAPHIC “I” IN FIELDWORK

“MY BODY IS A MOVEMENT TOWARDS THE WORLD, AND THE WORLD MY BODY’S POINT OF SUPPORT”

One way to counter the forensic, depersonalised, and dispassionate gaze in photographic fieldwork practice is to adopt an intentionally personal, reflexive approach that places the embodied experiences of the photographer at the centre of research. Such an idea draws from the philosophical school of thought known as phenomenology, which considers how phenomena (objects/events/people) are perceived and experienced by the individual (Blackburn 2016; Chandler and Munday 2016; Tilley in Renfrew and Bahn 2005, 201). According to French phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2002, 625–626), experience and contact with the world begins with one’s body as, “my body is a movement towards the world, and the world my body’s point of support.” He further suggests that the body is a “knowledge-acquiring apparatus” (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 628). As an extension of this, professional practice guided by a phenomenological approach focuses on reflexivity; that is, how the researcher personally reflects, makes, moves, changes, and accommodates in response to embodied experiences in a certain environment (Sullivan 2010, 110). Sullivan (2010, 110) claims that through ongoing responsiveness and self-critique, reflexivity is critically concerned with challenging pre-existing theories and practices to reach new ways of seeing (Sullivan 2010, 110).

SELF-OTHERS-THINGS

However, it is not just about one’s body; rather, it is about one’s body “being there” in the place of encounter (Tilley in Renfrew and Bahn 2005, 204). As a photographer, this means that where my body goes ultimately shapes what I experience and all the subsequent interpretations I make (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 120–121; Wrathall in Parry 2010, 27). Having established that the body is the catalyst for encounters with phenomena, Merleau-Ponty adds the notion of “self-others-things” in which our interactions with other people, objects, and environments profoundly affects the way we perceive the world (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 127; Tilley in Renfrew and Bahn, 2005, 203). Therefore, it is not just one’s body being there that shapes experience, but how that
body positions itself and responds to the other. Further, the actions of others and the states of objects can also change how we encounter something:

   No sooner has my gaze fallen upon a living body in process of acting than the objects surrounding it immediately take on a fresh layer of significance: they are no longer simply what I myself could make of them, they are what this other pattern of behaviour is about to make of them (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 631).

This acknowledgement of others and things is particularly important when engaging in visual ethnographic practice. In the context of my visual research, an authentic encounter with both palaeontological “others” and “things” in the field is paramount. The use of the word authentic here refers to the importance I place on maintaining a strong connection to both the people and specimens being photographed. In addition to this, authentic also connotes that the context I am working within is genuine and not staged. That is, I am working as a member of an excavation team, not faux digging with a group of collaborators. To a degree, authentic means that the photographer relinquishes some control over the environment and its unfolding events to reflexively go-with-the-flow of events. Important to this is not stopping the flow of work. None of the final photographs submitted for this research required me to stage, stop, or change the palaeontological events. I have plenty of photographs from the early stages of the research that are overtly staged. However, the choice was made over time to place more reflexive emphasis on the genuine role of “others” and “things” in shaping my visual responses: that is, shaping my “self” in relation to the palaeontological others and things.

**PHENOMENOLOGY, FIELDWORK, AND THE ALLUSIVE PHOTOGRAPHIC “I”**

While it might seem obvious that the photograph is the result of someone having experienced something in the world, in historical-scientific field photography, the photographer’s experience and encounter with the excavation process is frequently subsumed by the objectives of official scientific recording, or overshadowed by camera-wielding scientists. Therefore, one of the main motivating forces shaping my visual practice is the photographic “I,” which responds to the problem identified by Bohrer (2011, 104), that regimented excavation protocols not only organise the space of the dig through a hierarchical privileging of information, but also the activity of the photographer, to the extent that the “photographer’s individual approach
disappears.” As previously mentioned, Bohrer (2011, 141) also points out that archaeological fieldwork photography is frequently viewed as depersonalised. The fact that much field photography remains uncredited (cited as “photographer unknown”), attests that even the identity of those who produce photographs are often not deemed important enough to officially record, even though meticulous records are kept for every other aspect of excavation. Yet, the photographic “I” is not about announcing myself in the manner of the informal, vernacular snapshot that shouts, “I was here and look at what I did,” but in a way that takes my encounters and direct experience of being on site and weaves them into the conceptual narrative of the photographic work. Thus, the photographic “I” is a term I created to acknowledge the subjective framing of the excavation site through the photographer’s experiential, immersive, and sensorial encounters. In chapter 2 I expand upon my phenomenological methodology and discuss how both the personalism of the cult of antiquarian anecdote (fieldwalking and personal recollection) and the reflexivity of the antinatural spatialization of story (personal rearrangement of fieldwork through combination photographs) ultimately placed my individual impressions and preferences at the centre of photographic practice.

**TWO TYPES OF FIELDWORK PHENOMENOLOGY**

A phenomenological approach to field photography is not to be confused with the practice of phenomenological archaeology. In archaeology practice, phenomenology is most often associated with how a scientist’s physical engagement with the site today helps them understand how that site was used and viewed in the past (Bruck 2005, 45–47; Hamilakis et al. 2002, 5). For example, phenomenological archaeologist Christopher Tilley (in Bruck 2005, 47, 50) suggests that archaeological landscapes, and Neolithic standing stones in particular, cannot be understood unless one places themselves in that landscape. Interestingly, archaeologist Adrian Chadwick (in Bruck 2005, 50) highlights that Tilley Appropriates the early sentiments of the romantic antiquarian practice of fieldwalking, with its associated archaeological/antiquarian imagination. This type of phenomenology is ultimately geared towards understanding and reconstructing the past. Yet, as a field photographer, how the past looked and how it was experienced is not necessarily of interest. Archaeology researcher Joanna Bruck (2005, 54) identifies another type
of archaeological phenomenology that is closer to the aims of this research by investigating the embodied practices and processes of archaeologists today; that is, how they engage with physical and material things in their working rituals as a form of archaeological ethnography. The only problem with this framework is that it advocates scientists examining themselves, so the research is commanded from the perspective of the scientist not the photographic researcher.

**CIRCUMSPECTION AND THE PHOTOGRAPHER**

From a phenomenological perspective, the way a site is photographed by an individual is not so much about what features are observed but how their experience of the site is reflected in the way they chose to photograph it. Photography is selective and partial because my body and where I look, “imposes a schema on space” (Tilley 1994 in Hamilakis et al. 2002, 9). Martin Heidegger calls this a process of circumspection (*Umsicht*) or bodily awareness, as opposed to mere observation (*Betrachten*) where the body and how it is affected by encounters is not considered (Wrathall in Parry 2010, 19). It is observation that foregrounds the scientific method and, as a result, traditional representation of fieldwork also carries the scientific imperative, leaving embodied experience and subjectivity out of the equation.

**SEEING COMPOSITIONALLY AND AFFECTIVELY: PHENOMENOLOGICAL PHOTOGRAPHY**

What a phenomenological approach has opened up for this research is the important acknowledgment of the visual researcher and what archaeology theorists Yannis Hamilakis and Aris Anagnostopoulos (2009, 78) call “sensuous research.” This refers not only to the sensuous activity of digging and the sensory experience of the diggers, but also to the sensory encounters and depictions made by the photographer and the photograph’s “sensory richness” (Shanks 1997, 100–101). Sensory richness includes colour, tone, contrast, form, light, composition, viewpoint, and how the photographic artefact is then printed and physically given material form. Merleau-Ponty has highlighted a “phenomenological priority of art,” in which art making itself is a bodily response to the encountered world (Wrathall in Parry 2010, 17). Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, Wrathall (in Parry 2010, 12) suggests that an important phenomenological characteristic
of art is in seeing and representing the world compositionally, and helping audiences similarly consider the world as a perceptual encounter.

Field photography in particular, through framing, viewpoint, and witnessing, places art making in direct contact with encounters as they unfold. The notion of being there (even if it is that-has-been) is tied to another phenomenological feature, which is arresting engagement. For the photographer, unlike other artists, the making of the photograph temporally coincides with the phenomenological encounter of the photographer as they experience things in the world. Merleau-Ponty (in Wrathall in Parry 2010, 20) calls this a “way of arresting our perceptual engagement in the world, of catching ourselves responding to the solicitation of the world.” Photography can do this via the directness (and intimacy) of its indexicality as the field photographer moves through and responds to the digging space. Another important phenomenological feature of visual practice is the affective dimension of art. Hamilakis et al. (2009, 283) propose that as “material memories of things they have witnessed,” photographs work more affectively than representationally. This refers to the emotive and suggestive capacity of art to take us somewhere beyond physical description, into the memory the photographer both experiences and simultaneously creates through the work. This aspect of art practice is particularly important in moving beyond the depersonalising and formulaic narratives of the forensic and heroic regimes.

SANNA KANNISTO: BEING THERE AND SLIPPING AWAY IN JUNGLE FIELD STATIONS

One artist who places herself, her body, her camera, and her experiences of scientific (biological) fieldwork at the centre of photographic practice is Finnish photographer Sanna Kannisto. While not explicitly referencing phenomenology, she positions herself—the photographic “I”—in and around fieldwork research stations, either directly with her body in the frame (fig. 145), through the camera’s presence in the frame (fig. 146), or indirectly by reframing specimens and fieldwork rituals in the field when the scientists are absent from site. Kannisto uses visual strategies connected to many of the theoretical and practical frameworks my own work draws upon; particularly, the anti-forensic concealment of evidence, the inclusion of landscape as part of the
fieldwork narrative, a focus on subtle beyond details in fieldwork spaces, and a re-presentation of fieldwork from the artist’s own personal encounters.

Figure 145 Sanna Kannisto Transect 2003

Figure 146 Sanna Kannisto Bee Studies 2010
Working for intensive periods at a time with biologists who study flora and fauna at research stations in Brazil, French Guiana, and Costa Rica, Kannisto produces photographs that respond to scientific fieldwork in authentic research contexts located in dense rainforest environments (Baker 2011; Grosenick and Seelig 2008, 206; Laakso 2009, 152). Her photographs are not just about specimens and evidence; rather, they are about her sensorial encounters with thick forest, physical isolation, and the intriguing shapes and colours of bagged, tagged, or flagged objects that punctuate the otherwise green monotony of the forest (fig. 147) (Holzherr and Persons 2007, 141). As such, Kannisto observes, measures, calculates, responds, and creates as an artist. As Baker (2011) observes, “the work displays a deep fascination with scientific procedures and with the history of scientific representation, but it has its own distinctive relationship to order.”

Figure 147 Sanna Kannisto Marked Forest 2 2004
In *Field Studies 1* (fig. 148), Kannisto makes the landscape itself the subject of scientific containment as a miniaturised version of the surrounding landscape is doubled and deposited in a suspended sack, becoming a “forest nesting within the forest” (Baker 2011). The sculptural evidence bag, elevated by an intricate web of yellow string, supports important botanical research but here the doubling of landscape, the abstraction of the specimen, and the visibility of its support structure are what dominate the frame.

*Figure 148* Sanna Kannisto *Field Studies 1* 2003

*Field Studies 1* therefore deemphasises the clarity of traditional fieldwork photography by exploring how things can be “separated from their own visibilities” (Laakso 2009, 154) through the image making process; that is, the denial of visual facts. *Marked Dragontium gigas* (fig. 149)
similarly presents “the marks but not the meanings” (Baker 2011). The flags testify that something of scientific importance is located here but clarity of the specimen is somewhat lost by its confusing surrounding environment. What is being investigated? Is it the tree root, the sapling, or something living on it? These questions are left open for the viewer to contemplate, unless they are familiar with the scientific title of the work, *dragontium gigas*. Figures 150–152 visualise a similar dilemma. There is a trace of something, but the physical detail of the specimen is problematised through concealment or physical distance that places more emphasis on the whole site, and its place within the larger forest landscape than on the forensic gaze of specimen identification.

The landscape mandate to withdraw and the anti-heroic distancing and lifting away from the downward facing forensic gaze are particularly evident in figure 151. Kannisto also pays attention to the subtle beyond in the form of scientific refuse seen in figure 152. Here lies an abandoned scientific experiment where only the rubbish of a former project lay. The undercurrent of Kannisto’s work is that we are not meant to glean biological information from these photographs other than the sensorial delights of the forest and the intriguing shapes and colours of fieldwork rituals, past and present.
Kannisto’s fieldwork is ultimately about discovering her own objects and viewpoints, which is the result of having participated in authentic—as opposed to staged or personal—fieldwork and being there for seasons on end. Further, while science culture is her muse, methodologically speaking, Kannisto is critical of how scientific imperatives frequently control image making processes—a concern shared by this research project. As such, Baker (2011) purports that her work is addressing “the inadequacy (or at least the incompleteness) of a scientific worldview” when it comes to photography. Her work is ultimately about cultures of looking: the way we look, process, and respond, depending on what disciplinary community we belong to and what embodied encounters we experience on site (Baker 2011). Professor of visual culture Henri Laakso (2005, 72) adds that, “Kannisto works on the edge of science, sometimes using its instruments, always examining scientific ways of thinking and its limits.”
Beyond landscapes, Kannisto continues her examination of scientific fieldwork in studio assemblages that bring the forest into her portable photographic laboratory, equipped with studio lighting, white backdrops, and black velvet curtains (Laakso 2009, 152). However, unlike standard studio photographs of specimens, which are clean, tightly cropped, and supposedly neutral, Kannisto’s specimen records are overtly theatrical. In figure 153 she is not trying to hide the constructed, artificial space. She is not feigning objectivity. The photographic support structures—such as the joins in the studio background and the string tying the specimen and its index card to the studio’s top beam—are clearly visible. Moreover, in figure 154, the portable studio box and its photographer (Kannisto) suggest an overt self-referentiality that is critical to Kannisto asserting her personal claim over the scientific space. In fact, all Kannisto’s photographs
suggest that fieldwork is a private space due to the noticeable absence of the scientists themselves.

