Chapter One

Prologue: Visual narratives

Before the eye

The topics of photography, women and homelessness, particularly during the late twentieth century have incited and inspired a sea of discourse that affords little opportunity for disengaged reading, demanding a critical self-awareness. For this reason I am beginning with a personal reflection that acknowledges and establishes my own experience in the research analysis. This approach borrows from Anne Game’s, Undoing the Social: Towards a Deconstructive Sociology (1991), which begins with a discussion of a favourite and significant photograph taken by Anne Zahalka, titled, The Sunbather Ia'. Game uses Zahalka’s image to assert her own passions and interests as central to her writing by identifying the pleasures of reading, sun bathing and the beach as formative and transformative features of her self, and therefore her research. A feature for Game is the presence of water as a site of consciousness and renewal, as a boundary reaching beyond certainty, an entry to unknown, unfathomable, yet chartable and therefore comprehensible depths. Game calls for a deconstructive sociology, a practice that necessarily employs themes of desire, memory, time and the body. Drawing on French poststructural theorising she posits her experience within analysis of the social, while seeking “to develop a materialist semiotics ... an understanding of meaning processes as both temporal and embodied ... [breaking] with distinctions between representation and the real, text and context, theory and practice ... [and providing] the opportunity to reformulate the question of social change” (Game, 1991, p.x).

According to Game meaning is created in (and by) time and place, shifting between reality and representation so much so that the difference between ‘what is’ and ‘what is seen to be’ becomes fairly arbitrary. Thus we are engaged constantly in negotiating our
sense of being between the actual and the imagined. The resultant comprehension of world and self, argues Game, is no less real than experience; it is experience. In this sociocultural and interpersonal imbrication, photographic images as influential cultural objects are employed variously to define, refine, extend and contextualise who we are, where we have been and what forms our desire might take. Their meaning, however, is always unstable and contestable, as Annette Kuhn suggests:

Thus can a simple photograph figure in, and its showing set the scene for the telling of, a family drama – each of whose protagonists might tell a different tale, or change their own story at every retelling. What I am telling you – “my own story” – about this picture is itself changeable. In each re-enactment, each restaging of this family drama, details get added and dropped, the story fleshes out, new connections are made, emotional tones – puzzlement, anger, sadness – fluctuate. (Kuhn, 1991, p.20)

Denise Farran similarly observes the contingency of photographic meaning, claiming:

Our reading of the ‘same’ photograph, of what the photograph is about, often changes over time. As the meaning of the photograph is socially constructed, so there are always various meanings possible and indeed achieved of a photograph. People often argue about what the ‘same’ photograph is about. Further, at a single reading of a photograph we can have conflicting ideas about it. (Farran, 1990, p. 264)

In light of such observations, I adopt the position that visual images, in this case photographs, operate as sociocultural and political products and objects at both individual and collective levels, simultaneously emerging out of, and producing context and meaning. The following account composed from stories told to me by my mother about a particular family photograph serves to illustrate not only the investment in manifold understandings of a portrayed subject’s identity, but also how the narrative representations surrounding this image contributed to shaping my own approach to making sense of the human condition and identity through photographic imagery. This particular narrative also illustrates one of the avenues through which I have engaged with the possibilities offered by photography for shaping and constructing futures, for in/forming desire.
The impetus to embark on this journey has many possible beginning points, and as I describe in the chapter to follow, my inquiry catalysed around three photographic documentary projects about homelessness in the city of Melbourne, Australia, that I conducted between 1987 (The International Year of Shelter for the Homeless) and 1996. All three of these projects were in different ways concerned with the visual representation of homeless women, particularly young women. My interest in young people’s experience of homelessness, however, began much earlier in my life. Questions of when found me trawling memories reaching beyond early adult working years to the more intimate experiences of family life, in particular my mother’s stories about her childhood. One of these, assembled around a photograph of an aunt I never met, emerged as significant, and I now believe was formative in my fascination with the narrative variations associated with certain photographic representations, particularly those dealing with women’s exclusion from family and home (figure 1).

The photograph of Alyse ²

The deployment in 1888 of Eastman’s Kodak camera saw the emergence of photographic technology able to produce affordable family snap shots (Berger, 1980). In keeping with other industrialised countries eager to engage with new technology, most Australian families have at the very least a small photograph collection. My family is no exception. These collections of visual memories (Berger, 1980, p. 49), as Kuhn (1991) and Farran (1990) observe, with their attached explanatory oral histories (no matter how fragmentary) often tell various and contradictory versions about the depicted events, people and places. Most children of the twentieth century have grown up accepting almost without question that memories as evidence and affirmation of lived experiences can profoundly shape relationships and interactions with our social and material worlds. As a fragment of my own oral and visual family history³, this narrative does not and cannot sit apart from either the work I have engaged in with women experiencing homelessness, the photographic images I have produced with and for them, or the analysis I bring to bear on their photographic representation.
Figure 1

"Ailiate" c.1949. Portrait of my maternal aunt taken when she was about 16 years old, approximately six months before her death in a motorcycle accident.
My grandmother’s walnut-veneered buffet was a monument of carefully stored gifts, souvenirs and photographs. Behind the frosted sliding glass doors were housed presents from birthdays and Christmases recent and long passed. Nan did not use her gifts according to their intended function. To her they were precious and decorative objects. No matter how functional, she would save them in the buffet for imagined future occasions that stretched way beyond her own lifetime (my mother’s prophesy that we would get them all back when Nan died proved to be true). Although irrational to me as a child, her reasoning emerged from a lifetime of material poverty. Within the confines of the display area were various plates, glasses, bars of soap, tins of talcum powder, hand-knitted tea cosies, china cups, coffee percolators, kettles and even saucepans. On top of the buffet, inexpensively framed, stood various-sized photographs of family members. The majority of these were gifts also. There were the usual family assortment, weddings, babies, my grandfather in his army uniform, and Nan’s own parents and siblings. With five living children, all married, and eventually fifteen grandchildren, the photographs spread beyond the flat horizontal surface of the small cabinet onto the walls, the television set, side tables and the bookcase. To my knowledge Nan never owned a camera, (although there is an out of focus ‘box brownie’ snap of me linked to a not so vague memory of the event of its taking. I remember Nan’s expression of dismay when I moved, and her exasperated reproof that inside the camera I was just a fuzzy blur). Regular extended family get togethers were few and far between, and so throughout my childhood I would go into the lounge room to meet and familiarise myself with my relatives through their photographs. I knew many of them, especially my cousins, but of course a number were deceased or unfamiliar, and it was these that fascinated me the most. One of these images was a relatively large (10in x8in) portrait of a young woman (figure 1). Her identity became an issue of ambiguity between my two sisters and myself. Even now with the record supposedly set straight, the young woman’s identity refuses to fix, moving, as it has for at least thirty-five years (and I suspect longer) between my deceased aunt Alyse, and my mother. Like a carefully coded visual representation, there is truth in what my mother says, but she often speaks with allegory and riddle.
The story Mum told to me, but apparently not my two sisters, about this photograph of her sister unfolded in serial-like parts over my childhood. At first, like my sisters I thought the woman in the image was my mother. The name Alyse first emerged as a briefly mentioned character in my mother’s childhood oratories. On questioning Mum about Alyse I initially received a slightly terse response with flimsy detail. ‘Alyse was a lady’ I knew once, you don’t know her, she died before you were born’. No doubt in part due to Mum’s half-hearted resistance, I was driven by curiosity. With a little insistence she confessed, ‘Alyse was your aunty’. ‘Yes, she was my big sister’. It did not take long before Mum was compelled to explain that the young woman in the photograph was Alyse. Further persistence unfurled her story. It was clear that Alyse’s life and death had immense significance for Mum and Nan. I was instructed not to speak to my grandmother of Alyse and yet there was a moment when between the three of us it was understood that I knew. Nan began to give me clothing associated with Alyse; such as the black rayon mourning dress she had worn for months after Alyse died. The late 1940s style was very fashionable in the mid 1970s, so I was keen to accept and wear it. I was given Alyse’s unfinished knitting, a blue and white cardigan with only one sleeve. A project developed between the three of us around finding the correct wool and pattern to knit the last sleeve; Alyse’s unfinished work. We couldn’t make an exact match, the new sleeve (that I knitted) didn’t belong, the original dye lots were too old, the colours too fresh and new. Nan suggested dying the whole garment as Alyse had done with another cardigan. To prove the success of this solution the dyed cardigan was produced and given to me, which I happily wore until it became too small. While Mum spoke to me of Alyse’s struggle, suffering and victimisation, Nan’s memories were of her talents and skills, never mentioning her death or its circumstances.