AARON WATSON: PHENOMENOLOGICAL ARCHAEOLOGY, FIELDWALKING, AND CIRCULAR LANDSCAPES

Conversely, post-processual archaeologist and artist Aaron Watson produces multi-sensory research that specifically calls upon phenomenology in the branch of practice known as phenomenological archaeology. He specifically considers the impact of sound and image on interpretations made at prehistoric archaeological sites (Bruck 2005, 50–51). His creative work includes commercial photo-realistic reconstructions, public art installations, experimental archaeo-acoustics (archaeology of sound), visual fieldwalking journals, and circular landscape montages (Douglas Bailey in Russell and Cochrane 2014, 238). He represents the fringe archaeologist who challenges official modes of field reporting and embraces the subjective and visually experimental in the interpretation process:

[F]ieldwork practice reproduces some of the limitations of publication because it is principally concerned with collecting data that can be accommodated within the traditional printed report or archive. This raises some important questions concerning how traditions of fieldwork and representation perpetuate one another, and in particular how they may exclude experiences or places or landscapes that do not fit within their constraints (Watson in Renfrew et al. 2004, 94).
His modified circular landscapes of prehistoric archaeological standing stone formations (figs. 155–156) explore the sensory faculty of sight through representational inquiry (Renfrew et al. 2004, 83). In figure 155, embodied research takes the shape of fieldwalking with a camera around the stones at Avebury, England. In one afternoon, Watson shot 300 frames while moving in and about the stones. In post-production, he further edited and reconfigured them in new arrangements to create a photomontage with a multiplicity of perspectival moments from his time on site (Renfrew et al. 2004, 87–88, 92). The different perspectives, angles, scales, textures and lighting all suggest how one site can be experienced in many ways. Professor Douglas Bailey (in Russell and Cochrane 2014, 238) adds, that these circles are beyond archaeological depiction and description because they “work within and beyond archaeology; it offers no explanation, but it alters the way that we see the past, and that we see the residue of the past in the present.”

Watson himself contests that, “while cartographic and photographic conventions might communicate a large amount of information, this is a very different way of seeing to that of an observer within a monument … [the] qualities of being there” (Renfrew et al. 2004, 88). While the circle arrangement of photographs mirrors the circumnavigation of the fieldwalker around
the standing stone circles, it also hints at the possible *axis mundi* or world centre of Neolithic cosmology, in which such sites may have been viewed by the original inhabitants as sacred centres of the earth—the cosmic axis (Renfrew et al. 2004, 88–89). Therefore, even though Watson’s photographs change from frame to frame, they still maintain a sense of circularity that mimic the real standing stones in the field. While Watson’s circularity thesis may or may not be plausible from a scientific point of view, it nonetheless puts people and their imagined, embodied experience into the photographic fieldwork narrative. Both motives suggest temporal, spatial, and subjective interruption in an otherwise analytical and data driven mode of image production.

The composition and conceptual objectives of the circular landscapes challenge the rigidity of technical images found in artefact photos, maps, diagrams and site plans. They are fundamentally concerned with the embodied experience of being on site, moving around and within it, and its place within the larger, abiding landscape. On Watson’s work at Avebury, archaeologist Steven Mithen (in Renfrew et al. 2004, 166) adds:

[H]is concern seems to be merely the expression of his own experiences as opposed to discovering something about the past itself or the experiences of those who lived in the past. This marks the critical boundary between art and archaeology.

Above all, what his phenomenologically-based visual research points to is an alternative to the scientific gaze that normally monopolises fieldwork photography. At the same time, however, it cannot be denied that Watson is an archaeologist and still places his sensuous scholarship under the banner of archaeological science. Yet, his use of multiple (polyptych) images to expand, disrupt and re-imagine new scenes has been pivotal to my own studio methodology in which single photographs are combined to make new polyptych landscapes. Combination images, whether in a circular photomontage schema or in a diptych and triptych formation, embody Douglas Holleley’s (2009, 17–18) concept of the “third effect,” where new meanings are created by placing different images together. Renfrew et al. (2004, 92) suggest this new meaning creates tension, but the “infinite number of Aveburys” created through the photomontage opens up the possibility for photos to “take on a life of their own” with new meanings and possibilities.
CHAPTER 2
PHOTOGRAPHIC DIGGING: PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We construct the meaning of things through the process of representing them.

(Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 12)
PHOTOGRAPHY AND PALAEOLOGY IN THE THIRD SPACE

The contemporary, human enterprise of historical-scientific digging is important from a photographic point of view because photography has always been implicated in the processes of surveying and excavation. Yet, as chapter 1 detailed, photographic practice within this context has traditionally been confined to visual paradigms that reflect forensic and heroic narratives. This not only reduces the visual dynamism of digging into predictable image formulas, but it also underestimates the potential for photographic storytelling as a form of interpretive, sensuous, and innovative research. That is, it devalues the photographs ability to “construct the meaning of things through the process of representing them” (Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 12). While exchanges do take place between artists and archaeologists in the field today, there is still surprisingly limited discussion about how photography can express itself as an independent form of research in these digging spaces. Photographic artists Jeff Wall, Richard Barnes, and Paul Nash have been instrumental in probing this insular fieldwork culture in the context of archaeology, but there is still much to be done. Moreover, there is no precedent at all for photographic documentary-art research in palaeontological fieldwork. Here, sensuous scholarship is altogether absent.

Therefore, the following folio is my testament to a new visual practice that generates research through photographic image making. Produced during museum-led palaeontology excavations in the Queensland townships of Winton, Nebo, and Rockhampton, this project considers palaeontological fieldwork as an image of genuine labour, scientific craft, embodied experience, situatedness in the land, and pictorial/aesthetic constructedness. Scientists, their community of behaviours, and the by-products of their labour form the backbone of this project, but they alone are not the sole motivation of the research; rather, this project is driven by how the camera responds to such a community.

The way an excavation site is photographed by an individual says more about how they experience and choose to represent it than depicting it as it is. Such an idea draws on the phenomenological centredness of the researcher and their camera; the ethnographic encounters
of self-others-things in the digging space; and the transformation of such encounters into photographic aesthetic objects. This union of phenomenology and visual ethnography is a creative response to Merleau-Ponty’s self-others-things, but it also involves the sharing of experiences, exchanging of ideas, and collaboration with others. Art historian Hal Foster (in Sullivan 2010, 166) calls it “artist as ethnographer.” The powerful combination of phenomenology, ethnography, aesthetics, and photographic practice places the subjectivity of the documentary-art photographer at the forefront of visual production in what cultural geographer Gillian Rose (in Pink 2003, 187) terms as a “kind of autobiography” that acknowledges how “the author’s social position has affected what they found.” However, Sullivan (2010, 166) adds that the visual ethnographic researcher is often in a position of being “both insider and outsider,” which is certainly true of palaeontological field photography. While the photographer is a member of the excavation team, they are always unavoidably operating outside of palaeontology discourse unless photographic duties are undertaken by one of the scientists themselves.

My visual practice has involved observing, participating, reading, experimenting, understanding, reconsidering, creating, and re-creating with these frameworks in mind. Feeding into the phenomenological, ethnographic, and aesthetic aspects of fieldwork photography has been a reconsideration of forensic and heroic photographic image conventions that became apparent during my time in the field and in my examination of fieldwork literature. To challenge or reconsider these two metanarratives, I propose that somewhere in between the forensic and heroic extremes is a middle ground, and somewhere in between technical science and pure fiction is a third space for authentic documentary-art research. This somewhere in between explores what it means for a camera to be present on an excavation site in the hands of a photographic researcher. It gives autonomy to the photographer and opens the dig site to a whole series of reinterpretations; an endeavour that creates in its own language for its own audience, not for supply and demand to other disciplines.

It also correlates with Bhabha’s concept of third space theory, in which old hierarchies and divisions of culture are reconsidered through a blurring or a hybrid encounter between different
agendas—here, palaeontology and photography (Ikas and Wagner 2009, 2; Rutten et al. 2013). It is difference and contact that makes the third space valuable, and as Bhabha (2009, ix–x) suggests, “the grain of the idea or the concept comes to be revealed through the side-by-side synchrony of different voices.” While Bhabha’s third space theory stems from postcolonial discourse, it can also be more broadly considered here as state of in-betweenness and a “dialogical site” involving “negotiation” and re-initiation of different epistemological cultures (Bhabha 2009, x–xi). In short, rather than simply pitting science against art, or the objective against subjective, field photography can be positioned as a new postdisciplinary horizon of theory and practice that exists outside current frameworks and questions old hierarchies of visual production (Sullivan 2010, 111). Importantly, I maintain that in this third space, photography, not palaeontology, drives the research.

As previously cited, Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos (2009, 78) call such a camera-centred framework “sensuous research.” Such research not only refers to the sensuous activity of digging and the sensory experience of the diggers but also to the sensory encounters and depictions made by the photographer and the photograph’s “sensory richness” (Shanks 1997, 100–101). This aligns with Merleau-Ponty’s (Wrathall in Parry 2010, 12) notion that the phenomenological “priority of art” is based on the premise of seeing the world compositionally and affectively. So, while there is quite extensive research on how archaeology has been influenced by the visual turn and critical theory of postmodernity—what it calls the pictorial turn or archaeological expressionism—this research approaches the third space from the opposite point of view to explore how contemporary art, in the space of excavating and unearthing, has been influenced by the historiographic and ethnographic turns (Cochrane and Russell 1997, 3, 5; Roelstraete 2009, 23, 25). This offers an opportunity to reposition and reframe palaeontological fieldwork from a contemporary art platform.
LOOKING THE OTHER WAY: A PHOTOGRAPHIC AESTHETICS OF DIGGING PREHISTORY

In the early stages of this research project, it seemed dinosaurs were my main subject matter. However, as the project progressed two things became apparent: first, that palaeontology involved more than just big dinosaurs; and second, that it was photographic representation itself that was my main subject matter, not dinosaurs. Therefore, each year during the Winton, South Walker Creek, and Capricorn Cave digs, my photographic practice gradually started to draw back and withhold, showing less palaeontological evidence and more of the subtle beyond possibilities connected to memory, allegory, or other seemingly “insignificant” details (Edwards 1999, 59, 67–68). As a result, my images shifted from a preoccupation with photographing impressive looking fossils in-situ to a self-critique of the way the photographs were constructed. Part of this self-critique involved exploring the more underrepresented aspects of fieldwork labour through photographic experimentation that lent itself to a new way of looking at the excavation site. This shift from descriptive subject matter to representational problem solving, marks the difference between critical visual arts production and creative play. Sullivan (2010, 52) qualifies the difference as being one of shifting from surface description to inquiry.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION AND THE PROBLEM WITH BORROWING

The first point of contact for this research was archaeological and all the accompanying literature subsequently centred on the archaeological imagination, archaeological poetics, and post-processual archaeology (Bruck 2005, 48; Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009, 69; Hauser 2007, 25, 40; Russell 2006, 294; Russell in Roelstraete 2009, 305; Shanks 1992, 180, Shanks 2012, 25, 129). Even Renfrew’s (2003, 42–43, 44–45) “aesthetics of excavation,” which advocated inquiry into the visual pleasures of digging, dirt, uncovering, and archaeological craft was proposed as an archaeological paradigm that incorporated photography as an applied branch of archaeological ethnography. As a starting point, Renfrew’s pleasures of digging proved invaluable. However, as aesthetics is broadly defined as “the philosophy of art, art history, art criticism, art making, art experiences and art objects” it seemed counterintuitive that the aesthetics of excavation found its home in archaeology and not in the visual arts (Åhlberg 2014, 96; Bundgaard and Stjernfelt
2015, 1; Schirato and Webb 2004, 124). For this research, it was therefore important to find a more solid foundation for photographic theory and practice that was not constantly borrowing from other disciplines.

Likewise, the constant borrowing of photography from researchers in other fields did not help the matter. Archaeologists picking up cameras and calling themselves archaeological photographers or “archeographers” as Shanks (2012, 20) has dubbed it, often promote themselves as photographic authorities. Morgan (2016, 5) has stated that Shank’s archaeography conflates photography and archaeology as one and the same entity. However, such research often involves playing with photography in an exchange that sociologist Luc Pauwels (in Pink 2003, 179) warns “manifest[s] itself in a quick (and dirty) exchange or borrowing of ideas and techniques without grasping the full implications.” I would argue that photography frequently ends up the loser in this scenario, whereby it either must borrow or be borrowed to be invited into the fieldwork space. Eventually I came across Roelstrate’s retrospective historiographic mode and Godfrey’s artist as historian framework and wondered if an opening had finally emerged. So, I entered the field, observed, and began my own process of making a visual inventory of all the impressions I encountered in the field.

**BEYOND BORROWING: ARTIST AS HISTORIAN AND THE RETROSPECTIVE HISTORIOGRAPHIC MODE**

Within the retrospective historiographic mode, Roelstraete (2009, 19, 23) suggests artists can either work indirectly with historiographic frames of reference (appropriating methods and processes, or working with metaphors), or they can work directly with historiographic objects and processes (Russell and Cochrane 2014, 1, 3). For this project, the historiographic process under investigation is excavating and unearthing; therefore, my practice is intrinsically about the direct connection to and encounters with palaeontological digging communities. As previously mentioned, both Godfrey (2007, 21) and Roelstraete (2009, 17) identify two levels of historiographic art practice: the first is concerned with the history of one’s own discipline, and the second with “history proper.” For my research, the fossil record and its excavation became the historical-scientific subject matter, but as an artist addressing the history of my own specific
medium, I also examine the traditional role of photography in its expeditionary capacity—reconsidering new approaches to photographic engagements with palaeontology sites.

Perhaps the most significant reason for aligning with the retrospective historiographic mode is its emphasis on the underrepresented, devalued, and obscure aspects of historiographic process and historiographic representation (Roelstraete 2009, 23, 25). According to Sullivan, this choice to explore the underrepresented reflects critical inquiry where the unknown (or at least, the less familiar) is considered more desirable than the known (Sullivan 2010, xiii). Sullivan continues that this pursuit of exploring the unknown is also a key strategy to encourage research of a topic from new and multiple points of view. Hamilakis et al. (2009, 289) add that when photographs focus on the other, the subtle beyond, or what I call negative detail, they “can … lead to unexpected associations; they can unearth, bring to the surface, but also throw into sharp focus things that were always there but were not seen, nor felt and experienced.” Such unexpectedness or possibility allows fieldwork to unfold far beyond forensic and heroic conventions.

On another level, by choosing to photograph the more obscure, subtle beyond details of fieldwork culture, what we expect to see, or what we think we know about archaeology and palaeontology, is challenged. Choosing not to describe, illustrate, and illuminate every forensic and heroic detail is also a strategic statement about the camera’s inherent inability to fill in gaps. Such withholding amplifies the age-old fallacy that photographs are objective stencils of the world and messengers of truth via a mechanical, innocent eye (Bate 2009, 17; Shanks 1992, 184; Watson in Renfrew et al. 2004, 94; Smiles and Moser 2005, 2; Sontag 1977, 154). In relation to Barthes positivist history discussed in chapter 1, the unknown is deemed negative because history cannot positively assert that which did not happen or that which is obscure, incomplete, or purely subjective (Roelstraete 2009, 23). Being drawn to such negative obscurity, however, is the hallmark of nineteenth century antiquarianism and the twenty-first century “cult of antiquarian anecdote” (Roelstraete 2009, 23). It appeals to my own photographic practice because it emphasises qualities of storytelling, ethnography, landscape, obscurity, and personal, phenomenological encounter. Shanks (2012, 16) similarly identifies the nineteenth century antiquarian aesthetic as a personal, anthropological, and narrative quest:
The intellectual world of the antiquarian, before the consolidation of academic disciplines in the nineteenth century, was one that allowed [one to] (sic) traverse across many disparate fields of research, learning and practice. Antiquarian interests in collecting antiquities and documenting landscape and community could combine artifact study with human geography, toponymy, genealogy, natural history, and whatever else that seemed appropriate to an antiquarian to include. Antiquarians ... were central to the development of experimental science as well as art history.

Above all, in the retrospective historiographic mode, there are three main strategies of practice that support the initiative to explore the underrepresented and anecdotal: aesthetic, ethnographic, and phenomenological. Within the first framework, withholding, the subtle beyond, and the photographic landscape become guiding strategies. Here, indexical connection to the excavation process is redirected to the wrong objects, which are either scientifically trivial or indiscernibly concealed by plaster casts, tarpaulin sheaths, or hessian specimen bags. The second strategy incorporates landscape both in the way it visually dominates the photographic frame through big space, richly textured and coloured topography, and strong horizon lines, but also in the way it reinforces an anti-forensic looking up, withdrawing, and distancing from the central action of fieldwork. However, these are not just redirecting, parodic, or contested landscapes, they are pictorial, and draw on the art historical tradition of Neo-Romanticism/natural Surrealism.

**HISTORIOGRAPHIC PROCESS: THE MECHANICS OF FIELDWORK**

As stated in the introduction of this exegesis, one of the central methodological practices of palaeontology and archaeology is “the mechanics of fieldwork” (Shanks 1992, 15), also defined as “primary research that transpires in the field” (Hobbs and Wright 2011; Lucas 2000, 3). Palaeontological fieldwork encompasses numerous processes, including fieldwalking, surveying, surface collection, mapping, excavation, cleaning/prepping, jacketing, photographic documentation, removal, and transportation to the museum. Excavation itself may involve fine combing with brushes and small picks, it may involve larger picks, shovels, rakes and brooms, or it may require bulldozers, loaders, and jackhammers. All specimens must be recorded and labelled, and the fragile ones coated in paraloid, which is a thermoplastic glue for heavy duty adhesion. When large specimens are ready for removal, they are first coated in alfoil, newspaper,
then plaster to encase them for protection during their journey from site to the museum (referred to as jacketing). Jackets are then spray painted with letters and numbers identifying their location in the trench for later reconstruction purposes.

**Figure 157** LC Ball *The bones of Rhoetosaurus brownei as they were found in 1924, eroding out of the banks of a gully on a station north of Roma, South-western Queensland 1924*

**HISTORIOGRAPHIC CONTEXT: QUEENSLAND PREHISTORY**

In 1914, one partial dinosaur bone, named QM (Queensland Museum) F311, was found near Blackall, Central Queensland. More than just a group of numbers and letters, however, QM F311 began the story of Queensland’s dinosaur heritage. In 1924, the more complete QM F1659 was unearthed at Durham Downs, Eurombah Creek, Taloona cattle station near Roma, South Central Queensland (Long 2002; Longman 1927). While only partial remains, including neck vertebrae, trunk vertebrae, ribs, a hind limb, and half of the tail were found, scientists were able to ascertain that this long-necked Jurassic sauropod would have measured 17 metres in length and weighed approximately 20,000 kilograms (Long 2002). QM F1659 was officially named *Rhoetosaurus brownie* in 1926 by Heber Longman from the Queensland Museum. The name acknowledges the station manager who found the bones, Arthur Browne, and also draws from Greek mythology: *Rheotos*, the titan. Figure 157 represents one of the first field photographs ever produced on a
Queensland palaeontological site and documents *Rheotosaurus*—a barely discernible stack of bones—being inspected in-situ before being transported to the Queensland Museum.

As previously mentioned, choosing to photograph Queensland palaeontology came about through a desire to photographically work in my own backyard. After Greece, I wanted to explore what photographic digging might look like in both an Australian and palaeontological landscape. In Queensland there are a handful of excavations undertaken each year that specialise in researching extinct species from the Mesozoic Age of Reptiles (Triassic, Jurassic, and Cretaceous periods) and the Cenozoic Age of Mammals (Palaeogene, Neogene, and Quaternary periods) (Hocknull et al. 2009; Jell 2013; Tattersall 2010, 80). Research soon led me to the Australian Age of Dinosaurs museum in Winton, Central Queensland. I visited and lived on site at the museum during my first research trip in 2012. During this time, I photographed and learnt about the museum collection and Queensland’s unique dinosaurs: Clancy (*Wintonotitan wattsi*), Banjo (*Austrolovenator wintonensis*), and Matilda (*Diamantinasaurus matildae*)—namesakes to the iconic Australian poet, Banjo Paterson and his *Waltzing Matilda* and *Clancy of the Overflow* bush ballads (fig. 158).

I prepped fossils in the laboratory, photographed the dinosaur tracks at nearby Lark Quarry Conservation Park, wandered through the landscapes of Bladensburg National Park, and explored the Diamantina River. I travelled around the tourist Dinosaur Triangle of Winton, Richmond, and Hughenden and spent many days and weeks driving through this flat, arid channel country, captivated by the harsh sun, bright light, brown soil/blue sky pallet, and ever present, strong horizon. A connection to place was forming. This is where I wanted to conduct my photographic research. So, the following dig season I accompanied the Age of Dinosaurs museum staff, scientists, and volunteers to excavate the latest bundle of bones that had popped up from the black soil on a local cattle station in Winton. After four years photographing in Winton and on Elderslie and Lovell Downs cattle stations, another opportunity presented itself, working with Queensland Museum staff at Nebo, Northern Queensland and Rockhampton on the Central East Coast. These megafauna sites were vastly different to Winton. New landscapes (including a
mining site and a cave), new diggers, and new specimens meant a whole new range of possibilities (fig. 159).

**Figure 158** Travis Tischler in Hocknull et al. *Silhouettes of the three new dinosaurs showing the material currently known from their respective holotypes.* A–B. *Diamantinasaurus matildae* gen. et sp. nov. (AODF 603); A. Right side, B. Left side. C. *Wintonotitan wattsi* gen. et sp. nov. (QMF 7292); Left view. D. *Australovenator wintonensis* gen. et sp. nov. (QMF 7292); Right view (detail of C and D) 2009

**Figure 159** Laurie Beirne *Diprotodon undertaking mass migration, while being observed by a giant lizard (Megalania) and giant grey kangaroos* nd.

**THE ANTI-IMPERATIVE**

*Photography is not solely handmaiden to studying objects or sites, but can also become an object in its own right. It is not designed solely to buttress or disprove a given hypothesis, but rather to explore the contradictions of lived experience.*

(Bohrer 2011, 66)

Like Kannisto, Wall, Callery, Noble, and Barnes, *Beyond the Forensic and Heroic* creates representations of scientific fieldwork in an environment that already has its own entrenched image regimes. Avoiding certain representational strategies attached to these regimes invites a deconstructive methodology in which traditional ways of representing people, objects, labour, and landscape are reconsidered and re-presented. As discussed in chapter 1, deconstruction is a post-structuralist concept that advocates the pulling apart or dismantling of metanarratives embedded in certain discourses (Wells 2009, 21). In my project, the anti-heroic, along with the anti-forensic, emerges as a negation, undoing, and re-imagining of practices and ideologies associated with palaeontological digging. While the anti-heroic challenges narratives of conquest, scientific shamanism, picturesque landscapes, and eureka moments of revelation, the
anti-forensic counters photography’s role as “handmaiden” to science with its plain-style crime scene aesthetic and depersonalised, didactic gaze (Bohrer 2011, 9, 66; Clack and Brittain 2007, 15; Mitchell 1998, 166; Ryan 2013, 8). A large part of my deconstructive methodology has therefore involved turning away from certain expected details and big, impressive moments, to instead focus on Edwards’s (1999, 59) “subtle beyond” details that illuminate what Bohrer (2011, 66) relates as the “contradictions of lived experience” in scientific fieldwork culture.

**PHOTOGRAPHING NEGATIVE DETAIL: CONCEALMENT AND WITHHOLDING OF EVIDENCE**

Visual withholding features throughout this research but in several photographs, it not only occurs because things are withheld photographically, but also because some objects are already concealed on site—ironically due to the scientific rituals of covering and jacketing. In figures 160–163, the processes of wrapping and plaster jacketing cover the fossils seen curiously sitting in the excavated landscape. While focusing the camera on concealed objects might seem trite or contrived, it is a reflexive response to, and representation of, genuine fieldwork processes and how these specimens looked at that specific stage of excavation when I encountered them. In this manner, covered objects are neither concealed by me nor staged to evoke mystery in the pursuit of what Edwards (1999, 58) cautions can become a type of “raw aestheticism” and “superficial spectacle.” The methodology I have chosen allows photographic practice to unfold organically alongside excavation and sees the photographic image invested in genuine encounters by waiting, using, and responding to what is already in the field. One such visually intriguing by-product of this process of jacketing is the obvious whiteness it brings, which in turn punctuates the monotonous colour palette of soil and sky. The white objects and the white covers jolt the eye, but at the same time reveal only beautifully abstract shapes and forms, not evidence. Whiteness, with its connotation of sterility, takes on anything but a clinical, forensic meaning here.

Didactic closeness is also replaced with what Laakso, in his discussion of Kannisto’s work suggested was a type of wonder (Laakso 2009). It is wonder or the possibility of the other lying underneath, behind, or within a protective shroud that challenges the photographic seeing that
normally dominates visual narratives of science. Laakso (2009, 154), further suggests that such an emphasis on wonder and concealment, ultimately separates things “from their own visibility,” as they become more suggestive in their intent rather than descriptive and explanatory. Such a process of transformation from didactic description to wonder certainly disrupts forensic authority and heroic unveiling.

![Figure 160](image)

**Figure 160** Elise Hilder *History Inside Spheres* 2015

*Closing Site with Amanda* (fig. 161) documents the activity of site covering. While important for protecting fossils until they can be removed or for covering a site at the end of a dig season, photographing this veiling process visually serves no purpose in the official record because it obstructs access to the specimens, underneath. Such withholding is a direct affront or deconstruction of the forensic gaze and the concept of the fantasy of referentiality; whereby, camera vision is perceived to reveal information even the eye cannot always see, or reveal evidence by being able to look at it “in the right way” (Hauser 2007, 63). Yet, it does not matter which way you look at figure 161, access is unequivocally denied despite the curiously suggestive mounds underneath pushing at the tarpaulin surface. Photographic detail—a key feature of the medium—is still there, along with its indexical relationship to the referent encountered and its “thereness” function as witness to something having occurred in the field (Szarkowski 2003, 100). However, the choice has been made to focus on more unconventional subtle beyond details. So, while the forensic fidelity of the photographic act may be brought into question, photographic detail and connection has simply been deferred elsewhere onto other referents and encounters in the digging space.
DISPLACED OBJECTS, TRANSFORMATION, AND STATES OF SURREALISM

While genuine objects, the stark white forms in figures 160–163 are nonetheless obscure looking forms on journeys from one state to another, both physically and photographically. From an art historical perspective, these concealed specimens could be viewed as surrealist found objects. The palaeontological fossil undergoes a series of radical transformations, from living sauropod dinosaur to carcass, to decomposition, to burial, to deposition, to fossilisation, to soil uplift, to erosion, and finally, to being touched and photographed by human hands. Its status as a found object begins with its unearthing and continues through its transformation as an object of science, before finally being offered up as a representational object via the photographic medium. Its life after the photographic event also continues as it is transported to the museum, prepared by laboratory staff, potentially put on display in the museum, published in a scientific paper, and, in the context of this research, displayed in an art gallery. This process of transformation, which surrealist artist Paul Nash called “an object in a state of surrealism,” corresponds with Surrealism’s concept of delay, in which an object/subject/experience is
abruptly stopped or displaced from its original path and redirected elsewhere (Krauss 1981, 28, 31; Matheson 2005, 157–158). The fossil is an object perpetually in a state of displacement.

As has already been identified, there are a number of ways in which historical-scientific excavation can connect to surrealist ideas: found object; found landscape; displacement; disembodiment; unusual juxtaposition; and the uncanny return of that which “ought to have been kept concealed but which has nevertheless come to light” (Boettger in Denson 1987, 6; Hauser 2007, 15; Krauss in Denson 1987, 3–4; Mulvey 2000, 144; Friedrich Schelling in Shanks 2012, 134). While loosely referenced in my own practice as a form of Neo-Romanticism influenced by Nash’s natural Surrealism and Evans’ archaeological found landscape, surrealist ideas offer an alternative entry point into visualising the fossil record and its excavation from the earth. While the fossil possesses the quality of a found object and its uncanny return, it is also a very real physical thing. As such, it is also tempered by its materiality and its presence in an historical-scientific space.

Figure 162 Elise Hilder Sauropod Bone Bed I 2015

In Sauropod Bone Bed I (fig. 162) these surrealist qualities are particularly amplified by the allusive quality of the concealment process. These objects are photographed in a direct manner, but because of their covering they reveal nothing about what is concealed underneath. Instead, other visual elements are offered up for consideration, such as shape, texture, form, colour, symmetry, spacing, and the objects relationship to (or displacement from) other objects in the space; that is, self-others-things. Drawing on a surrealist framework not only frames fieldwork
from an aesthetic and art historical point of view, but it also embraces an anti-forensic narrative through its penchant for obscurity, displacement, and the subtle beyond. It could also be said that while concealment is a curious anthropological reflection of scientific process it is also a surrealist strategy against the forensic gaze. This transformation and displacement is further exacerbated by photographic processes such as spacing and framing—also surrealist concepts. The use of combination or polyptych photographs, which will be explored in depth in the final section of the research, inevitably draws attention to photographic framing and the space between images; the gap. According to visual artist and academic Andrea Thoma (2014), spacing is like a cutting, interruption, or displacement, “which means that each image is plucked from the void and falls back into it.” It is a photographic displacement in which the original single image is stopped and redirected elsewhere: partnered or juxtaposed with other images to invite new meanings.