Alyse was the third child of four in my grandmother’s first marriage, my mother the eldest of two in her second. My grandmother’s second husband, my grandfather, although a wonderfully generous man when sober, (and always gentle and interminably patient with me) was angry and violent when intoxicated. A fisherman, he would return home from days or weeks away, drunk and aggressive. My grandmother and her six children were victims of his violence. At sixteen, following a particularly violent physical and verbal assault, Alyse ran away from home with her boyfriend. Her family
did not see her alive again. She died as a pillion passenger in a motorcycle accident a few weeks later. The news of Alyse’s death was delivered to my grandmother by neighbours, who heard it broadcast at 7 o’clock in the morning on the radio, prior to any official notification. Mum was nine years old at the time.

Alyse became a ghost in my childhood. I was never allowed anywhere near a motorbike, for fear I might meet the same fate. Mum, as the abused child who survived, was well aware of her likeness to Alyse, often being mistaken for ‘Ally’ at local dances. In a family album there is a ‘box brownie’ photograph of Mum wearing Alyse’s jeans and checked shirt. It leads the knowing viewer to ask, ‘Is she being Alyse?’ The narrative of the circumstances that led to Alyse’s tragic death swam around and between my relationships with both my grandparents. Only twice did I witness my grandfather’s violence, enough to convince me of the veracity of my mother’s recounts.

For my two sisters however, the smiling young woman in the stand-alone frame was my mother. I grew up having no idea that this was their perception, such was the exclusiveness of my mother’s telling and the silence of my knowing. If they did ask who she was, perhaps my mother gave an ambiguous response; perhaps there was convenience in the confusion. After all, I only discovered Alyse when I sought embodiment of a name. Not so long ago one of my sisters referred to the photograph as an image of our mother taken at her debutante ball; I could not believe her misconception. I checked the ‘misunderstanding’ with sister number two, she had the same impression; that it was a photograph of Mum. How could we grow up in the same household with such different versions of a significant family image? There is no doubt the portrait of the young woman could easily be taken for my mother, it is almost impossible to gaze on her face and not see my mother’s smile spreading to the corners of my mother’s eyes (I am told I share some of the same features). Despite their different paternity, Mum and Alyse were obviously very alike.

My own confusion with details of the photograph has also emerged through an exploration that has taken on the dimensions of a family history project. I had thought the photo was taken at Alyse’s debutante ball, but when rechecking details of the
portrait (perhaps I had imagined this tale of family violence) my mother located the
taking of the photograph at a guesthouse where Alyse had worked during a previous exit
from home. While telling me this she also wondered why the particular photographer
(whose name she remembered clearly) was working out of his Melbourne-based studio
on that particular occasion, and so there was speculation that perhaps Alyse sat for the
portrait in his city studio, after all. Although the exact location of where the photograph
was taken remains in question, the ambiguity adds dimensions to Alyse’s story.
Mentioning the guesthouse asserts Alyse’s commitment to work and family; she did not
leave home to indulge herself, she had sought and gained employment, but had then
returned home in an attempt to make amends. Connections are also drawn with my
mother’s life story; she left home as well when she reached the same age as Alyse to
escape my grandfather’s rages, taking work as a live-in domestic in a seaside
rehabilitation facility. Whatever uncertainties there are about the identity of the young
woman in the portrait, between my mother, my grandmother and myself there was
consensus that the image was of Alyse.

While the begging question might be, who is the subject of this photograph and its
narrative, I am less interested in fixing this piece of family history than in the range of
interpretations it permits. Whether the young woman is my mother, which I seriously
doubt, or my aunt, makes little difference, the image and its stories provided my mother
with the opportunity to talk about her experiences of family violence, and the
devastating effect on herself, her mother and her siblings. It also offered a location
where she could place, or perhaps rest, a particularly painful aspect of her life. My
mother’s anguish over her sister’s death, and possibly also the pervading very real threat
to her own life, are enshrined in, and expressed through her memories of, and
connection with Alyse. The other players in the drama cannot be left out either. My
grandfather is portrayed as dangerous and violent, against many other stories and
experiences of his generosity and patience. My grandmother, not always meek, is cast as
the long-suffering silent victim, whose pain over the circumstances of her daughter’s
death endured until the end of her own life. What might be some of the effects of
sustained ambiguity over the identity of the young woman as either my aunt or my
mother? Alyse’s life story is somewhat fixed, her corporeal life is over, while my
mother is still alive. To an extent she has explored and created aspects of her ‘self’ through this portrait, which functioned as a reminder of the fragility of her physical and emotional safety, while at the same time providing a source of strength and liberation by allowing her to resist a fixed identity. She could reflect on and imagine an identity that had escaped (even if this was through death) the emotional pain that I know has always haunted her.

At the less personal level the photographic site is established as one of constantly contested and contestable meaning. As viewing authors we are able to move in and out of the image, writing our lives and our ‘selves’ into, and out of the image’s meaning through potentially endless narrative possibilities. The photograph is highlighted as an object that provides opportunity for an infinite range of inter-subjective journeys; transgressions, communions, affirmations, validations, even exorcisms of self and identity, even though these intimate and personal actions are often left unspoken or unrealised.

In searching through and attempting to analyse my collection of photographs of homeless young women it occurred to me that Alyse’s photograph was the first image I encountered that connected the portrayed subject with a story of homelessness. Alyse’s story could have belonged to any number of young women that I have worked with and photographed. This family artefact with its associated horrors and confusions was one of a number of material objects woven into the unfolding story of my mother’s abusive childhood. It marked, perhaps even became, the baton passed on to me as consignment of the duty to somehow redress, undo, and relieve through telling. To take responsibility for ‘dealing with’ the awful experiences, and thus memories of actual family moments when my mother’s physical and emotional survival was under threat. For my own part as the recipient of the story, I both recoiled from, and was fascinated by the imagining of these events so foreign to my own experiences as a child. At the same time I felt the sense of importance that goes with being privy to knowledge shared by a select few; knowledge that affords considerable power; family secrets. The narrativisation of Alyse’s photograph not only illustrates multiple understandings of subject and context,
it also offers clues as to how a particular photograph and its story played a significant role in shaping my own fluid approach to making meaning out of visual images.

The formulaic blandness of the photographic portrait offers broad scope for ambiguity, allowing the photograph itself to act as a more specific trace of the truth of my mother’s and her mother’s apparently silenced narrative. To the uninformed observer the image lacks obvious evidence of any distress or personal crisis. The representation is of a smiling, red lipped young woman with laughing eyes and the short wavy hairstyle that was fashionable in the late 1940s. The background, although mostly framed out, glitters, locating the event within a celebratory space. Alyse is wearing an off-the-shoulder blouse (which according to Mum was disapproved of by my grandmother). She is turned to face the camera, smiling in its direction, out at the viewer. Who is she smiling at? The photograph was a gift from Alyse to my grandmother. Was it taken for her, or Alyse’s boyfriend also? (The ‘disapproved of’ blouse suggests Nan was not the only intended recipient of the gift). Was she smiling in defiance at her stepfather? Was this a display of accomplishment, of the ability to succeed despite his abuse? The original image is black and white, but common with the time, it has been hand coloured. Alyse’s bright red lips suggest a performance, a deliberate preparation for the photographic event. There is movement in Alyse’s pose, almost. Not quite off balance, she is held still. In one brief moment she is frozen, fixed in joy forever, as my grandmother, as any mother would want to remember her child. The message is that this is one happy moment of many. Alyse is normalised, rendered ‘just like everyone else’ within the photograph’s frame. It would appear she likes where she is, so much so that she wants to be forever in this space that simultaneously defies and fixes time. The photographic image performs its task, Alyse smiles out at us.

This image, so intimate and yet so transcendent, so ordinary and yet so opaque, represents a multitude of similarly masked portraits, in which private agonies are visually written out, obliterated by standardising conventions. At the same time it offers the possibility that the story behind the image might be told, that the male/functions of silence might be transgressed by the perseverance of other competing memories and stories. Many of the portraits I have taken of young women unable to live at home with
their families express similar messages and desires. Alyse’s desire highlights their desire, to be located in sites of pleasure, to be seen by themselves and others as confident, happy and safe, with promising futures that reach beyond the boundaries of the frame. If Alyse’s photograph did not exist, it is doubtful I would have persisted in finding out details about her life and death, let alone even be aware that she had lived. And perhaps, more pertinent than what this portrait and my mother’s story tells me about young women like Alyse, is what the photograph tells me of my own engagement with photographic discourse.
Endnotes

1 Displayed on the front cover of Game (1991) Undoing the Social: Towards a deconstructive Sociology.
2 This was not my aunt’s real name.
3 I am alert to the danger of collapsing into an analysis underwritten with a Freudian premised and Barthian-inspired sentimentality overly invested in the emblematic encoding of my own life with my mother’s childhood experiences and memories.
4 My mother has read and endorsed the publication of this account. My aunt, my grandmother and my grandfather are deceased.
5 Common with the convention of the time, ‘lady’ is a descriptor my mother used for women who were above reproach, who had special qualities to be admired, even revered.
6 I have two sisters and a brother. I am the eldest, my brother is the youngest.
7 As have many feminist photographers, see for example Spence and Holland (1991) Family Snaps: The meanings of domestic photography.
Chapter Two

Homelessness: The old, the new and the emergent homeless woman

This chapter describes the formulation of my investigation of photographic documents that depict women as homeless. After briefly mapping relevant material and conceptual territory I tentatively approach some methodological and theoretical options offered by feminist and postmodern thought. The following chapter (chapter three) discusses the necessarily flexible framework of discourse analysis subsequently applied in the interrogation of the role of photography as a technology of social comment, representation and reform.