LIGHT THAT DOES NOT ILLUMINATE

Light also plays a major role in photographic image production. After all, the etymology of the word photography, from the Greek phos graphe, means to draw with light (Miles 2013, 263). Yet, despite its illuminating quality, which in Western metaphysics stems from Enlightenment ideas associated with transparency, objectivity, purity, clarity, and revelation, light has instead been used here to redirect the forensic gaze onto other minutiae details (Derrida in Miles 2008, 19; Miles 2008, 20, 56–57, 244, 263). Even the harsh Australian sunlight, which provides much direct, ambient light in this project, does not aid in the illumination of evidence. Therefore, its revelatory quality that supposedly “announces things to the world,” is challenged in the anti-forensic and anti-heroic frameworks: rendering a strong quality of light that none the less paradoxically fails to unveil anything with forensic clarity (Miles 2008, 10, 38; Miles 2009, 224). The details that are illuminated in images such as Limbs, Ribs, and a Horizon (fig. 163), are scientifically insignificant: the texture of the dirt after it has been imprinted by loader tracks, or the irregular shape and spray-painted surface of bone jackets on the back of a museum ute. In this case, both light and photographic framing work against revelation.
Light is particularly relevant to my research as it is these very myths of objectivity, transparency, and revelation that underscore the scientific method of palaeontological practice and by extension the technical fieldwork photograph. In addition to ambient sunlight, I have also used mobile studio kits, speedlites, and time exposure to build light in various fieldwork environments. I have also made the light source visible at times through lens flare (fig. 163) and photographing directly into the light source (fig. 164). According to art historian Melissa Miles (2008, 247), lens flare and time exposures challenge the otherness or absence of the light source and call attention to the “luminous tactility” or “touch of light” that is normally hidden from view. The light source is certainly not something that needs to be seen in the context of palaeontological fieldwork photography. It works behind the scenes to enable things to be seen, but as a physical entity it is passive and left anterior to the frame. Choosing to include it draws attention to the constructedness of the photographic act and, according to Miles (2008, 247), subsequently “brings a loss of objectivity.”

In the first panel of figure 163, lens flare contributes a photographic self-consciousness and is not something that is normally acceptable in technical site photography. Lens flare or looking directly into the light source would normally be considered a blemish on the photograph and an unsightly aberration in need of cropping out. Yet here, lens flare has its own panel. The inclusion of the left panel in this diptych both expands space but also allows photographic details like lens flare to occupy its own frame thus giving it more authority than it would normally enjoy in traditional fieldwork photographs. Conversely, in figure 164, I use time exposure, natural light entering the
cave, and the lighting system already available in the cave’s tourist pathways. These patches of light also draw attention to the materiality or presence of light sources and demonstrate how light can be used to redirect and illuminate negative details such as buckets, yellow safety chains, or a scientist entering the cave system on their way to work at the excavation site.

![Figure 164 Elise Hilder Deep Time 2015](image)

**IN-SITU/IN-LANDSCAPE: LOOKING UP AND AWAY**

*The landscape imperative is a kind of mandate to withdraw, to draw out by drawing back from a site.*

(Mitchell 1994, viii)

Deconstruction of photographic fieldwork conventions can take on a variety of different guises: concealment of evidence; antinatural spatialization of story; or inclusion of elements not normally considered image worthy in technical field photography, such as landscape. According to Mitchell (1994, vii), landscape is often the first encounter with place, yet the most overlooked and undervalued. This is particularly true in palaeontological field photography, where the imperative to get close to evidence means landscape is almost always sacrificed. When it does appear, the two main typologies as identified in chapter 1, include the evidence-bearing landscape, and the picturesque and ambient backdrop supporting heroic narratives for editorial and press paradigms. Figure 164 avoids these typologies. Just shy of the frame in the right-hand panel is the main excavation trench but it has been deliberately omitted. The focus of this diptych, in addition to the luminous tactility of the light source and a redirection of forensic
illumination, is the surrounding landscape of the limestone cave known in this section as the Colosseum Chamber of Capricorn Caves.

Landscape practice here also works against the strongest dictate of field science, the downward facing forensic gaze. Through lifting and withdrawing the photographic viewpoint, elements such as surrounding topography and the space in-between and around site take on more prominence. Therefore, landscape is not only the anchor for fieldwork, but it also allows for a deeper contextualisation and connectedness to history in the land and its subtle beyond features. Such framing demonstrates that landscape is always strategic, organised, selective, and constructed: it is an “organising point of view” (Bate 2009, 89). Additionally, landscape is not only a way of looking at, experiencing, and picturing the natural environment where excavation takes place, but it is also intrinsically concerned with human intervention in the land and conceptual ideas attached to the framing of it (Bate 2009, 89; Mitchell 1994, 14; Shanks 2012, 132; Wells 2011, 1–2). It is for this reason that I have chosen to put the palaeontological found landscape at the forefront of my research.

Figure 165 Elise Hilder Digger, Ute, Surface Material, Contrail, and the Winton Horizon 2015

Figure 165 similarly presents the landscape agenda; however, this time with the notable inclusion of evidence laid bare on the back of an Age of Dinosaurs museum ute. The evidence is not concealed; nonetheless, it is not forensically inviting either. This is because the photographic viewpoint is too low and too wide. It is too inclusive of the landscape with its horizon line, tire marked soil, shadows cast by the truck, and aeroplane contrail darting overhead. It is looking up
to the surrounding world not down onto the specimens. In one way, looking up to the landscape diminishes (or removes) the evidence-based prerogative of technical photography that would normally eliminate these features as unnecessary clutter. In another, it opens the digging site to surrounding context and, in the case of Winton, the characteristic vastness and aridity of the Lake Eyre Basin with its monotonously flat grassland and dry, russet coloured soil. The double take of the same horizon and same contrail moving through the diptych panels suggests repetition, multiplicity, and expansion; that is, an antinatural or implied pictorial space. It is certainly a landscape, but not a natural, seamless one. The doubling of certain features and the placement of the images in a diptych formation suggests spatial and durational build-up, the passage of time and, importantly, the expansion of long, big space in the tradition of the photographic landscape panorama.

![Figure 166](image)

**Figure 166** Elise Hilder *Sauropod Fibula and Fossil Nuts* 2015

In *Sauropod Fibula and Fossil Nuts* (fig. 166), dinosaur bones are again present but not in the form of a face down clinical record or an imposing heroic close-up. Rather, the fragmented fibula is incorporated into the surrounding landscape through the now familiar gentle rising of the camera viewpoint and inclusion of the horizon line. Yet, even though the camera viewpoint is elevated it is still above the leg bone to avoid looking up at the fibula and heroically elevating its perspective to a position of prominence. A surrealist found object in the sense of Nash’s natural Surrealism, the placement of a sauropod leg bone in this bizarre looking outdoor laboratory suggests displacement and transformation. Here, the bone appears as a product of scientific ritual, framed by the aridity and alienating sparseness of contemporary Winton. The overwhelming volume of
soil; the fossil nuts (a local colloquialism for moon rocks); the lone digger walking back to the
digging site in the distance; and the whitewood trees dotting the horizon line all pull the attention
of the viewer away from the forensic gaze. This is a layered space and each layer from foreground
to background reveals new connections to the land. The palaeontological found object therefore
shares the photographic space with other features of the found landscape and the combination
of all these visual oddities work together to create a commentary on the genius loci of Winton.

It is also worth noting that the image titles accompanying this research have incorporated terms
and language acquired from post-exca vation interviews conducted with the scientists and
museum staff involved in the fieldwork. This reflects a commitment to incorporating culture-
specific terminology and local knowledge into the research. While some language is formal and
reflects scientific frameworks, other language is colloquial and community specific, such as the
use of the term fossil nuts to describe excavated moon rocks in Winton by the local volunteers.

Mustard Earth, QML1470 SW9 Megafauna Site (fig. 167) is also named after the way scientists in
post-exca vation interviews described the overwhelming yellowish-brown hue of this mining-
turned-megafauna landscape. While Mustard Earth may seem to evoke the landscape tradition
of the beautiful, with its small figures tending the land and its tall green gum trees both framing
the picture and creeping in as shadows, it is anything but a pristine, picturesque, or pastoral
landscape. The fact that it is a mining site alone undermines the notion of the beautiful. Not only
a mining site, however, QML1470 SW9 is also a palaeontological megafauna site run by the
Queensland Museum. Strewn across the mustard coloured earth are items associated with
scientific ritual: an abandoned marque box, a specimen bucket, tool boxes, backpacks, a tent,
tarpaulin, and tiny hi-vis clad workers. Here, the palaeontological ethnography of the site gives
rise to an anti-heroic landscape of human occupation and, ultimately, the debris that
accompanies it (Crombie 2010, 5). Dig sites are not necessarily clean or ordered spaces, but then
neither is the reality of digging. This is, after all, an active worksite.
However, rather than being problematic, the white objects are embraced as synchronistic forms connected to each other and the photographic digging space. Through careful framing and alignment of images in the post-visualisation stage of production, a sense of controlled chaos and space is established. Once again, the landscape has been reconstructed, resituated, or built up through a triptych formation that extends time and space. While visually meaningless as a technical photograph, the repetition of white forms evokes a pictorial continuity or visual flow between the three frames. Moreover, the depiction of the aesthetic and ethnographic elements of the space, rather than scientific detail, offers a glimpse into the materially and socially embodied space of digging. A consequence of adopting a distanced perspective within landscape practice is also the anonymity of the workers. The landscape view not only tends to diminish clarity of evidence, but also the identity of the diggers. However, anonymity is not meant to detract from the palaeontological ethnography or people-centred focus of digging culture; rather, distance and withdrawing is used as a visual strategy to avoid the valorisation of any one individual as the hero of the digging space.

In a very different digging locale, figure 168 also provides a landscape that defers connection to evidence through withdrawing and filling the frame with the sheer volume of cavernous space:
Capricorn Caves. The triptych formation—a product of extended underground fieldwalking and post-production assemblage—focuses on gradual movement towards the location in the ground where scientists have exposed the cave floor to investigate the remains of ancient animals such as ancestors of today’s lizards, birds, bandicoots, possums, and wallabies. The alignment of the three panels suggests movement and durational build-up through the digging landscape. The fieldwalking journey begins in the first panel at the entrance of the cave and proceeds down into the excavation area. The yellow barrier chain offers connectivity between panels one and three, and signifies something important is located on the other side. However, this triptych is also about a connection to land, not just land being worked on. Therefore, the intricate colour variations in the thick chunks of limestone rock; the perspectival and phenomenological emphasis of the photographic researcher moving through the space; and the voluminous expansion itself of underground space are all important subtle beyond features. The inclusion of the dig trench with buckets in the third panel alludes to work being done by the Queensland Museum but the camera does not approach the pit with a forensic eye. How different this photographic representation would be if it only appeared as a single image. The temporal, spatial, and conceptual space of the photograph would completely change. The pictorial expansion (or antinatural spatialization of story), the durational build-up, and the evocation of fieldwalking through site would no longer be present.

Figure 168 Elise Hilder Fifty thousand years of Fauna (Site QML1456) 2015

WHAT KIND OF LANDSCAPE IS A PALAEONTOLOGICAL DIGGING-SCAPE?

Palaeontological digging landscapes cannot be confined to the traditions of the picturesque or the sublime. The picturesque aesthetic, with its predictable and pretty scenes, and the sublime, with its frightfully untamed wilderness and awe-inspiring scenes of danger and mystery, do not
encapsulate the reality of contemporary digging in the land (Gregg 2011, 22; Ryan 2013, 91). Vernacular, editorial, and commercial fieldwork photography certainly tends to rely on picturesque conventions, and both popular and photo-realistic reconstructions of the past frequently conjure up dramatic environments seen in narratives such as Spielberg’s Jurassic Park. However, these landscape typologies operate outside the scope and interest of this research. Instead, I have chosen to explore the palaeontological found landscape through neo-romantic, antiquarian and anti-heroic modalities.

**THE NEO-ROMANTIC LANDSCAPE AND THE SUBTLETIES OF THE PHYSICAL WORLD**

Under the banner of the retrospective historiographic mode, the cult of antiquarian anecdote provides a vital link between historiographic research, contemporary documentary-art practice, and pre-modern antiquarian romanticism. The contemporary deconstructive impulse to withhold the obvious and explore the lesser known, parallels Romanticism’s fascination with its own type of unfulfilled yearning and denial of obscure “poor objects,” lost worlds, and ruin in the landscape (Gregg, 2011, 221–222; Hauser 2007, 14; Mitchell 2005, 116, 167; Roelstraete 2009, 23; Rosenblum 1993, 76). As Gregg (2011, 8) suggested in chapter 1, the power of the romantic “longing for what is missing” relies on it never being fulfilled. Therefore, searching is the most important part of the romantic narrative, not closure. There are certainly some images in my research that play on this idea of searching and looking as I focus on fieldworkers scanning for fossil evidence without ever revealing a single bone. The “longing for what is missing” is also connected to a kind of palaeontological looking that archaeologist Rob Leiper (in Campbell and Leiper 2013, 592) similarly refers to as the “passionate gaze” of fieldwork.

Moreover, the big landscapes I have chosen to frame the digging narratives within seem to amplify this sense of relentless (and seemingly futile) looking and withholding. At the same time, however, Mitchell (2005, 170–171) also identified in chapter 1, that while yesterday’s Romanticism placed emphasis on the metaphysical and the spiritual connection to nature and the transcendental, sublime “beyond,” today’s Romanticism is very much connected to the subtleties of the physical world (Gregg 2011, 16; Mitchell 2005, 170–171). Therefore, romantic
seeking and withholding is also tempered by the physicality of the digging act and Renfrew’s (2003, 44–45) “physical pleasures of digging with dirt and stone.” It is also a key reason why, after two years of photographing dinosaur dig sites at night, I eventually chose to return to shooting during daylight digging hours because photographs taken at dusk, in semi darkness, and by car light, seemed too theatrically contrived and bordering on sublime foreboding (Gregg 2011, 190).

Beyond the Forensic and the Heroic is fundamentally concerned with the subtleties of physical work, physical objects, contemporary aesthetic space, and the anthropology of digging culture. The key aspects of Romanticism supporting these fieldwork aspects include the connection to and emphasis on nature; a focus on petrification and the fossil record; the tradition of antiquarian fieldwalking, individualism, subjectivity, recording personal experience; and lastly, the aesthetic penchant for big, infinite space and ambiguous forms (Gregg 2011, 2, 22; Hauser 2007, 14). Once again, the suggestion for a neo-romantic third space maybe the order of the day. One that adapts, as the neo-romantic movement in Britain in the 1930s–1950s did, to the contemporary realities and possibilities of the historical-scientific found landscape.

PALAEONTOLOGICAL FOUND LANDSCAPE

The search for history in the land that Nash (in Hauser 2007, 15) called natural Surrealism and Hauser (2007, 1–2) called topophilia, similarly appears today more broadly as a type of history that is uncovered in the land by artists themselves (Crombie 2010, 12). While Ross Gibson (1992, 48) once identified the heroic myth of the Australian centre to be a draw card for many landscape artists, for this research, location and landscape is literally contingent upon where the next fossil turns up. That is, it is subject to chance: the found landscape (Evans in Renfrew et al. 2004, 103, 110, 115). Nash, Wheeler, and Evans underscored the significance of chance encounters within fieldwork with Evans (in Renfrew et al. 2004, 103, 110, 115) adding that archaeological dig sites are landscapes of chance or found landscapes. The same could be said for palaeontological landscapes, for while certain locations such as Winton and South Walker Creek have gained a reputation over time for producing fossils, there are no roadmaps or records of prehistory to guide diggers to precise locations. The first significant dinosaur specimen excavated in Winton in
1999 was accidentally uncovered by cattle grazer David Elliott, now the director of the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum, on his own property (Hocknull et al. 2009). Therefore, exploring the chance and found aspects of fieldwork is not just a conceptual idea it is also a direct response to the phenomenological experience and reality of how palaeontology comes about in the field.

While the initial discovery of a fossil hinges on chance, it is also followed by hours of survey work and preliminary surface collection before a full-scale dig commences: a continued slow process of potential chance discovery hinted at in figure 169. Repetition and multiplicity across the two panels shows the same group of diggers at various stages of the surface collecting process working over the same patch of land. The antinatural expansion of photographic space created in this diptych exaggerates the big space and absurdity of finding anything—let alone a 2mm long crocodile jaw—in such vastness. And yet, this is what palaeontologists do, and that is exactly what was found in figure 169. The viewpoint and perspective of *Underneath My Feet Is a Crocodilian Jaw* is also in keeping with the larger series of work produced for this research, whereby lifting the photographic viewpoint away from the forensic downward gaze opens the space to the horizon and the landscape features that appear along the way. This combination photograph also provides another type of personal authority with the inclusion of *My Feet* in the image title. It creates a possessive, phenomenological, ownership over the encounter. *My Feet* could refer to the photographer or to the main digger in the foreground of the the second panel—such ownership is left open to the viewer to decide whose feet are being referred to.
THE HORIZON AND THE INCISION

*The Cutting* (fig. 170) also represents the chance nature of the palaeontological found landscape, with the accidental unearthing of a 98-million-year-old conifer tree during the annual Australian Age of Dinosaurs dig. Moreover, the strong horizon line and the overwhelming flatness, sparseness, and aridity of Winton Channel Country reflects the *genius loci* of place. Not only that, but it also juxtaposes contemporary and prehistoric flora in the form of two lone trees: one attached to today’s Winton landscape (the distant Whitewood tree) and the other to Winton’s past landscape (the partially excavated fossilised conifer). The tire tracks and precision cutting of the excavation trench also mark the ways the landscape is both incorporated into and affected by the digging narrative. The first frame and the left edge of the second frame also include what is normally absent from the official excavation record; scientific debris. This includes excavation tools, disturbed soil, a hessian covering, and tire tracks from the excavation transport vehicles. There are no workers present but these visual traces all connote human labour and give agency to the people via subtle suggestion (or the subtle beyond) rather than direct illustration. It is interesting to note, that within the romantic framework, Gregg (2011, 3, 156) acknowledges that even though the horizon line frequently signifies a dramatic sense of “the boundlessness and extremities of nature” and “the void and the infinite,” it also quite literally represents distance through its association with vastness.

![Figure 170](image_url)

*Figure 170 Elise Hilder The Cutting 2015*

Here lies the importance of the romantic infinite for my research: expansion, distance, space, and unfolding. Incorporating the horizon line and big space therefore becomes a strategic tool for
creating a sense of extended, drawn out photographic time and space. Additionally, broadening the excavation site and looking up to the larger, abiding landscape, also marks (or exaggerates) the shift in orientation away from the proximity of the downward facing forensic gaze and creates a much larger photographic field of view. The edge of the excavation pit is not the end of the photographic field of view, the landscape horizon is. This extension or expansion of the photographic field of view reflects the withdrawing mandate of landscape practice, the contested landscape imperative of anti-heroic and anti-forensic distancing, and the desire to connect the anthropology of the digging site to a specific history in the land.

**REPRESENTING CULTURES OF DIGGING: UNFOLDING FIELDWORK THROUGH THE CRITICALITY OF SLOWNESS, PHOTOGRAPHIC IMMERSION, AND THE SUBTLE ETHNOGRAPHIC BEYOND**

_I have made the case elsewhere for ethnographies of archaeological fieldwork that document the life of archaeological projects, just as an ethnographer documents communities ... Such ethnography would build on the realization that archaeology is not just about the past, but is as much about the people, ideas, and networks which allow the past to be recovered—experience and discourse. There are enormous traditions of documentary photography upon which to draw, and which have hardly been tapped in archaeology. Let it be called a sociology of the discipline if necessary, but let it also be remembered that it is the detective work and experience of doing archaeology which interests so many people, as much as the things found._

(Shanks 1997, 100)

**CULTURES OF DIGGING: PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTARY-ART, AUTHENTICITY, AND ETHICS**

The main objective of this research is to make photographic art. To think, respond, problem solve, and produce through art making. However, at its core, this research is also committed to the story of palaeontological fieldwork and its communities of diggers. Edwards (1999, 58) raises the fundamental issue of retaining authenticity and integrity of research when working with the documentation of people and that an expressive approach should not just be “raw aestheticism.” Foster (in Sullivan 2010, 166) also warns against “superficial spectacle that lacks ... integrity.” I have avoided this type of aestheticism by making photographs based on genuine encounters with a culture I spent extensive time living and working with over four years. In this way, my photographic methodology connects with Sullivan’s (2010, 166) notion of “making in
“communities” and participant observation, in which the researcher often works beyond their own disciplinary and/or cultural boundaries to involve themselves in the activities of others. This immersive visual ethnography also relates to Merleau-Ponty’s (2002, 127) phenomenological concept of self-others-things, whereby encounters with “others” becomes part of my art making experience in the field. Pink (2003, 180) has underscored the importance of such sensorial, subjective, and reflexive critical visual inquiry in visual anthropological practice. She considers the materiality of the image an important facet of visual ethnography, alongside collaboration, ethics, social context and content (Pink 2003, 179). Therefore, aesthetic and art historical frameworks previously introduced, do not work against documentary practice; rather, they bring out its expressive, sensorial, and innovative potential to shed light on new stories in the digging space.

Importantly, filmmaker and literary theorist Trinh Minh-ha also adds that the ethnographic turn in contemporary art is about trying to “speak nearby” a discipline rather than from it and in doing so it is about responding to another rather than “speaking for another” (Rutten et al. 2013, 460). This is certainly true with my project in that I am not photographing fieldwork with any false sense of palaeontological authority. Nor am I using scientific modes of image production to appropriate science stories. In fact, speaking nearby palaeontology, I have actively avoided succumbing to its dominant modes of photographic image production seen in the technical, vernacular, commercial, editorial, and press conventions.

While my post-visualisation process involves joining single photographs taken in the field to create new combined or polyptych photographs, my photographic methodology otherwise maintains a strong focus on the camera’s thereness and the documentation of palaeontological fieldwork as a specific social, cultural, and scientific activity that transpires in the field. It is not a research project produced in solitude or in a studio environment where the elements can be controlled. It is not about staging or creating fiction. It is about community-based encounters and aesthetic engagements—responding to and reframing the diggers, their actions, their tools and methods, and their relationship to the land being worked on. As Shanks (1997, 100) has stated, the experience, detective work, and the doing of archaeology is an important part of this. It is
also one of the major elements missing from David Webb’s contemporary ethnographic photographs and even early examples of field photography produced by William Henry Jackson and Gabriel Tranchard. People occupy fieldwork spaces, but they are not actually doing any work. They are positioned instead as actors in a static worker’s portrait. It has been very important for me not to let the camera interfere with the flow of work taking place during excavation.

**PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION**

Fieldwork photography takes place in a communal working environment in the field and, depending on the locality of the excavation site, generally involves camping or lodging together for extended periods of time as a team close to site. To work effectively within the team as a photographic researcher requires both teamwork and autonomy, negotiation and re-negotiation, and a reflexive working methodology that responds and adapts to the unpredictability and constantly evolving nature of an active dig site. One particularly important ethnographic methodology in this context is participant observation. In their discussion on participant observation, among other key processes, Hobbs and Wright (2011) suggest that participant observation is a “method of collecting qualitative data, in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture.”

This is certainly the case with this research project. Living out in the field with the expedition team enabled experiential, deep field perspectives to emerge as a result of fully immersing myself in the daily practices of excavation culture (fig. 171). This sort of experience and observation could not have occurred after one day on the dig, or one hour, as is the case for most press photography. My practice reflexively evolved over time by thinking, doing, and making in response to the daily situations I faced. Without this extended, intensive working methodology, the documentary project would not have unfolded in the same way. My participation involved prepping specimens in the museum laboratory, photographing in the museum, interviewing museum staff and scientists, and participating on the annual excavations.
Slow looking, meticulous digging, continuous fieldwalking, and surveying could also not be understood and represented without experiencing those long durational quantities of time. Figure 172 suggests transformation through such unfolding passage of time, as the same dig site is depicted at different stages of digging and non-digging. More than just a before and after record, it highlights the build-up of time, the in-between waiting time, and the ongoing transformation and transient nature of excavation sites. In total, I spent six dig seasons out in the field over three years, plus one year acclimatising myself to palaeontological culture at the Age of Dinosaurs Museum in Winton to learn the history, language, and processes of both the science and the scientists involved in palaeontological digging.
TOTAL ETHNOGRAPHY, THE SUBTLE BEYOND, AND SLOW LOOKING

Edwards’s (1999, 59, 67–68) expressive “subtle beyond” concept that explores memory, allegory, or details that might look insignificant to one person but “singularly significant to another,” has led me to explore the underrepresented, unconventional, or seemingly insignificant aspects of palaeontological fieldwork. This correlates with the previously introduced concept of “total ethnography,” which extends the scope of ethnographic inquiry to include all the social and material nuances of the digging experience: the more non-official aspects of socio-cultural fieldwork documentation (Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009, 75). In fieldwork culture, such non-official aspects could include landscape, space, colour, form, obscure objects, social mingling, sweeping, walking, waiting, looking, and any other seemingly small, mundane actions that operate in-between the big moments of discovery. I have previously called these aspects the negative details of excavation as they are not geared towards the positivist tradition of revealing and recording evidence about the past.

Looking beyond, I noticed an intriguing synchronicity in the slow, meticulous, looking underpinning both the work of the field scientist and the work of the photographic field artist. Depth of engagement, intimacy, patience, and visual sensitivity to detail are all key activities of fieldwork shared by both research cultures. Such a synchronicity, however, is not something that is explored in fieldwork photography. *Fieldwalkers/The Long, Slow Walk* (fig. 173), advocates slowness and expansion through long drawn out time, long, big open space, long, tedious hours of labour, and long, slow looking—of the diggers and the camera—across three panels. It is this
durational mode of slowness, coupled with a spatial expansion that I am trying to represent, despite the fact I am working in a medium known for its ability to freeze time in a single instant.

![Figure 173 Elise Hilder Fieldwalkers/The Long, Slow, Walk 2015](image)

The slowness of photographic art process itself is an interesting methodological consideration as well. Contemporary art theorist John Roberts (in Wall and Roberts 2007, 156) suggests that the experience involved in art making is very different to the knowledge sought in “science, history, or journalism.” As discussed in chapter 1, photography produced as art practice is concerned with making and creating and therefore is implicated in a longer durational process of transformation from the development of an idea, to the incorporation of materials, to the formation of a visual product, to its display in front of an audience. My continued intervention all the way into the post-production phase of producing photographic combination works reinforces this. Moreover, art invites slow looking and contemplation.

Slow art making is further partnered with social documentary practice for this research, which is similarly connected to notions of slowness through “depth of research,” and visual ethnographic immersion in communities over an extended time frame (Bate 2009, 45; Crombie 2006, 14; Kember 2003, 215; Manovich 2003, 252). Most palaeontological field imagery is concerned with clarity, expediency, and speed: instantaneous, decisive, informative depictions of evidence. However, as previously suggested by Finn (in Clack and Brittain 2007, 17), simple and speedy image production is at odds with the nature of fieldwork because, “[i]mpatience, necessary to the process of journalism, rubs against the pace of archaeological excavation.” Press, editorial, or commercial photographs tend to lack the minutiae, the mystery, the depth of engagement, and the slow gazing of art practice. Such images would have audiences believe digging is quick,
perpetually eventful, and unequivocally successful. These unary images are designed to illustrate quick stories or produce a quick succession of forensic facts for archival inventories. Either way, speed is the essence and the subtle beyond is lost to the big highlights and the quick factory line production of images.

THE OTHER SIDE OF EXCAVATION: THE DELICACIES OF TENDING AND SLOW LOOKING

Archaeologists must lovingly tend, one might say caress, and “husband” their site during an excavation. This involves more than professional discipline but also care. An aggressive desire to rip out the secrets of the land must be transformed into a patient and careful responsiveness to it.

(Leiper in Campbell and Leiper 2013, 592)

Of all the ways an historical-scientist could be portrayed going about the professional business of fieldwork, the least conventional is the one that considers the notion of slowly and lovingly tending to site. Such intimacy, delicacy, and domestication after all is in the realm of the unofficial. However, lovingly tending to site is a very real component of the excavation process and a reflection of the scientist’s fastidious and attentive respect for the fossil record (fig. 174). Jennifer Wallace (2004, 15) refers to it as the “care” and “thoroughness” of excavation. Such tending—be it digging, sweeping, brushing, cleaning, looking, raking, touching, guarding, or collecting—generates an intimate portrait of direct human connection to the land: a gentle topophilia (Crombie 2010, 12; Evans in Renfrew et al. 2004, 108; Hauser 2007, 1–2).