My project is principally concerned with the ‘feminine’ gendering of particular photographic representations depicting social inclusion/exclusion, through and within the discursive field delineated by the dyad of home/homless. The meaning of ‘homeless woman’ and how this construct has been discursively re/produced through photographic imagery constitutes the main axis of inquiry. In order to explore how photography has contributed to, and made use of the idea of ‘homeless (or destitute) woman’ I draw on examples from a range of genres, particularly traditional social documentary photography and photojournalism, as these tend to be the most visible and accessible in ‘ordinary’ daily life.

I do not set out to find an original source of the visual representation of the ‘homeless woman’ or the moment when the idea entered the imagination of the social body, as origins, particularly of ideas, are always contestable. Rather, images of significance to my involvement in making photographs of homeless women are selected from across the history of photographic image making. My intention is to re/trace discursive inter/connections between these and other socially concerned photographs, their sociocultural and historical locations, and other pertinent images and icons. Broadly, I am interested in photography as a visual discourse, its role as a medium for expressing
concern about the issues of poverty and homelessness, and the ascription of gendered
meaning in these photographic representations.

As constellations of idea and actuality, science and art, human skill and mechanical and
electrical technology, socially concerned photographs are situated within, and driven by
complex sociocultural and political circumstances. Drawing on the real and the
fictional, these message laden material objects generate truth/power effects. As such
their potential, and their effect is simultaneously productive and oppressive. Therefore,
a primary aim of this thesis is to critically explore social documentary photographic
practice aware that alongside good will and intent lay unavoidable acts of betrayal.

Three interconnecting themes, which recur in discourses about women and
homelessness, also interweave throughout the various chapters of the thesis. These are,
firstly, the insistence on oppositional difference; on women’s homelessness as different
from men’s homelessness and on the ‘new’ homeless as different from the ‘old’
homeless, secondly the notion of invisibility and the emphasis on women’s
homelessness as hidden and, thirdly the construction and use of ‘woman’ as a signifier
of social reproducibility. Unavoidably, possible implications of the public display of
photographic images that describe and define homelessness by portraying women as
destitute are also considered. Feminist social research in this area draws attention to the
use of myth and stereotype to misrepresent and thereby objectify homeless women,
variously identified as mad and insane bag ladies, (Golden, 1992; Harman, 1989);
welfare cheating single mothers (Smith, 1999); law-breaking (Carlen, 1988); alcohol
and drug addicts (Stubbs, 1996); poor housekeepers and mothers (Harman, 1989) and
victims of physical, emotional and sexual abuse (Davis, 1992; Grant, 1997; Hirst, 1989;
HREOC, 1989). Like these authors I am concerned with issues of misrepresentation and
objectification, and seek to also consider the meanings produced by efforts to redress
such stereotyping when ‘woman’ becomes visible amongst the homeless.

Poststructural thought has drawn attention to the folly of efforts to discover immutable
originary sources of ideas or moments of invention. Starting points are arbitrary as the
beginning is always elsewhere. The prologue to this thesis, while asserting the
importance of personal experience, sought to demonstrate that various locations and factors might be appropriately acknowledged as shaping choice of research topic. Another significant setting is the final quarter of the twentieth century, when a visible and statistical rise in homelessness was reported throughout western capitalist cities.

**Imag(in)ing the old and the new, the seeable and the unseeable**

During the 1970s and 1980s in Britain, North America and Australia the media, social welfare institutions and social activists remarked on the emergence of a ‘new’ homelessness. Observers drew attention to the neoteric features of this historically particularised population which distinguished it from the tightly contained, and in many ways glorified, groups of predominantly male, alcohol dependant transients referred to variously as ‘hobos’, ‘bums’ and ‘derros’. Demographic and descriptive profiles revealed the inclusion of teenagers, women and often their children, (Carlen, 1988; Golden, 1992; Rossi, 1990; Watson and Austerbury, 1986). Linda Grant writing on London’s ‘new’ homeless in the late 1990s observed:

> We thought we knew about beggars. They were tramps, down-and-outs, meths drinkers. They had matted hair and they stank. They were life’s losers, but what could you do? They were always going to be with us, and anyway, the churches were there to serve them cups of hot sweet tea and change their ulcerated bandages. But now there were cardboard encampments of ‘gaffs’, fragile houses which had once contained and protected colour televisions and fridge-freezers from freight damage. Teenage couples lived inside them in sleeping bags … the character of beggars had changed beyond belief in the space of two years. (Grant, 1997, p.12)

Writing in 1990, Peter Rossi commented, “today’s homeless are different and intrude more pointedly into everyday existence” (Rossi, 1990, p.954). Rossi drew attention to the gendered distinction between the new and the old homeless, suggesting that during the 1950s and 1960s homelessness had become stereotyped as male. He also made the observation that, “indifference to the plight of derelicts and bums is one thing; indifference to the existence and problems of homeless women is quite another” (Rossi, 1990, p.956).
The Women’s Studies Encyclopedia also invoked the opposition of old and new, suggesting, “to the old picture of the homeless white male alcoholic was added the picture of the bag lady, the teenage runaway or throwaway, soliciting on the streets of major cities and the family group eating in a soup kitchen” (Tierney, 1989, p. 173). What had been seen, for the previous two decades at least, as an older male problem, a male domain, was now ‘invaded’ by women and children, families and teenagers. Shattered fragments of the middle-class ideal, the nuclear family, fell into the shadows of street-life. These ‘new’ homeless bodies and faces stood out among the visual fields previously composed of ‘bums’ and ‘drunks’ in soup kitchens, parks, back alleys and train stations. Where the sight of down-and-out men (and even bag ladies) had become an urban habit requiring sympathy, but little action save the occasional hand-out, the sight of this new population of women, children, teenagers and families demanded attention and bit harder at the social conscience. In the effort to establish these ‘new’ homeless as deserving, visual depictions of homeless women (and their children) were used to represent the breadth and gravity of this seemingly suddenly expanding problem. Additionally, in order to establish difference between the ‘new’ and ‘old’ faces of homelessness (and also to explain the continued predominance of destitute males, both young and old in public spaces) the dualism of invisibility/visibility, of the seeable and the unseeable, was evoked in an array of discourses which sought to prove a shift in the demographics of poverty.

Sight metaphors such as ‘image’, ‘picture’ and ‘face’ are imbedded in much discussion about homelessness. Written text repeatedly elicits the visuality of homelessness, as if the truth lies in what homelessness looks like, how it appears to be, suggesting that the materiality of homelessness can be better known through illustration. Franco Ferrarotti (1993) offers some hints as to why the epistemology of homelessness is so often closely linked with visuality. Drawing on the knowledge foundations of modern science, he proposes, “seeing is an act of intelligence” (Ferrarotti, 1993, p.89). He also laments that the over abundance of visual imagery in our daily lives has resulted in the development of habitual non-seeing, in other words, we no longer perceive when we see. His assertion that seeing the world is to perceive the world falls just short of tautology in current discourse⁹. Although Ferrarotti does not let seeing rest with physical sight, he
conflates the boundaries between what the eye perceives and how the mind understands, stating:

Seeing is such an essential part of our experience and understanding of the world that the ability to see cannot be restricted to the confines of our ability to decode light signals, but is also essential for grasping and understanding the central point, the essence of an argument or verbal discussion. (Ferrarotti, 1993, p.89)

Ferrarotti asserts a seamlessness of knowledge, conception and sight, claiming that we cannot understand or synthesise knowledge without the idea of what it is to see. He further claims that photography offers the opportunity to look and to look again by, “distributing light over reality so that it strikes with differential intensity that petrified datum of the everyday” (Ferrarotti, 1993, pp. 91-92). Ferrarotti draws the conclusion that to photograph, to write with light, “means to have need for the dark, to evoke the shadows” (Ferrarotti, 1993, p. 93). Similar in approach, John Berger comments, “the visible implies an eye [and] consists … of the seen which, even when it is threatening, confirms … existence, and of the unseen which defies that existence” (Berger, 1984, p.50). Both Ferrarotti and Berger suggest that perception of the physical object and its negative other, the literal interplay of light and dark, is fundamental to our comprehension of existence. They claim that the ability to perceive through metaphorical abstraction, to desire what is beyond the physical and actual is necessary for our synthesis of knowledge. In the discourses of homelessness, the words – sight, image, picture – are often employed to evoke homeless stereotypes, and specific images and contexts are often redundant after idiomatic assumptions of the homeless experience are deployed (Becker, 1994, p. 7).

Stephanie Golden uses a related logic for employing the image and the imaginary to understand the homeless woman. Golden suggests the fabrication of the image ‘the homeless woman’ assists in knowing ‘her’ by piecing together the jigsaw of the homeless experience. She explains:

All the material I gathered, past and present—through research and my own experience—came to me in fragments. In such a case, where the material is so scattered and incoherent, an effective method of analysis is to use an image. A powerfully magnetic image can
draw all the bits and pieces away from the women and out of the texts, and make them cohere like iron filings into a recognizable shape ... by creating a shape, an image constrains and focuses thought while still allowing great freedom in moving around within it; you can come at your material from many different directions without losing coherence because the analysis acquires its form from the structure of the image. [my italics] (Golden, 1992, p.10)

Golden draws on the image of the witch and her contemporary form, the bag lady, to comprehend the varied experiences of the homeless women she encountered while conducting research in women’s shelters. She challenges the social and cultural stereotyping of marginalised women, unpacking the ‘bag lady’ to reveal who she really is: the excluded and marginalised older woman. Nonetheless, Golden depends on word pictures as powerful emotive forces, making the point that an image has further advantage through its non-linear qualities by operating emotionally as well as intellectually. Her book contains no pictures of actual homeless women, rather the cover displays an artwork, leaving the visual manifestation of ‘homeless woman’ in the realm of the imaginary. This is perhaps explained by the claim that separating the ‘real’ women from the mythical would require surgical precision – “such was the connectedness” (Golden, 1992, p.9).

Images of homelessness as a social issue are treated in a number of different ways, depending on the context out of which attention to the issue emerges, and in which it is read (Becker, 1994). While social science texts about homelessness often display images of apparently homeless people on the front cover10 few contain genuine documentary photographs. Photo-documentary texts on the other hand, many of which can be described as belonging also to the genre of art photography, tend to draw upon highly aestheticised black and white images of ‘real’ homeless people11. These publications often include explanatory text describing circumstances surrounding the taking of the photograph, or the subjects’ personal and social contexts. A popular approach is to employ the voice of the sitter, sometimes using his or her own handwriting12. These combinations of image and text oscillate between affirming and challenging assumed social and cultural perceptions of homelessness. Speaking from, to and about the photographs these texts utilise narrative to create the impression of
documentary authenticity. In providing the reader access to an ‘insider’ view of the homeless person (supposedly more knowable through portrait and vernacular text) these publications operate liminally, in the boundaries between truth and fiction. Some of these, committed to asserting the image of the politically appealing, deserving homeless person who is “just like you and me” (Rosenthal, 1996, n.p.13), suggest the stereotypical bag-lady, street-kid or ‘derro’ on the park bench are misrepresentations, popular fictions, which effectively conceal the truth of structural and individual experiences of homelessness.

However, unless there is effective promotion of the structural nature of poverty such actions can become politically neutralising (Rosenthal, 1996). If homeless people are portrayed as ‘just like everyone else’, there is a danger of producing an image of the historically defined ‘undeserving’ poor, able-bodied, capable individuals who do not need welfare support. On the other hand, the meaning of deserving and undeserving has shifted significantly from the original definition in the English laws of late feudalism and early industrialisation. This was based on whether or not a person was able-bodied, and therefore able to acquire work and be self-supporting. If so, they were assessed as undeserving of, “anything but the most onerous forms of aid” (Rosenthal, 1996, n.p.). In the contemporary context of welfare Rosenthal proposes three categorisations of the homeless that he believes are popularly applied: incompetent due to their own self-neglect (undeserving); incompetent due to circumstances beyond their control, such as children, and people with mental or physical disabilities (deserving); and the competent, but homeless due to circumstances outside of their immediate control, such as retrenchment, physical abuse, etc. (deserving). Interestingly, Rosenthal describes these three categorisations as ‘image 1, image 2 and image 3’, and argues that these representations translate into the practices of welfare workers and organisations as well as media portrayals and public attitudes.

Although these categorisations cannot be realistically considered stable or precise, many of the photographs discussed throughout this thesis comply with images ‘2’ and ‘3’, the ‘deserving’ homeless, as these are the primary products of socially concerned photography. There is also a trend to promote ‘image 1’ homeless people as deserving
by asserting that their incompetence has resulted from circumstances beyond their immediate control, such as a history of bad parenting resulting in childhood neglect and or sexual abuse. Thus blame is re/located in the past, in a previous generation, neatly removed from the immediate individual, and deflected from structural causes.

Photo-documentary images that challenge individual deficit theory still require archetypes of destitution, if only to act as counterpoints to their own purported truths. They must operate simultaneously in opposition to, and in concert with the visual terrains of life both outside and within domestic comfort and security. The street worker looks like other street-workers, but underneath she is a thinking and feeling woman with her own tragic story. The unwashed, unshaven, rag-clothed man is not his image, because he is unique in his humbled humanness. Ferrarotti suggests this representational scission is a condition of,

The tension between the idiographic and the monothetic ... between the general social significance and the specific individuality represented in the photograph, between the structural invariance of the type and the irreducible, unrepeatable characteristics of the unicum [reminding us that] behind the type there always stands the living, real, untamed, unrepeatable and unique individual. (Ferrarotti, 1993, p.76)

While the motivation to assert the distinctions between individual uniqueness and generalised type is grounded in the political paradox that the individual must not be forsaken for the general, the feminist dictum – ‘the personal is political’ – also has merit. The theoretical and political concerns of my project consequently duck and weave between fast moving feet in a dance of sameness and difference. As suggested above, awareness of the damage caused by typecasting and labeling has resulted in actions to reclaim the uniqueness of individual identity. These efforts have been positioned within discourses informed largely by socialist and Marxist critiques based in academia and social welfare practice, which recognise homelessness as resulting primarily from structural rather than individual deficiency (Rosenthal, 1996). However the emergence of the new homeless population during the latter twentieth century, and the construction and promotion of its heterogeneity, has thrown into question causal relationships between class and poverty. It is of interest that there are now
representations of homelessness and homeless people that have shifted away from, and in some cases acted in opposition to, images that starkly delineate between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ towards an assertion of similarity. Necessarily these approaches towards sameness are never able to achieve confluence, for ultimately difference must be maintained. The threat for the homed and privileged in this approach is that the nominal rupturing of class division facilitates the undoing of the symbolic protection afforded to them by boundaries established on difference. Mimetic ploys of this kind in visual representations traverse social and cultural boundaries, by producing opportunities for an ironic destitution and offering vicarious freedom for the comfortable, but not always materially secure, middle-classes. Thus, the analytical dialectics of political discourse and the desires of the capitalist market and its individualized consumer simultaneously produce and co-exist in the confusion over boundaries. Homelessness and its corollaries, poverty and destitution, have been aestheticised, commodified and depoliticised in fashion trends such as Calvin Klein’s ‘heroin-chic’ advertising campaign, in which the discomfort of social conscience is reconfigured as desire. These distortions and variations have emerged amid sustained campaigns by feminist researchers and activists to draw attention to women’s homelessness as a distinct and urgent issue. Somewhat paradoxically the seeming lack in proportion of homeless women to homeless men is explained as a problem of invisibility, while the new visibility of women on the streets and in emergency housing services is put forward as evidence of an increase in, and overall change to, the nature and causes of homelessness.

In the late twentieth century, as an increasing polarisation between poor and wealthy was being recognised, the feminisation of poverty was also being exposed. In June 1996 the UN conference on Human Settlements—Habitat 2 stated in a press release that female-headed households constitute 70% of the world’s homeless (Mulherin, 1996, p.100). Pat Carlen, discussing the poverty of women in Thatcher’s Britain commented:
This ‘feminization of poverty’ is not just a contingent consequence of economic recession aggravating women’s powerlessness. It is also the logical result of a ‘New Right’ political economy that, in lauding the virtues of ‘the market’ and ‘individual effort’, also seeks to replace the ‘cossetting’ welfare state with the idealized, ‘self-sufficient’ nuclear family.