Figure 174 Elise Hilder Crocodile Collection Before the Rain 2015
On another level, tending also reflects the essence of palaeontological craft: the precision, poise, discernment, sensitivity, watchfulness, and inquisitiveness of the human researcher normally hidden behind the scientific method, or at the other end of the extreme, exaggerated to heroic proportions. Tending is ultimately a mundane, subtle aspect of excavation. It is devalued in much field photography because it signifies slow work and often, visually obscure, inconsequential action. It represents all the insignificant in-between moments that distract from the real action of discovery or the clarity of evidence identification. However, figures 174–178 follow these in-between moments: earth cupped in one’s hand scanning for crocodilian fragments; the stroke of a dust pan brush along a 96-million-year-old conifer trunk; the careful lift of a pick readying itself to delicately break the top soil; the guarding, scanning and raking of a fossil bed for evidence; and the gazing into excavation rubble for traces of prehistoric plant matter.

Focusing on the people-centred act of lovingly tending to site further challenges the depersonalised gaze and the supposed neutral, clinical detachment of the scientific excavator. Figures 174–178 also challenge the representation of digging spaces as hyper-masculine and heroic spectacles of muscle and extraordinary feats (Clack and Brittain 2007, 15; Lucas 2000, 7). If anything, the tending of the digging space suggests careful domestication. Campbell and Leiper (2013, 590, 592) also contend that excavation—as a physical penetration of the earth’s surface—is a delicate balancing act between careful tending and violent destruction. One wrong move and a specimen might be shattered beyond recognition into oblivion. Therefore, while figures 175–176 depict more rigorous physical labour, it is a cautious rigour that understands what is at stake.
if precision, attentiveness, and patience are forsaken in the name of speed and undisciplined eagerness.

Figure 176 Elise Hilder *David, Joan, Hugh, and Bystander (The Art of Looking)* 2015

Perhaps the most visually absurd aspect of fieldwork is the act of palaeontological looking (fig. 177). While seemingly ineffectual, the intensity of looking, and by the extension the camera’s looking at looking, evokes what Leiper (in Campbell and Leiper, 2013, 592) suggests is a “passionate gaze” or an intimate connection to work. Such depictions similarly serve to counter the forensic or dispassionate gaze with connotations of intimacy, watchfulness, sensitivity, and curiosity.

Figure 177 Elise Hilder *The Plant People* 2014

In each of these image combinations there is also a formal aesthetic in the way tools are laid out in the land, the way evidence is strategically marked with coloured pegs, the way people are
absorbed and spaced at key working stations, and the way the weight of history is piled up into neat mounds of excavated deposit. The real features of interest are therefore no longer just the fossils or big moments of discovery but the anthropological and idiosyncratic markers of fieldwork. The original chaos of the excavation trench seen in my earlier photographic documentation of digging (which I discuss in the final section of this chapter) is not evident in these photographs. This is partially due to the post-production extension of space through diptych, triptych, and polyptych image combinations, but also due to an in-field working methodology that developed over time in which space, isolation, and a more distanced perspective became methods of practice associated with the landscape mandate to withdraw. As such, the measured and controlled aspect of tending is also mirrored in the measured and controlled photographic withholding and withdrawing.

Figure 178 Elise Hilder Allan, Prehistoric Conifer, and Reinforcements 2015

FIELDWORK AND THE PHOTOGRAPHER

In figures 179–182 extended, slow, time is signified through the combination of frames, but the camera (or image capturing device) is now self-referentially implicated in these images as well. That is, the photographic act is seen simultaneously occurring alongside the digging and collecting processes of fieldwork. Here photography is twice present: as the pictorial representation, but also as part of the depicted workforce. In figure 179, Kate photographs the early pre-digging stages of an excavation site on her iPad, in figure 180 Yvonne photographs the finer excavation work of digging up an enormous sauropod, and in figures 181–182, David photographs a group of diggers posing after work in a vernacular snapshot.
The inclusion of the photographic act is also an activity traditionally kept anterior to the frame and therefore devalued as part of the digging ethnography. The photographic act as an image is neither forensically relevant or particularly heroic, despite the fact it is an integral part of fieldwork. Here, the historically underrepresented presence of the visual medium is in full view. Further, Yvonne Takes the Shot (fig. 180) juxtaposes the intense concentration of the diggers alongside the intense focus of the digger-photographer. Their working spaces are kept in separate panels to suggest a degree of spatial and cultural separation between the activities, but their mutual body language suggests equal absorption in the space and a parallel deep engagement.

Here we also get a glimpse of the photographer’s phenomenological encounter with site and the physical embodiment of their experience in the negotiation of self-others-things. The depiction of the photographer, the camera, and the photographic act (thereness) also confronts the camera’s silent role as witness (Barthes 2000 [1980], 76; Mulvey 2000, 142; Smiles and Moser 2005, 2; Sturken and Cartwright 2009, 18). Field photographers are frequently disassociated from the final photographic record. Such anonymity ensures visually depersonalised, forensic, verisimilitude. The depiction of the photographer in figure 180, identified as Yvonne, therefore provides a direct authorial presence to a practice that normally seems to automatically produce itself.
Figure 181 similarly acknowledges the presence of the photographer but in this context, the vernacular snap shot is attached to a larger durational and spatial narrative. Panel one (fig. 182) depicts the social record in action whereby participants document their own experiences of site, including selfies, group shots, evidence found in-situ, and surrounding picturesque landscape. Here, acknowledgement of such a ritual is interwoven into the fabric of the larger fieldwork space. The repetition, overlap, and expansion of the same dig location across four frames also highlights the passing of time and my own bodily movement through the space “from one position to another” (Modeen 2013, 138).
A NEW AUTHORIAL PRESENCE BEYOND PALAEONTOLOGY: THE REFLEXIVE PHOTOGRAPHIC “I”

The premise of the technical field photograph is that it is objective, impartial, and detached from personhood and experience. The premise of the heroic image is to conform to certain popular or predictable narrative conventions that praise the biggest and best specimens found by the bravest of diggers set against the most beautiful or terrifying of backdrops. Neither of these options allow room for the photographer to incorporate their own experience and conceptual preferences into the photographic fieldwork narrative. However, by locating my practice in a phenomenological framework, I have reframed the depersonalised gaze and the formulaic heroic gaze into a personalised photographic “I.” As previously discussed, phenomenology is a form of knowledge that is connected to embodied experience and is concerned with the individual’s intuitive response to such experience through practice (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 8, 10; Parry 2010, 6; Sullivan 2010, 110; Wells 2011, 48). In a photographic research context, encounters and
observations of phenomena orientate the photographer to take up a particular position in relation to specific phenomena observed; that is, to choose this view over that view, to declare in the words of John Berger that “I have decided that seeing this is worth recording” (Boyle 2014, 16).

Adopting a phenomenological approach to visual research means certain guiding principles have become part of my visual practice, including reflexivity, self-others-things, and seeing compositionally and affectively. These concepts all place the photographer’s encounters and the photograph’s materiality at the forefront of research. Hamilakis et al. (2009, 283) even add that the photograph is a material memory of the photographer’s experience and as a result it brings the affective and subjective into visual research. Merleau-Ponty (2002, 628) states that “the body of the researcher is the starting point of these encounters.” For this research, it is not just about one’s body; rather, it is about one’s body “being there” in the place of encounter out in the field (Tilley in Renfrew and Bahn 2005, 204). This is something that separates field photography from other forms of representation: its thereness, witness, participation, and direct indexical closeness. Even through the post-visualisation practice of combining images, the thereness does not disappear; rather, it is extended and resituated into new compositional and conceptual possibilities that reflect the photographer’s assemblage choices.

SELF-Others-THINGS

Phenomenology supports a photographer-centred approach to research: the photographic “I.” By photographer-centred I mean the photographer has autonomy over their own research practice and actively incorporates their own experience and interpretation of digging sites into the photographic narrative. However, the photographic “I” also works in collaboration with objects and people as visual ethnographic practice highlights (Bruck 2005, 46; 127; Tilley in Renfrew and Bahn, 2005, 203). Therefore, Merleau-Ponty’s (2002, 127) phenomenological concept of self-others-things importantly connects the photographic “I” to the anthropology of site because genuine participation in an active palaeontological excavation cannot be separated from its people-centred (and fossil-driven) mode of operation. Self-others-things is about
encounters and exchanges, not just passive observation or, at the other end of the scale, pure imagination. The diggers, fossils, palaeontological tools of the trade, and landscape all provide distinct social and material engagements for the photographer. Maintaining connection to these fundamental aspects of fieldwork is very important for my practice even though I often choose to represent them in antinatural or obscure ways. According to Tilley (in Bruck 2005, 58), maintaining a connection to excavated things is important from an archaeological point of view because an objects materiality “ensures that we cannot describe them in any way we please.” In short, while an individual is free to have their own encounter, the presence of certain physical objects means the experience is grounded in actual material phenomena. Our experience, therefore, is not in the realm of fantasy or inner-imagination. Real things are there to be encountered. Similarly, as a photographer working in these spaces, object-centred encounters are also very important for maintaining a sense of authenticity and integrity of visual research associated with documentary practice. That is, the desire for connection and encounter with palaeontological things is not just a scientific priority.

REFLEXIVITY

How one responds to phenomena in practice ultimately depends on the concept of reflexivity or critical reflection and responsiveness. Professor of Anthropology George Marcus (in Sullivan 2010, 52) states that, “reflexivity is associated with the self-critique and personal quest, playing on the subjective, the experiential, and the idea of empathy.” While reflexivity implies change or responsiveness due to self-critique, it can also emerge from unpredictable diversions, complications, or intervention from others. This has certainly been the case with this project, given that the nature of palaeontological excavation is so unpredictable and dependent on what happens to others and things. Historical-scientific excavation, after all, represents the found or chance landscape (Evans in Renfrew et al. 2004, 110). Therefore, in terms of methodology, my process has been distinctly shaped by reflexive thinking, in which working with and responding to continual change in the digging space is par for the course. As the evolution of my own images demonstrates, responding to one’s environment often necessitates the need for redirection. This
corresponds with Sullivan’s (2010, 110) suggestion that reflexivity is concerned with challenging pre-existing theories, conventions, and practices to reach new ways of seeing.

**REFLEXIVE PRACTICE: EARLY PHOTOGRAPHIC EXPERIMENTATION**

This research project has involved going in to the field and experimenting with new types of photographic narratives and compositions. Thinking through practice and reflexively responding to the palaeontological fieldwork environment has meant much trial and error. I had to implement and assess different strategies to ascertain which were appropriate for the aims of my project: to reconsider the forensic and heroic modes of fieldwork representation. As previously mentioned, when I arrived in Winton in 2012, the spectacular dinosaur simulacra in the street and the curious assortment of bones on display in the museum were overwhelming. As I travelled around Central Queensland, the experience was repeated. Consequently, the photographs produced during this time focused on the drama and strangeness of dinosaurs living in our contemporary world—be it through heritage tourism (fig. 183) or museum displays (fig. 184). I photographed in the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum (Winton), Kronosaurus Korner Museum (Richmond), the Outer Barcoo Interpretation Centre (Isisford), Flinders Discovery Centre (Hughenden), and Lark Quarry Dinosaur Stampede Conservation Park (Winton). The resultant images used artificial lighting to evoke a sense mystery and theatre. However, this research changed direction after participating in my first dinosaur dig in Winton, 2013. As a result, the more familiar, spectacular, and accessible dinosaur images disappeared.

![Figures 183–184](image1.jpg) Elise Hilder *Early Experiments 1-2* 2012–2013
During the initial in-field excavations my process began with extensive photographic documentation of both specimens in-situ and people working in the excavation trench. I created my own photographic inventory and set about getting to know the culture of digging. I would circumnavigate the digging sites then gradually approach the diggers. In the early stages, the aim was to eventually get as close to the action as possible, evidenced in the way figure 185 has moved in close to the action, eliminating surrounding context and landscape. However, while the activity of digging was visually dynamic, it was not translating in the photographs. Wider frames were impossible unless I wanted a tractor, pole, or someone’s backside in the frame. The energy was there but the perspective was all wrong. There was too much detail and it was taxing on the eye. Photographing isolated jacketed specimens proved easier than negotiating the digging chaos; however, it came at a cost, as the diggers were completely lost (fig. 186).
I continued to photograph in this manner for some time, drawn to the abstract shapes of bone jackets sitting in the landscape. I was determined to stay close to the bones, but at the same time wanted to give the images more space and surrounding context. Also, the excavation site was photographed during non-digging times both during the day and at night. Using studio lights with coloured gels, Speedlites, and time exposures, my photographs reverted to the earlier theatrical, cinematographic influence (figs. 187–188). While the landscape finally appeared in these photographs, the diggers were still noticeably absent, and I could not help but question the validity and authenticity of photographing vacated digging sites at night.

The night shoots were in part an effort to heighten the strangeness and otherness of the digging site but also to challenge the myth of the “truth bearing qualities of light,” by selectively withholding it (Miles 2008, 56). The colouring of light was further employed to emphasise both the theatre of the digging spaces but also the constructed anti-forensic nature of the photographic act. However, after experimenting with these photographic lighting methods it seemed an overly simplistic approach to cast the dig site into half-darkness with dramatic red light. It also seemed to be moving away from the actual experience of digging. Therefore, the following year, the research returned to daylight hours, with the gradual reduction of coloured lighting (fig. 189). A renewed focus on the anthropology of digging emerged but with it the came the incorporation of big landscapes (fig. 190). As a result, the photographs also began to withdraw from the earlier forensic close-up shots and began considering the position of the

Figures 187–188 Elise Hilder Early Experiments 5–6 2014
digging space within the larger landscape and the *genius loci* of place. In doing so, the human figures became smaller but their actions no less significant. In many respects, their actions were amplified by their position in the landscape. No longer de-contextualised, they now appeared as though they were tending to the land and thus became part of the place—part of Winton, South Walker Creek, and Capricorn Caves. Their actions were now tied to the history of a place, history in the land. This transformation of photographic practice in the first few years of research ultimately reflected a phenomenological reflexivity to the unfolding and immersive expeditionary experience of the photographic “I.”


**POST-VISUALISATION, SLOW ART MAKING, AND NEW PHOTOGRAPHIC FRAMES OF REFERENCE**

Continuing in the earlier manner of slowness and expansion, post-visualisation is a key methodological practice of this research concerned with extending the process of art making to reflect the photographer’s ongoing engagement with research beyond initial image capture in the field. Put another way, photographic image making does not begin and end with instantaneous image taking. According to photographic theorist Robert Hirsch (2009, 18), post-visualisation allows the photographer to “continue to interact with the images at any stage of the process,” subsequently extending “the time of interaction with an image,” and potentially adding “additional spans of time” to the image. The implication for this research is that the photographer can alter and/or reposition photographs into new configurations after the original photographic event, to create additional modes of engagement with the photographic digging narrative (Hirsch
2009, 241, 250). It also allows room for additional personal anecdotes and storytelling reminiscent of nineteenth century antiquarianism.

In this scenario, photography, much like an excavation site, is an ongoing and fluid process of interpretation, renegotiation, and reflexivity. Idea, concept, capture, recapture, consolidation, post-visual production, re-consolidation, and exhibition are all phases of my visual practice that emphasise slow photographic process over instantaneous production. Such extended art making, with its potential to reorganise signs and meanings, ultimately challenges the scientific paradigm of the objective record. It also works against the modernist, heroic concept of pre-visualisation, in which the notion of a “single, fixed, perspective” crafted in advance by the superior vision of the photographer, is discordant with the realities of dynamic, ever-changing digging spaces (Hirsch 2009, 14). While photojournalist Henri Cartier-Bresson praised the intuitive skill of the photographer’s response to the decisive moment, landscape photographer Ansel Adams’s notion of pre-visualisation suggested good photographers could pre-visualise their image and thus control their shooting environment to suit their purity (or superiority) of vision in that moment of capture (Hirsch 2009, 17). Both concepts, in different ways, emphasise the heroic vision of the modernist photographer, suggesting the most important aspect of the photographic act was the genius moment of capture. Neither of these ideas suit photographic art making in the environment of palaeontological fieldwork.

ANTINATURAL SPATIALIZATION OF STORY AND THE PHOTOGRAPHIC THIRD EFFECT

Post-visualisation not only extends the time the photographer can work on their images, but in this case, it also extends the visual time of the image narrative itself. Here, post-production sequences that stretch time, space, and story, combine multiple perspectives and create new frames of reference (Hirsch 2009, 18, 241, 250). Multiplicity involves the use of more than “one image, moment, viewpoint or physical location” in a single image (Modeen 2013, 136). As a result, multiple viewpoints challenge the best general view or decisive moment. They also crucially signify that time has passed. Polyptych images, from the Greek word *polyptychos* meaning “many folds,” work in a similar way to grid images (Clarke and Clarke 2013b). In both
instances, single images are brought together in a specific formation to be viewed as a single work (Holleley 2009, 18). Polyptych images are comprised of many separate images (or folds), while the triptych contains three folds/images, and the diptych contains two (Chilvers 2014; Clarke and Clarke 2013a, Clarke and Clarke 2013b). Most importantly, the combination image is not just about breaking up the palaeontological space but the photographic one as well. Likewise, post-visualisation practice is not just a matter of cropping and re-aligning photographs; rather, it is a conscious decision to alter something significant about the temporal, spatial, and conceptual composition of the photographic narrative and the photographic artefact.

While the images in this research are not staged or doctored, they are cropped and repositioned with other images to reflect new conceptual and spatial landscapes that go beyond the reality of the instant in which they were initially produced. In similarly referring to photographic grids, Krauss (1979, 50, 55) calls such reorganisation intentional and antinatural. Moreover, because the combination image is seen as something antinatural, such a structure immediately alerts the viewer to its artifice and aesthetic construction: it is an art object not simply a record of reality (Krauss 1979, 50). The same could be said for the polyptych combinations created for this project. Such image construction debunks the objective façade of technical, scientific photography, and with it, its singular, decisive authority. Australian photographer and theorist Douglas Holleley (2009, 17–18) suggests images are affected by their placement alongside other images, whereby “the moment one image is placed next to another, the meaning of each is modified.” He claims individual frames joined together to make one combination work are not viewed as single entities, but rather as a unit of images working together to create a new, shared narrative with an extended field of meaning—the third effect.

Importantly, it is the differences between the individual combined images that help create completely new associations and new meanings and they do not have to be neatly resolved or assimilated to create a cohesive narrative. This also reflects the concept in gestalt psychology of closure, where cohesion of the whole is considered in light of its individual parts working together (Holleley 2009, 17–18). Any disjuncture or unresolved tension between different images is to be left unresolved. It is not the aim of the third effect to simplify and resolve points of difference.
and tension between the images. The more pronounced the difference between the images the more significant the third effect will be, which mirrors Deleuze and Guattari’s (1983) notion of “inclusive disjunction,” where meaning is derived from a unity of differences.

Choosing not to reconcile difference or tension also corresponds with the anti-forensic and anti-heroic rejection of revelation and filling in gaps. Professor of cultural history, art history, anthropology, and museum studies Ivan Gaskell (2006, 330–331) calls such unresolved difference, projective distortion or the implied pictorial space, whereby meaning is generated by the viewer in those unfillable gaps. Filling in gaps, or not filling them in, is one of the biggest differences between scientific and art-based field photography. It is the difference between a palaeontological worldbuilding and what I propose is a photographic world encountering (responding to site encounters) (Shanks 2912, 64). What this means for this project, is that combination images promote possibility rather than confine photographic narratives to positivist or picturesque paradigms. The combination photograph therefore offers both a structural and conceptual destabilising of dominant fieldwork image typologies. As Modeen (2013, 142) has suggested, multiplicity, or multiple points of view, can therefore be seen as a critical deconstructive strategy suggesting “an opening out of meaning” or a “taking apart” of entrenched ideas.

**SEEING COMPOSITIONALLY: THE CRITICALITY OF PHOTOGRAPHIC TIME AND SPACE**

*Photography is largely concerned with intervening in space and time.*

(Wells 2003, 1)

Multiplicity invites new ways of framing fieldwork (Stivale 2005, 68–69) and I wanted to experiment with how much a single image could be transformed when placed into new, combined relationships with other fieldwork photographs. Images were partnered based on: shared features such as shape, colour, exposure, and perspective; the expansion of the temporal and spatial configuration of site; and/or to reflect a specific experience that “I” the photographer encountered at that site. *Incisions (Coral, Sediment, and Trench)* (fig. 191), for example, has been
brought together based on the repetition of certain shapes and forms found at the Queensland Museum Megafauna site in the Capricorn Caves.

While on site, I was intrigued by how the shapes of natural and scientific cuts in the cave landscape mirrored each other. Therefore, while the perspective across the three panels differs, the shape of the cuttings and openings in the cave’s coral and sedimentary surfaces creates a visual synchronicity across this photographically reconfigured space. Panels one and three are photographed looking directly up at the irregularly formed roof of the cave, while the middle panel peeps into the excavation trench directly below. It is an antinatural spatialization of story and an impossible view in normal circumstances. However, here the implied pictorial space simultaneously presents looking up from site and down onto site. There is no revelation or forensic description, however, as the base of the digging pit is left just out of view. Instead, subtle beyond details such as work tools, safety chains, site ropes, repetitive abstract forms, and the way the caves lighting system illuminates the texture of the cave’s ceiling and floor dominate this photographic landscape.

Time is also a central, unavoidable characteristic of the photographic medium shared with other time-based disciplines such as archaeology, seen in the layeredness of both photographic and
historical time in Jeff Wall’s *Fieldwork*. In challenging the singular heroic decisive moment through a composite photograph, Wall raises interesting questions about photographic truth and, also, how to represent the long durational time of digging in a still image. Wall’s *Fieldwork* expresses slow/extended/multiple time through a build-up of similar frames layered on top of each other vertically in a single, digitally stitched photograph—the product of three weeks shooting on an archaeology dig. Conversely, this research project extends time (and space) horizontally rather than vertically. I do this by temporally and spatially stretching and mimicking the format of the panorama—a conventional stalwart in fieldwork photography that normally provides picturesque ambience or technical geological context seen in chapter 1 (Bate 2009, 107; Lyons et al. 2005, 22; Maurer 2009, 303, 307–308). However, rather than providing a seamless image, these new panoramas are temporally and spatially disjointed through the presence of gaps between each image panel. Such an approach not only challenges the heroic decisive moment, but it also unnaturally unfolds photographic time and space and emphasises the long durational quality of the fieldwork process as I encountered it and chose to reassemble it. On the matter of how to represent extended or slow time through a still image, Wells (in Wells and Standing 2009, 5) suggests that the use of grids/image combinations helps to “allow distinctions between discrete moments in photography,” which subsequently enable the possibility of “fluidity and change through stillness.”

![Figure 192 Elise Hilder Palaeo Channel (Site QML1470 SWC-US) 2015](image)

*Palaeo Channel (Site QML1470 SWC-US)* (fig. 192) offers an example of such fluidity as it was photographed across a seven-hour long fieldwalking survey at South Walker Creek Mine with scientists from the Queensland Museum. The purpose of this hike was to map for possible future digging sites. As its title suggests, these panels were photographed along an ancient river bed. In addition to evoking the process and accumulation of slow fieldwalking time, I also wanted to depict the physical sense of movement through the ancient channel system. This was achieved
in post-production by combining frames with similar composition, tone, and perspective to reconfigure the phenomenological experience of the fieldwalking journey. The shape of the photographic procession also mirrors the winding nature of the creek bed trail and the spatial accumulation hints at time having passed (figs. 192–195).

Figure 193 Elise Hilder Palaeo-Channel, Site QML1470 SWC-US 2015, detail of panel 1

Figure 194 Elise Hilder Palaeo-Channel, Site QML1470 SWC-US 2015, detail of panel 3
While adopting the format of the panorama, figure 192 is not seamlessly stitched together. The frames do not coalesce perfectly and the gaps between the panels emphasise a disruption of meaning, time, and space. Forensically and technically, this image tells the viewer very little about Pleistocene-Holocene geology, as the surrounding channel wall has been cropped out of the frame and the scattered shadows, lens flare, and sometimes distant viewpoint problematise the normal information-bearing function of the technical photograph. The focus is instead on the movement of workers—hands outstretched, kneeling, walking, looking, touching—as they contemplate the earth’s stratigraphy. Their hi-vis uniforms are bizarrely juxtaposed against the russet coloured mass of earth they are scanning with the intense acuity of the passionate gaze. Fieldwalking is an anthropologically occupied endeavour that brings with it the colours, figures, and tools of a contemporary working community. For the photographer, this image represents a combined engagement with the scientific, cultural, embodied, temporal, spatial, and aesthetic elements of this site: self-others-things. It also offers an alternative or antinatural spatialization of story.

At first glance, the three integrated panels in figure 196, taken during different phases of the same dig, evoke the sense that the earth has parted or peeled back to make way for the digging
Anonymous workers tap, brush, and pick at the dirt encased fossils in the centre panel while the frames either side create a sense of downward movement or a dramatic drop of perspective. On another level however, the multiple perspectives also importantly suggest the photographer’s movement around the space and the effect of different, multiple durational experiences accumulating over time: a phenomenological expansion. Panels 1 and 3 are similar and reflect the process of photographing what Hirsch (2009, 250) refers to as “joiners”; that is, frames shot successively one after the other with the intention of being joined in post-production, though not necessarily in the same order they were shot. I call this process circumnavigation with a camera, whereby a site is documented from all possible angles, but at the same relative height and viewpoint for later combination work. However, unlike some of the previous combinations, this triptych is overtly misaligned. It is important that not all images join neatly at the seams; however, as the misalignments or fracture points underscore a change in the original landscape and signal its transformation into a new aesthetically and conceptually manufactured space: the third effect. The gaps and misalignments also challenge the seamlessness of the pristinely heroic fieldwork panorama tradition.
Sauropod Bone Bed II (fig. 197) is also the result of circumnavigating the dig site with opposite viewpoints of the excavation pit simultaneously offered up at the same time. It is another impossible view—conjoining both north facing and south facing images of the same space—but here the opposing views of the pit are unified through the antinatural spatialization of the photographic story. The diptych creates an illusion of extended or expanded space in an otherwise crowded, confined pit. At the same time, it also resists didactic recording through the low camera angle and obvious concealment of evidence in its jacketed form.

![Figure 197 Elise Hilder Sauropod Bone Bed II 2015](image)

The shift towards using combination images as a visual strategy came about as a result of wanting to create more photographic space, and convey longer, slower, durations of time. However, it was also informed by examples of combination photography encountered in the earlier research phases. Aaron Watson’s circular landscapes (fig. 198) and Richard Barnes’s *Vertical Triptych with Shroud* (fig. 199) planted the initial seeds of a photographic multiplicity, layeredness, and expansion. Watson’s circular landscapes were particularly relevant to my own fieldwork experiences, given his connection to phenomenological theory and the central importance he placed on experiencing archaeological sites through fieldwalking and photographic manoeuvring. His circular landscapes, though framed through a branch of archaeological theory exploring Neolithic culture and Neolithic perception, nonetheless emphasise the embodied experience of the researcher and the reconstruction of site through a multiplicity of world encountering views. Similarly, Barnes’s *Vertical Triptych with Shroud* defers a direct recording of site by photographically layering strata on top of each other in an image-based stratigraphy. I was
particularly interested in how this layered photographic work suggested depth and digging purely through a photographic rearrangement and stacking of space.

![Photomontage of Avebury 2003](image1.png)
![Vertical Triptych with Shroud 1996](image2.png)

**Figure 198** Aaron Watson Photomontage of Avebury 2003  
**Figure 199** Richard Barnes Vertical Triptych with Shroud 1996

**BEYOND THE FIELD: DISPLAYING FIELDWORK IN THE ART GALLERY**

One aspect of palaeontological fieldwork photography never mentioned is how it might be displayed in an art gallery. Interestingly, in this viewing context the photograph itself becomes the artefact, replacing the fossil specimen as the prime object of interest. This is because the art gallery singles out and actively values art process over all other forms of potential research. It also continues the main aim of this project to provide photographic authority and autonomy over the research process. Exhibition is a cultural and visual practice concerned with displaying, connecting, and audiencing (Sullivan 2010, 217). It transports or extends the photographic enterprise into a new context as an artefact for visual consumption by an audience that encounters both the concept and materiality of the photographic process. Display is one of the
most important aspects of visual art practice, as it transforms things from ordinary life and reframes them as aesthetic objects for contemplation. Archaeologist Chris Gosden suggests, “display has the effect of abstracting objects from the overall flow of life, so that they can then be singled out for attention.” Further, display also “creates a form of fiction which necessitates cutting some of the links things have with each other and with people in the processes of everyday life” (Gosden in Renfrew et al. 2004, 36). Displaying the photographic artefact in a gallery context likewise cuts ties with the palaeontological community and its scientific audiencing platforms.