(Carlen, 1988, p.2)

New ways of representing the impoverishment and ultimate destitution of families, women and children needed to be found if the public was to be diverted from the old dichotomy of dividing the poor into deserving and undeserving. In this regard, feminist scholarship has made considerable headway.

**Invoking the elusive homeless woman**

Feminist research and literature on homelessness produced since the 1980s (see for example Golden, 1992; Hirst, 1989; Hughes, 1996; Mulherin, 1996; Watson and Austerberry, 1986; WISH, 1991) recognises that there have always been homeless women, but unlike their male counterparts, significant numbers have been invisible to the public and government policy-makers. Sophie Watson and Helen Austerberry state, “[t]here is a strong case for the argument that an unquantifiable proportion of women’s homelessness remains concealed” (1986, p.163). Claudia Hirst, explaining research that identified twice as many homeless adolescent males as females during the late 1980s in Melbourne suggests young men are more “visibly homeless” and that more young women “fall into the category of ‘hidden homelessness’ than do the young men” (Hirst, 1989, p.29). More recently Sophie Watson has argued that the “conundrum at the heart of analysing women’s homelessness” continues to be formed by three interdependent factors: “visibility/invisibility; estimated significance of the problem; and its definition” (Watson, 2000, p. 161). Pursuing the theme of sight, and using what might be construed as photographic metaphor, Watson states: “The issue of homelessness has to be established as existing, and then drawn out of the shadows and illuminated before anything can be done to address it” (Watson, 2000, p. 161).

It can be reasonably argued that for many homeless women their obscurity results from a culture of oppositional masculinity and femininity in which women lead private lives
within a domestic realm, where often male violence is hidden, meaning that women’s exclusion from safety and security is also veiled from public sight. Unemployment, lack of education, or other life circumstances, has meant that some women are faced with trading domestic labour (including sex) in a marriage or defacto relationship in order to secure a home. Another option has been prostitution, yet another much hidden aspect of public life (Golden, 1992, p.97). Pat Carlen makes the equally disconcerting observation that the ‘apparent’ failure of a woman to secure a bed for the night is likely to be taken by some as a violation of gender stereotypes of femininity (Carlen, 1996, p.31). Additionally, despite evidence that the number of young women in the 16-19 age range who run away from home is greater than the number of young men, there tends to be less all-women accommodation options (Carlen, 1996, p.31). Overall, the problem of recognition and thus representation is attributed to the male-centredness of definitions of homelessness and determination of housing and welfare policy (Carlen, 1996; Golden, 1992; Harman, 1989; Mulherin, 1996; Watson and Austerberry, 1986; Watson, 2000; WISH, 1991). On the one hand homeless women are represented as invisible, while on the other, policy-makers, researchers and key state departments are accused of being blind to their experience (Carlen, 1996; Mulherin, 1996; Watson, 2000). Although, it is worth noting that Tamara Mulherin includes feminism in this problem of the oversight of women’s homelessness, suggesting that feminist energies have been directed elsewhere in the social and community sector (Mulherin, 1996, p.107).

These assertions raise the issue of whether, aside from obviously visible homeless women, such as the bag lady, the street worker or teenage drug addict – women who defy patriarchal stereotypes – homeless women must prove their existence from the position of imagined subjects. The repeated use of terminology of the gaze: picture, image, in/visibility, hidden, concealed, suggests an inherent imperative to provide visible evidence of women’s homelessness. And yet, as has been recognised, an actual image, even of a single individual is inevitably generalised to speak for all. Appreciation of the unique individual experience of homelessness is potentially erased by documentary proof, at the same time the heterogeneity of women’s experiences of homelessness can only be preserved in the imaginary, through and within an image, which as Golden (1992) suggests stabilises and coheres while remaining constantly
redefinable and pliable. Visibility however remains a condition of social recognition. What is ‘seen’ shapes public opinion, and carries considerable weight as evidence of the need for social, economic and legislative reform.

The media and public are consistent in requiring visual confirmation of the existence of homelessness; a state of being that cannot be separated from its equally elusive binary opposite, home. The sight of homeless people in the cast off packing containers of consumer goods on the streets and in the subways of New York and London has effectively elicited public concern, so much so that Australian media, social activists and welfare organisations draw on these images and overlay them onto Australia’s far less visible homeless population (Crinall W, 1999) (figure 2). The birth of the social documentary genre as a method for illustrating the poor and destitute is often attributed (although I will argue otherwise) to photographers of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) such as Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans, who during the Great Depression captured the poverty, despair, courage and determination of farming families in North America’s dustbowl16. These black and white photographic representations exposed untenable living conditions to homed and well-fed Americans, as they furthered the Roosevelt government’s New Deal17 campaign. These images essentially depend on the establishment of lack. Few material possessions are depicted; food and water are demonstrably scarce, evidenced by the presence of unwashed, malnourished bodies. Sad, hungry, and sometimes hurt children look out at the viewer18; adults bear worried frowns, their taut mouths often appear as if it would be dangerous to smile (figure 3). Framed by the paucity of the environment their bodies are immobilised; material means (and therefore joy and hope) are absent. And yet, at the same time the desire to work, to be productive can always be read into the images. The adults are attentive, earnest in their engagement with the photographer, eager, maybe for what benefits might flow from their co-operation in allowing themselves to be photographed in such dire circumstances (figure 4).

Perhaps most profound and concerning about photographs of the destitute is the lack of protection from the inquiring gaze. People are visible in spaces that modern social conventions expect to be private; sleeping in public, exposed to the weather,
inappropriately clothed. Their worldly possessions seem collected in a few plastic bags, or they may be sitting in poorly furnished accommodation, it is as if all they own resides within the frame of the photograph. Viewers are urged to focus on what the subjects of these images do not have. We are presented with visual spaces that depend on recognition of absence, removal, evidence of something not being there. What we see is invisibility. The impossibility of the presence of signifiers of homefulness is, unavoidably, the signifier itself of homelessness.

The presence of absence

When we see we also become aware of what we cannot see, the visible both includes and excludes the self, creating the desire to see the unseen and the unseeable (Berger, 1984, p.50). The sight of destitute and needy individuals, other human beings, in our shopping malls, at our train stations, outside our buildings, in our parks, evokes strong emotional response. It bids us not to ignore, or look away from the need so obviously in our sight. And yet we do look away. We are more likely to view a photograph of a homeless person with more compassion, than the person lying in our path. Other factors are also in operation; homelessness in the streets challenges the notion of social façade. The sight of homeless people tells us they have no private retreat, or if they do it must be some monstrous hole, for it cannot possibly be a home, not as our cultural norm construes home; warmth, security, comfort, love, nurture, safety, privacy, and some control over surroundings. Homeless people represent privacy stripped bare, their exposure to our gaze signifies the seeing of the unseeable, that which we, according to Berger (1984), so desire.

It is not surprising that assertion of the social cause and individual need of homeless people has found voice and effect through media-based visual representation. Welfare organisations regularly use such images to publicise fund-raising campaigns, to engender community support and to recruit volunteers, the strategy being to enlist support by presenting a need so desperate that it must be immediately addressed. Such campaigns, however, have multiple effects. While they pronounce a social need, they subjectify individuals with inscriptions of the well-worn grammar of otherness, of non-belonging.
Figure 2

Figure 3

Dorothea Lange, *Damaged Child, Shacktown, Elm Grove, Oklahoma*, 1936.
Copyright 1978 © Dorothea Lange Collection, Oakland Museum, The City of Oakland.
Figure 4

Homeless people and their locations represent the states of being and the places that the homed do not want to physically enter; the unseeable is simultaneously brought to light by the desire to see, and submerged by our corporeal fears. For those of us who live safely and securely, such images ultimately establish difference; we are not ‘them’ and, ‘they’ cannot be us. Our completeness, our homefulness is identified and confirmed by the lack in the other; we reside in the homes that are absent from the sites and spaces the homeless occupy. Alison Young, drawing on Lacan proposes, “[s]eeing the other is a form of self-reproduction. In looking at or for the other, we represent ourselves as ourselves” (Young, 1996, p. 15). With the distinction secure, our other and therefore our self is given meaning. What then is our capacity to respond when we are confronted with the need of the other? Interest is perhaps incited by the exoticism of the bag lady or adolescent punk, emotions stirred by the wide, hungry eyes of the needy baby or a mother’s expression of despair. Maybe we cringe at the obvious physical discomfort of the drunk sleeping under newspapers, or the mentally ill woman crouched in a doorway. Woe betide that it might ever be us or one of our loved ones, and yet for many of us the desire to look and look again remains compelling. Perhaps for some the belief that they are unlikely to ever be destitute affords permission to walk away, to avert their gaze. What if through our self-projections and our voyeurism, self-discovery in the gaps and spaces of others is all we seek? Unlike the perceived and real risks of staring at the less fortunate, photographs allow us to legitimately gaze, uninterrupted, unchallenged by the subjects they represent.