Throughout the duration of this project I exhibited photographic work-in-progress at the Queensland Centre for Photography (QCP) (2013), the Hold Artspace (2015), and the Art Meets Science Exhibition at the Geosciences Precinct in Brisbane (2016). I presented a conference paper at the annual Art Association of Australia and New Zealand in 2014 titled Aesthetics of Digging,

Figure 200 The Incomplete Dinosaur 2015, The Hold Artspace Exhibition, West End, Brisbane (Photo: The Hold Artspace)
produced a catalogue to accompany my exhibition at the Hold Artspace, and conducted artist talks at the Australian Age of Dinosaurs museum in Winton. All these avenues offered me the opportunity to test ideas and evaluate how my photographs were speaking to audiences as art objects. As previously mentioned, my photographs were initially presented as single images (figures 200–206). It was only through viewing them in the gallery context that I realised the single image was not working.

Figures 201–206 *The Incomplete Dinosaur* 2015, The Hold Artspace Installation, West End, Brisbane (Photo: The Hold Artspace)
I had one polyptych work featured in my 2015 exhibition at the Hold Artspace that was printed on a single roll of photographic paper (fig. 207). While experimenting with the notion of multiplicity, this work nonetheless was more of an object study of rock-encased fossils rather than a photographic landscape. After my 2015 solo exhibition *The Incomplete Dinosaur*, I began to reconsider space within and in-between my images.

![Figure 207 The Incomplete Dinosaur 2015, The Hold Artspace Exhibition, West End (Photo: The Hold Artspace)](image)

A sense of expansion was needed: spatially, temporally, photographically. The photographic narrative needed to be connected to landscape but at the same time, incorporate my growing interest in multiplicity, slowness, reassembly, and antinatural spatialization of story. Withdrawing and stretching space was also instrumental in minimising the forensic gaze and challenging the predictability of the commercial, picturesque photograph. Figure 208 represents
the beginning of my transition from single to combination landscape images. However, here I chose to print combination images together on the same sheet of photographic paper.

Figure 208 Elise Hilder Art Meets Science Exhibition 2016, Geosciences Precinct, Dutton Park

I have since changed my printing and display strategy so that each panel within the polyptych image combinations are hung separately, though closely, on the wall together rather than printed on one seamless photographic paper surface. The choice to print the panels separately reinforces both photographic materiality—the photograph as artefact—but also the difference or tension associated with Holleley’s (2009, 17) third effect and Deleuze and Guattari’s (1983) inclusive disjunction. As previously stated, it is the differences between combined images that help create completely new associations and new meanings, and they do not have to be resolved or assimilated to create a cohesive narrative. As such, extended meaning, or the third effect, comes from a degree of separation as François Zourabichvili (2012, CC 153) suggests, “everything divides, but into itself.” Therefore, physical gaps on the gallery wall within each polyptych work amplifies the third effect and the antinatural spatialization of story. It also resists the seamless, polished, glossy aesthetic of commercial and editorial photography spreads.
The exhibition of the final photographic research, titled *Digging on the Other Side of Dinosaurs*, is broken into two main installation areas. One features open excavation landscapes, and the other, subterranean excavation landscapes (the caves). Photographs produced at the Capricorn Caves megafauna excavation site have been placed within a separate, intimate, and darkened gallery room—evoking the feeling of being inside the caves. Griffith University’s Pop Gallery in Fortitude Valley provides such a space, with a small supplementary room adjoining the main gallery. This smaller area is also painted black to amplify the interiority of this digging landscape series. Here the gallery space is transformed into a microcosm of the real caves, replicating the sense of moving about in a confined, low-light fieldwork environment. In complete contrast, the main gallery is open, light, and filled with the big, open landscapes of Winton channel country and South Walker Creek.

In the main gallery, the walls alternate between black and white, however, as the entire front face of the gallery is open to the street, the space is very light. I also wanted to convey a sense of big, wide, expansive space through this area. I have used compendium walls to create new, smaller viewing spaces in this main gallery, but the images in this area have a sense of flow between them and are hung in a unified straight line in and around this space to evoke the long, blunt horizon line seen in many of the photographs themselves.

I also wanted to convey a sense of the buzzing activity of the dig site. I did not want to leave large spaces of the gallery walls empty as I wanted the open landscapes in the exhibition to convey a gradual build-up of intense activity, enabling audiences the opportunity to feel immersed in the digging environments. Hence the decision to include 26 combination works. Importantly, the different photographic stories were not lined up to present a day-by-day linear chronology, or a logical progression of dig events. They were not grouped according to the types of fossils in the image or even the sites they were taken. They were largely placed together according to visual themes of light, line, form, colour, and horizon. That is, the installation rationale was visually not scientifically structured.
CONCLUSION

The past is a foreign country, they do things differently there.

(L.P. Hartley in Lowenthal 2011, xvi)

The past is a foreign country whose features are shaped by today’s predilections, its strangeness domesticated by our own preservation of its vestiges.

(Lowenthal 2011, xvii)
Archaeologist Colin Renfrew’s aesthetics of excavation and art curator Dieter Roelstraete’s excavating and unearthing are concepts that have provided a starting point for my own photographic practice-led research. One speaks from historical-scientific discourse, the other, contemporary art discourse, but both speak for a need to open and unfold the visual space of fieldwork and excavation to new narrative possibilities. For this research, the notion of unfolding stemmed from Michael Shanks’s (1992, 183) particular interest in a photographic examination of the “slow painstaking process” of excavation through a sensitivity to archaeological “process” and “unfolding” of history in the contemporary space of digging. While not discussed in this research, recent reflection of my visual research to date has revealed a future potential research avenue in Deleuze and Guattari’s related notion of the fold between space, time, history, and place.

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As previously stated, photography and palaeontology forged a strong ontological alliance in the nineteenth century when both disciplines formally emerged and this relationship—both intimate and at times adversarial—remains to this day. As a photographer, I wanted to probe this enduring connection and challenge some of the entrenched visual conventions hindering other types of photographic narratives from emerging. The goal has similarly been to address the absence of genuine palaeontological fieldwork encounters in photographic research and to frame this exploration through the process of photographic artmaking.

As a photographer working within palaeontological science communities, I have worked to overcome the lingering burden of objectivity. While critical visual theory has long since surpassed metanarratives of objectivity, photographic verisimilitude, and the innocent eye, hard science still maintains authority over most aspects of palaeontological image production today. Attached to this burden of objectivity is the assumption that photographs take inventories of evidence rather than make representations of fieldwork encounters. Historian and geographer David Lowenthal highlights a central tension in historical-scientific culture which underscores this burden: then and now. From one perspective, those studying the past are concerned with
understanding how life was then. The implication for photography within this context is that emphasis is placed on recording evidence in-situ to help scientists document, examine and eventually reconstruct the past as it was. This agenda is geared towards worldbuilding and filling in the gaps of our knowledge. From another perspective, the doing of history or the daily rituals of fieldwork are fundamentally about the now: “shaped by today’s predilections ... domesticated by our own preservation of its vestiges” (Lowenthal 2011, xvii). An emphasis on now focuses instead on documenting the people and processes entwined in fieldwork culture today—what Michael Shanks terms archaeological ethnography. Instead of recording evidence this framework focuses on how the photographer interacts, interprets, and represents the ways people domesticate the past. Therefore, fieldwork is not just about digging but all the other associated and sometimes mundane activities associated with fieldwork such as slow looking, surface collecting, surveying, fieldwalking, photographing, brushing, touching, sifting, resting, and the countless in-between moments that fall through the cracks in technical and commercial photographic records.

The forensic gaze emerged in my research as the most dominant image convention associated with fieldwork. A close second to this was the gross over simplification or sensationalism of palaeontological fieldwork through heroic and picturesque photographic conventions. The scientific sage, the chiselled adventurer, big and pristine specimens, sanitised and dressed work sites, and the pretty landscape are all manifestations of the heroic associated with press, editorial, and commercial genres of photography. Frequently, both forensic and heroic narratives also work together to bolster public awareness of science research for newsworthy stories and to simultaneously provide supporting evidence and context for technical papers. While heroic narratives of digging might be populated with productive digging, eureka moments of discovery, and perfect specimens framed through pictorially pleasant views, such *mise en scène* staging of site offers limited visual inquiry.

While it could be argued that this research project is undermining the role of technical and commercial photography and their associated scientific processes, this is certainly not the case. Nor is this project nihilistically advocating the downfall of science and its associated image
regimes. After all, science culture is the ethnographic core of this research. Instead, I have taken advantage of the pre-existing relationship that exists between photography and palaeontology as motivation to search for a deeper and more critical level of visual engagement. This has meant the study of palaeontological fieldwork also required its own immersive photographic fieldwork methodology, involving participant observation and art making in communities. Therefore, a key methodological aspect of this project was access and extensive immersion in the field over six dig seasons.

From fieldwork to theory, another challenge has been locating a place within research culture to position my project. It has been argued throughout this exegetical inquiry that despite the paradoxical centrality of photographic practice in palaeontological culture, surprisingly little (if any) serious discussion about the critical role of the photograph in the production of palaeontological fieldwork interpretation exists. Fieldwork photography does not seem to fit into any one neat category of discourse. While some research on photography and archaeology has emerged in recent years located in the art historical writings of Frederick Bohrer and Kitty Hauser, the more general art frameworks of Roelstraete’s retrospective historiographic inquiry and Godfrey’s artist as historian, or in the post-processual archaeology theory of Michael Shanks, no such visual research exists between palaeontology and photography. Palaeontological field photography as research is not a topic that appears in scientific spheres either beyond a discussion of how to correctly light specimens for maximum preservation of detail.

_Beyond the Forensic and Heroic_ has therefore aimed to create a new set of epistemological and methodological interventions into palaeontological fieldwork culture that counter the overarching visual tropes of both the forensic and heroic to establish a new pictorial or aesthetic space for photography to co-exist alongside the traditional modes of image production. In doing so, it has created a new third space of photographic documentary-art research born out of embodied phenomenological encounter, ethnographic engagement, and a reflexive art making process. In this third space, this project has called for a separation of science-based and documentary-art-based photographic methodology and a recognition of more autonomous, sensuous scholarship for the photographic researcher. While palaeontology certainly provides
the context for research to take place, the main subject matter is photography itself. What is a field photograph as a photograph? Not, what is a field photograph as an applied branch of palaeontology?

As this research has demonstrated, photography is a phenomenologically embodied practice in which seeing and representing the world compositionally and affectively directly relates to my encounters with self-others-things. As Hamilakis et al. (2009, 283) have suggested, the affective dimension of photography refers to the sensorial, emotive and suggestive capacity of art to take us somewhere else beyond physical description and into the memory the photographer both experiences and simultaneously creates. Therefore, my photographs are not just a response to an abstract idea about the aesthetics and culture of digging, rather, they are a direct result of my participation in and negotiation of such sites as a documentary artist and member of the excavation team.

In this context, image making is connected to durational slow process, conceptual development, and aesthetic transformation. Durational slowness includes: slow looking; slow digging and tending; slow art making; and slow anthropological immersion and participant observation over time. The critical power of slowness resides in its ability to turn a quick, forensic or dispassionate gaze into a concentrated, curious, and passionate one reminiscent of the nineteenth century antiquarian sensibility of personal collection and personal commentary. Conceptual development on the other hand refers to the emergence of anti-forensic and anti-heroic frameworks for photographic practice. Aesthetic transformation not only refers to a phenomenological photographic reflexivity to self-others-things encountered in the in the field, but also to the continued photographic intervention in post-production through the post-visualisation of new image combinations. My repositioning and combining of new frames together to create polyptych landscape configurations created a uniquely photographic rendering of the dig space. Not only spatially and temporally altered, the joining of multiple photographs also created new conceptual storylines that can be understood in relation to Krauss’s concept of the antinatural spatialization of story. Further to this is the disruptive or
deconstructive third effect that emerged from combining different photographic frames of the dig together into one consolidated work.

Such an approach to photographic image making is the antithesis of simple and speedy picture taking which archaeologist, journalist, and artist Christine Finn suggests needs an alternative slow journalism and slow art making that matches the slow pace of excavation. Such an approach likewise featured in the durational build-up of photographic time in Jeff Wall’s *Fieldwork*. However, while Wall layers time vertically— with each frame successively blended on top of each other to contest notions of a photographic truth captured in the decisive moment—*Beyond the Forensic and Heroic* instead expands time and space horizontally through combination panels that mimic the traditional archaeological panorama format. However, the antinatural spacing between each panel in the polyptych image combinations ultimately undermined the traditionally seamless, informative, and picturesque panorama. Rather than providing the best general view, the interruption created by the gaps between each panel offers breaks and new points of connection bridging different moments and locations from the dig site together into uniquely photographic made landscapes. In doing so, it collectively challenges the heroic decisive moment, the information-bearing function of the technical record, and the seamless, predictable best general view of the picturesque. Also associated with the panorama is one of the key photographic aspects of this research: landscape.

With its mandate to withdraw and look up, photographic landscape practice became a key ally for establishing both an anti-forensic and anti-heroic field of view. Withdrawing from the forensic proximity to evidence and the heroic closeness to dominant personas meant that other aspects of fieldwork could emerge. Strategically woven into the photographic narrative, rather than functioning as a backdrop, landscape not only problematises the downward facing forensic gaze of palaeontological specimen recording but it also situates fieldwork as a practice connected to history in the land and art historical landscape traditions. Found, surreal, romantic, direct, fragmented, contested, combined, and extended—the photographic landscape provided the physical and conceptual space needed to picture a photographic aesthetics of digging in-situ in the land.
Lastly, a key aspect the retrospective historiographic mode drawn upon in this research was the deconstructive aesthetic of withholding. Not wanting my photographs to simply fill in gaps in a revelatory or didactic way, withholding instead advocated a redirection onto other subtle beyond details of the digging space. Here, I was able to explore more of the underrepresented dimensions of historical-scientific fieldwork rather than the big picture metanarratives (Roelstraete 2009, 25). As stated in chapter 1, such historical and visual withholding is the difference between showing positive (science-based) assertions and making new interpretations through negative divergences. In moving away from the dominant forensic and heroic fieldwork paradigms, this research has ultimately reconsidered palaeontological excavation sites as pictorial spaces contextualised within the photographic landscape and framed by documentary-art traditions. Thus, the resulting photographs not only consider how prehistoric digging sites can be transformed through contemporary scientific intervention and ritual, but, more importantly, how photographs themselves can transform our reading of such sites.
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