The photograph of Florence Neil/Thomas and three of her children, the subjects of Dorothea Lange’s Migrant Mother taken in 1936 became a “symbol of suffering, self-reliance and maternal strength” (Lennon, 1999, p. 4) (figure 5). Neil, and her children did not receive any material aid as a result of the much reproduced image (see chapter eight). Despite Lange’s expression of hope to bring relief to her subjects’ plight, she was also aware that the photographic event was not exclusively for the benefit of the family she depicted. The event of taking the photograph for Lange was reciprocal, acting to level or bridge the chasm between her own life and that of her photographic subjects. Lange wrote, “[t]here she sat in that lean-to tent with her children huddled around her, and seemed to know that my pictures might help her, and so she helped me.
There was a sort of equality about it” (Lange, 1996, p.152). In the larger political quest, the immediate need of the individual was thrown over for ‘the greater good’.

Recent criticism argues that social documentary photographs such as these offer little, if any, immediate or long-term relief for the actual subjects they portray. Benefits are directed towards the already privileged image-maker and, in particular to those who reproduce and circulate the image (Braden, 1983; Lennon, 1999; Rabinowitz, 1994; Rosler, 1989). Su Braden argues the oppressed must be involved in their own image production and dissemination, that without establishing interaction and therefore dynamic tension between oppressed and oppressor, the photograph offers little more than a self-representation of the photographer (Braden, 1983, p.1). Braden frames her claim with the assertion that, “[a]longside popular music and television, photography is the modern tool through which the dominant culture transmits its philosophies” (Braden, 1983, p.1). Suggesting that unavoidable ‘interplay’ between the image-maker and the subject causes confusion of identity, she challenges the possibility of notionally pure, subjective representation (or portraiture) by asking, “[w]hat kind of collaboration can there be between photographer and photographed which will ensure that the person behind the camera is not appropriating the identity of the person in front of the lens?” (Braden, 1983, p.2). If the act of photographic production does indeed involve plundering the identity of the subject, questions must be asked of how this occurs. There is clearly a need to understand how social documentary photographs might subvert the causes they intend to address; an issue dealt with substantially in chapters to follow, particularly chapters five, eight and nine.
Figure 5

Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California*, 1936.
Copyright 1978 © Dorothea Lange Collection, Oakland Museum, The City of Oakland.
Photographic narratives

We know the world, our world, through stories (Turner, 1988, p. 68). Whether verbal or written, in our childhood these are almost always accompanied by visual language forms. It could be performed by the storyteller’s body through mime and gesture, or a surrogate body such as a puppet; it may be pictures in storybooks, or the endless hybrid combinations of these in film and the electronic media. Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress propose that the ‘naturalisation’ and ‘neutralisation’ of the image is a mystification which occurs in the synthesis of text as stabilizer of meaning and image as illustrator (Hodge and Kress, 1988, p.233). Hodge and Kress further suggest that despite a visual text often being positioned subserviently to spoken or written text, the visual message does not necessarily become slave to the word. They demonstrate that illustration often plays a fundamental role in developing narrative meaning not hitherto achievable through the act of reading written text. My exploration of photography as a social documentary practice is alert to the debate that encircles and emanates from the image/text dualism, and recognises that it is impossible to disregard the narrative possibilities created in the mutual interplay of image and text. Visual images do not perform alone, and while this is obvious when immediately accompanied by written or spoken words, it is less so when the presence and effect of words is indirect. Nelson Goodman recognises the potential for still imagery, even a single photograph to perform narratively through association with the temporality of archetypal story sequences. He explains:

Even description or depiction of a momentary and static situation implies something of what went before and will come afterward. A picture of a forest tells implicitly of trees growing from seedlings and shedding leaves; and a picture of a house implies that trees were cut for it and that its roof will soon leak. (Goodman, 1981, p.111)

A narrative inevitably begins by introducing a problem to be resolved, a lack, thereby tapping into the desire for coherence and closure (Nichols, 1981, p.74). The change process in the narrative, from deficit to fulfillment, assumes the structure of sequential cause and effect chains. Although the story is spiced with various threats to the achievement of resolution, good inevitably overcomes evil and honesty overpowers deceit. Vladimir Propp’s studies of Russian folk-tales revealed inherent, common
patterns throughout the various stories. Despite arbitrary differences Propp found thirty-one basic structural features repeated throughout folk narrative (Toolan, 1991, pp.14-15; Turner, 1988, p.68). Interestingly, the first of these, listed under the ‘preparation’ stage of the narrative sequence is a family member leaving home (the extreme version of this being the ‘absenting’ of parents through death). Closure is achieved in the ‘recognition’ stage, when the hero returns, is recognised and reconnected with their home/place/family, and then marries and ascends to rule. It begs mentioning that where a woman occupies the hero position (for example, Cinderella or Snow White) she marries and ascends to the throne as the wife of the true monarch, her saviour.

Some of these narrative textual devices are evident in the discursive representations of homelessness. For example, within contemporary narratives of homelessness, closure occurs in achieving accommodation, the securing of a home, and exit from poverty through employment. Coherence is achieved by establishing why the depicted individual is destitute, and in the subsequent identification of the viewer or reader, as not homeless. In light of Braden’s comment above, I am interested in how intervention in a narrative chain positions the viewer of photographs of despair. If the photographer runs a dangerous course between their own and the subject’s identity, how might this translate to the viewer, who in their reading of the image becomes image-consumer/maker? Barthes explored and developed the idea of an intertextuality, in which the reader’s life text is incorporated into the reading of any document. Although Barthes began by arguing that a single image cannot constitute a narrative chain (Barthes, 1977) his intertextual narrative in Camera Lucida (1993b), composed around an apparent photograph of his mother as a child, and his memories of her, disrupted this position. The Winter Garden Photograph is not included as a visual image in the text, and so the written memory about his mother effectively becomes the photograph to which Barthes refers. In his concern to destabilise a single image, to effectively disrupt any fixing of its meaning into a single understanding, or honour its meaning with a sole source (Shawcross, 1998), Barthes demonstrates in Camera Lucida how visual images exist as and also within story-telling, and therefore meaning-making contexts, even if these remain contestable, flexible, irreducible, idiosyncratic or even absent.
The representative image is potentially an insertion into, and an eruption from any number of already existing narrative chains. Also, as with the narrative structure of folk tales that Propp identified, by their subject matter, photographs of homelessness cue meaning making with the problem of a deficit, in other words, the meaning of their narrative begins with a lack. Photographs of homeless women present the viewer with a compounded double lack. Rossi’s (1990) description of the social imperative to address visibly homeless women and children as something different from, and far less tolerable than destitute men, implies much greater need, and therefore a moral imperative. In masculinist heterosexual social organisation men are responsible for the material need of women. The shame in the sight of homeless women is generated by the belief that the (masculine) state has neglected to adequately care for its dependants – women and children. Women, when visibly homeless, particularly women who do not obviously defy female stereotypes, not only represent the plight of their own gender, their image acts also as a powerful comment on the circumstances of men who are homeless. Pictures of homeless men tend to be about male experience, and the highlighted absence of women in their social and personal domains lends weight to their plight.

As politically charged, reform-oriented objects, social documentary images present the viewer with a need and expect a response toward resolution. Each single image is unavoidably positioned in a signification chain that exists beyond the borders of the gelatin-coated paper. Individuals, places, moments are isolated, informing the viewer that the actuality of what is represented is in itself representational. Shown a small part of the whole, a ‘piece of evidence’, we seek to establish meaning by adding to, and embellishing the partial signs that we can see by matching concepts from our memory store, in order to fit the image-pieces into already existing patterns of thought (de Bono, 1990, p.27). At the point of this engagement in the search for meaning, between personal experience and the photographic sign, in this intertextual act, reading the image becomes writing. Various and competing meta-narratives function and operate through our authorship of these melodramas of disadvantage. As Goodman’s tree and house examples demonstrate, a single image is tied to any number of temporal reference points. The sign ‘homeless person’ is encoded with the loss of home, the home that came before, the home that might be achieved in the future and the inadequate living
conditions of the present. Its significations unfixed reach back into historical locations beyond the possibility of the subject in the photograph, as much as they reach into the life experience of the reader/viewer. The image we see, the subject before us is always defined by fictional characters of the past: the drunken/drugged vagrant/bum; the baglady/witch; the street worker/scarlet woman; etc. These archetypes of homelessness that are woven into our sociopolitical and cultural myth making are delineated by categories of gender, race, age, dis/ability, deviancy, criminality, religion, class, disease, mental illness, social functioning and work productivity. The representation of these typifications depends on shared understandings of what these states of being mean; meanings inevitably conveyed through discursive constructions of words and images. These imaginary discursive constructs oscillate across and between the borders of fact and fiction, real and unreal, past and present in narratives that we use to identify and discuss the homeless subject.

Hodge and Kress observe, “by presenting various contingent cultural categories in a narrative frame, the categories themselves take on the appearance of naturalness and come to seem as inevitable as nature itself” (Hodge and Kress, 1988, p. 229). They further suggest that the narrative sequence need not offer a fixed-focus on closure nor replicate and reinforce existing ‘naturalised’ oppressive categories such as gender, race, ability, deserving, undeserving, competent and incompetent. A critical awareness of the appeal, comfort and therefore power of narrative opens up possibilities for identifying the habits of entrenched social behaviour and practice. These invisible patterns and ideological proformas can then be disturbed and disrupted using intentionally subversive interventions. Laura Mulvey, commenting on cinema, suggests the filmmaker can breakdown the ‘voyeuristic-scopophilic’ narrative habit by firstly recognising how traditional cinematic narratives are enacted, and then deliberately acting to defy them. Mulvey argues that the ‘look’ of the audience needs to be allowed dialectic and passionate detachment while the ‘look’ of the camera needs to be freed into its materiality in time and space (Mulvey, 1991, p. 373). The application of Mulvey’s propositions to socially concerned photography would require the denaturalisation and de-neutralisation of the camera, the photographer, the subject and specific viewing context. It is here that poststructuralist ideas are helpful.
A poststructural approach recognises the power of narrative as a multi-operational discursive technology. While traditional narrative can perpetuate and further entrench oppressive practices, it also has the potential to promote and strengthen new understandings and knowledges and to shift power relationships within the story, to leave endings unresolved, to deconstruct and subvert the dualisms and polarisations on which traditional story-lines are dependant. Rather than placating the audience, the story can deliberately discomfort, unsettle and importantly refuse to provide closure; it can indicate many endings, rather than providing a rut for one. By deconstructing the narrator/audience dualism, emphasis shifts to the act of reading as text-production, as meaning-making practice, as intersexuality. This has implications for the production and reception of visual, written or spoken text because all are acts of discursive authorship and interpretation. If we approach a text in order to satisfy voyeuristic-scopophilic desires, then we are unlikely to uncover maleficent content (unless that is the source of our pleasure) (Mulvey, 1991). Our desire to be satisfied by the text will author gratification, while a reading intent on searching the weft and weave for invisible threads will have a different meaning. Therefore, photographic images are simultaneously products and producers of narratives that are never separate from sociocultural and political discourses of interpretation, and the reading/viewing of an image is a materially grounded act of authorship and knowledge production. The next chapter overviews the methodological approaches that assisted me in approaching the issues outlined above.
Endnotes

8 This stereotyping of the homeless population as comprising single, or lone male alcoholics seemed to emerge during periods of relative economic prosperity. For example, as discussed in later chapters, during the 1930s depression and the 1890s depression in Australia, visual representations of destitute families and particularly sole women with children were common.

9 See also Jay (1994) Downcast Eyes: The denigration of vision in twentieth century French thought.


13 No page numbers. This was a conference paper given at the "Constructing Representations of Poverty and Homelessness" conference organised by the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP), held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, New York, 16th August 1996. The copy I have of this paper was sent to me as an e-mail attachment. It has no page numbers or publication details.

14 ‘Sleepouts’ organised by welfare organisations and activist groups to raise funds and awareness have a similar effect.

15 This is by no means a new trend, the genre of pictorialism, popular amongst photographers during the late Victorian period turned the poverty and decay of the rural peasant life-style into the subject of a decorative artoform, see chapter six.


17 The New Deal campaign sought to reform farming methods with scientific technology and involved providing assistance to farmers whose land had became unproductive due to drought. Roosevelt needed to ‘sell’ the idea not only that productivity would be improved through scientific management principles and technologies, but also that people were worthy of the assistance (Stange, 1992).

18 Although the inimitable positive spirit of children does at times break the sombre, desperate mood, as in figure 4.
Chapter Three

Methodologies of Knowing: Intentions, inspirations and in/visibilities

This chapter begins with a statement of purpose, followed by a discussion of methods utilised in addressing the central concerns. I then explore in more detail methodological, epistemological and theoretical ideas pertinent to this project.

Intentions

It is no great revelation that women’s homelessness as a condition of poverty and disadvantage distinct from men’s homelessness achieved political representation at a time when the feminist movement was able to enter public discourse with more authority than ever before. The relationship between gender politics and the ‘sudden’ visibility of women on the streets and in shelters, however deserves further consideration. Although Stephanie Golden suggests the story of homeless women differs from that of homeless men by explaining that, “the male outsider has been defined in terms of work and the female in terms of sexuality.” (Golden, 1992, p. 97) the homelessness of women and men cannot be disassociated. Social documentary and media images of homeless women and men have tended to conform to stereotypes established by male homelessness, informed by and informing, popular expectations of what homelessness looks like. Golden repeatedly refers to the images encircling homeless women as originating from fairy tales and myths: the witch; the abandoned child; the prostitute. She also refers to the power homeless women as individuals achieve from this imagery. For example, an often-repeated myth is the evocative tale of the bag lady with large amounts of money concealed inside her clothing and whose bags contain amazing, magic objects. Lily Brett tells the story of a homeless woman in New York who enigmatically repays a favour by giving a self-sufficient, yet self-deprecating woman, male genitalia (Brett, 1998, pp. 45-61).
While political activists have construed the circumstances of homeless women as different from homeless men, somewhat paradoxically, over the past twenty-odd years a critical awareness of stereotyping has resulted in deliberate efforts to recast the faces of homelessness from marginalised derelict, to ‘someone just like us’. These dual, yet conflicting efforts to remodel the public image of the homeless subject reveal the political nature of the representation. Questions arise over whether new manifestations of the homeless woman are unavoidably coupled with the obfuscation of her lived actuality by a desire to have things ‘appear’ as they ‘should’ be, or as they might preferably be visually consumed. Therefore, one of my intentions has been to trace continuities and inconsistencies in the visual re/presentation of homeless women to better understand what these might mean. I approached this by asking how ‘socially concerned’ images are authored, authorised and employed; how they are coded; what truths they do construct and deploy about woman (and man) and homelessness, and the social and personal effects of their public display.

Under the subject of social concern I gathered a loose collection of images from a range of photographic genres including art, documentary, photojournalism, illustration, and publicity propaganda, because in the public domain all of these representational vehicles are employed to portray homelessness. It bears keeping in mind that the context of display rather than preconceived intentions of the photographer more often determines photographic type, and thus a single photograph is often simultaneously ascribed to, or moves through a number of genres (Becker, 1994). The selected photographs, the sociocultural circumstances out of which they emerge, and those in which they are read are interrogated across variations of genre, gender, class and power.

In terms of temporal and geographic locations, the field of inquiry radiates out from and returns to Melbourne, Australia, at the turn of the second millennium, as this is the capital city and historical period in which I am situated. However, it is unreasonable and undesirable to bracket other historical periods and the wider globe, particularly Renaissance Italy where I argue that the ocularity later employed in photography, together with a particular visual discourse of woman and poverty based on the Madonna icon, was formed. Great Britain during industrialisation and North America during the
Great Depression are also recognised as pivotal social documentary locations. It is impossible to include examples from every country that has contributed to the enormous and diverse archive of photographs that depict women as destitute. In any case, as the first chapter describes, this project began as a personal expedition with the purpose of making some sense of how and why, towards the end of the twentieth century, I found myself producing and exhibiting photographic images that portray women as homeless according to particular conventions of visual representation. Therefore, it was necessary to stay close to my own sociocultural context and the visual and written texts that circulate therein.

As evidentiary, publicly deployed visual objects, the images discussed throughout this thesis are, in almost every case, attached to claims of moral purpose, of being produced for the benefit of the individuals and groups they represent. However, they have neither this singular purpose, nor effect. As discussed in the previous chapter, these representations, despite many being individual portraits, act symbolically for a generalised collective of homed viewers. Each photographed homeless face and body operates emblematically for homeless people as a designated socioeconomic and sub/cultural group across a dis/continuum of social histories of poverty. At the point of interpretation, the codes imbedded in each image derive from the signs, symbols and icons of two specific locations, that out of which it was produced and that in which it is read. At both these sites there are multiple and conflicting realities at play, and the second site, that of the reading, is never the same. The meanings produced out of each reading are like drift nets of ideas; they exercise power, are continuous and discontinuous, snagging and trapping particular objects and subjects, while others filter through and temporarily escape. I am interested in how these unstable codes subjectify and divide particular women (and woman), while also performing functions of social coherence, and further, how these are narratively, aesthetically and morally scripted.

In the prologue I described how my curiosity about photographs of young women and homelessness are genealogically connected to the narratives encircling a particular family portrait. My interest can also be traced through my participation in three
photographic projects – briefly outlined below. In chapter five I return to consider in
detail some of the photographs produced in these projects.

Images of homelessness

In 1987, the “International Year of Shelter for the Homeless” I was employed by the
Salvation Army Crossroads Youth Project to photograph the daily life of ‘street-kids’
living variously in squats; refuges; with friends and acquaintances; and on the streets in
the Fitzroy and St Kilda areas of Melbourne. The idea to document young people’s
experiences of the streets came from a young woman who wanted, “to show everyone,
people who have everything, just what life is like living in refuges and on the streets”
(Janie19, personal communication, June 1987).

This project came after a three year period between 1983 and 1986 of living and
working (with my partner and three infant children) in youth hostels and houses with
young people aged between 13 and 18 years who were unable to live permanently or
temporarily with their own families. According to the definition of homelessness
provided by Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), all of the
young people we worked with were homeless at the time. The much publicised report,
Our Homeless Children20 describes homelessness as:

A lifestyle which includes insecurity and transiency of shelter. It is not confined to a total
lack of shelter. For many children and young people it signifies a state of detachment
from family and vulnerability to dangers, including exploitation and abuse broadly
defined, from which the family normally protects a child. (HREOC, 1989, p.7)

At that time my concept of homelessness was very much founded on the notion of
familial and social disconnection, and fitted with the Salvation Army’s understanding
of homelessness as a potential “state of non-belonging” (Salvation Army, 1991). Much
of our work was involved with addressing this condition and its imminence. Informed
by these experiences and welfare state discourses of homelessness I approached the
task of taking photographs of and with young homeless people21.
The participants of the photographic project were in the main more streetwise than the
residents of the hostel and long-term accommodation programs where I was previously
employed. And despite the wishes of the young woman who inspired the project, few wanted to be seen as homeless. Most, both female and male wanted to be photographed as ordinary people, living everyday lives. They wanted to be involved in taking photographs that provided evidence of their own self-image, and who they wanted to be outside of their homeless label. Some used the photo ‘shoots’ as performance opportunities, and pretended to be street-kids. I ended up with a lot of photographs of empty squats, stained beddingless mattresses, dirty toilets, young people looking like they were having a good time and portraits which might be found in any lounge room or family photo album.

Looking you in the face

Seven years later in 1994 I embarked on a similar photographic endeavour mainly to pursue, and attempt to redress some ethical concerns and questions emerging from Images of homelessness. My proposal was to enter into a photographic relationship with a number of young women, who were either at the time experiencing, or had recently experienced homelessness. I deliberately excluded young men because in the earlier project they tended to dominate social and visual space, at times forcefully asserting their (often assumed, rather than actual) technical skill and knowledge, with the result that a number of young women were discouraged from participating. The young men’s eagerness and the young women’s reluctance to be photographed also challenged my own naïve and sexist notions about young women’s desire to pose in front of a camera. Further, some female participants were clearly inhibited by a heterosexual adolescent male presence. This time my intention was to explicitly encourage young women to take leading roles in composing images depicting themselves, their children, their friends, objects and places of importance in their lives.

I wanted to continue to avoid victimising homeless images and increase the emphasis on hope and aspiration, as well as the ordinary and everyday. This was largely in response to the participants of the previous project who wanted to write homelessness out of their visual scripts. As the name of the project suggests, Looking you in the face was about assertiveness and confrontation as well as celebration (figures 6, 7 & 8).
Figure 6

Figure 7
Figure 8

Pictured in the lucky country

During 1996, the Victorian state peak body for homelessness, “The Council to Homeless Persons”, engaged me to curate a photographic exhibition of homelessness in Australia, titled Pictured in the lucky country. A main objective was to trace, through photographic images, a historical thread beginning with the early photographic documentation of homelessness during the 1930s depression in Melbourne until the present day. The goal was to demonstrate not only changes in the subject, the homeless person, from lone alcoholic male to destitute families, but also ideological shifts in working with homelessness and homeless people. Questions and discomforts emerged again around the use of photographic space, not only in the fixing of identity, but also the political effort to shift and reconstruct these identities. In some cases this involved masking the evidence of the image with words in order to deliver a desired message; not the message of the subject, but that of the organisation representing the social cause of homelessness, and therefore by association, the subjects23.

The contingencies of meaning and truth became ever more apparent throughout these three projects. How to represent homelessness and homeless people without undoing or undermining their agency? How to operate “within and against”24 (Lather, 1991) the framework of social perceptions and cultural constructions of ‘the homeless person’? How to work creatively with young women to address their multi-layered oppressions? My explorations here are built around similar ethical concerns.

In order to approach even a satisfactory level of transparency, the shifting nature and the contingency of my various roles throughout the three projects requires acknowledgement, particularly my presence as an embodied and active participant. I was at times a researcher or project co-ordinator, at others a kind of teacher, sometimes I was ‘photographic expert’, at others a ‘socially concerned photographer’ or just an annoying person with a camera. At moments it was difficult to conceive of myself, or even my circumstances as different from the young women, sometimes they ‘mothered’ me while at other times I found myself adopting a maternal role. Due to professional expectations, inevitably we found ourselves defaulting back to ‘me’ as worker, and ‘them’ as young people in need; clients/service users.
The diverse uses of the photographs produced out of these projects indicates how these activities – variously creative, documentary, educational, self exploratory and publicity – were able to enter personal and interpersonal domains in hand with the social, political and economic dimensions of homelessness. This raises questions of how photographic images have been and might be further employed in strategies of intervention and activism that operate simultaneously and discontinuously at individual and social levels. It is to these ends that I have included some of these photographs that cross the boundaries of the public and personal.

As indicated I collected images of destitute women from a range of historical and contemporary sources, such as social documentary and sociological texts, newspapers, published collections of photographs and publicity materials. I did not search out archival materials because a key criteria for the selection of images was their public visibility, the photographs needed to have circulated ‘on the surface’ in readily accessible locations like the media, published texts, or exhibitions. Further, the majority of the selected photographs have been reproduced numerous times, for various purposes. For example, as demonstrated in the chapters to follow, documentary images become artworks, artworks become documentary images and newspaper photographs become illustrations. These also often become objects of academic analysis (as is the case with many of the photographs). In their manifold reproduction these images retain previous meanings while adopting new ones, and it is this layering of meaning and effect that is also of central interest in my research. These transformations and adaptations require access to discursively produced and perpetuated meanings, as the bodies and faces that these evidentiary images represent become overlaid with, and constantly re/produced in, the flow of socio-cultural and political currents. Paradigmatically, my analysis is primarily informed by poststructural feminist theorising. However, to examine and explore these meanings, formations, influences and their crooked, multi-directional pathways I employed semiotic discourse analysis, with particularly reference to its applications in visual sociology and visual anthropology.
Methods

Image-based research

Taken cumulatively images are signifiers of a culture; taken individually they are artefacts that provide us with very particular information about our existence. Images provide researchers with a different order of data and, more importantly, an alternative to the way we have perceived data in the past. (Prosser, 1998, p.1)

Since its emergence anthropology has utilised visual data in order to better know and understand people and their social and cultural worlds. Early ethnographers used the camera to record in exacting detail the environments they identified for conversion into material inventories (Collier & Collier, 1986, p. 10). The proliferation of types and forms of visual data, such as sketches of village layouts, artefacts, photographs and film of ceremonies and daily life has witnessed considerable debate over reliability and scientific validity. A popular criticism has been that visual images are too subjective and unsystematic (Pink, 2001, p.7). This has arisen alongside and within similar epistemological debates over the accuracy of written and verbal data, whether produced by the people under study, or by those who are the researchers. Issues of the visual in anthropology became such a focus that the variant, ‘visual anthropology’ emerged. Beginning as the study of anthropological and ethnographic film production the field of study has now broadened to accommodate seemingly endless forms of visual text in the effort to understand people and culture. David MacDougall writes:

There is mounting interest today in visual anthropology, even if no one knows quite what it is. Its very name is an act of faith, like a suit of clothes bought a little too large in the hope that someone will grow into it ... the term covers a number of different interests. Some conceive of visual anthropology as a research technique, others as a field of study, others as a teaching tool, still others as a means of publication, and others again as a new approach to anthropological knowledge. (MacDougall, 1998, p.61)

MacDougall cites W.J.T. Mitchell, who in the footsteps of Martin Jay (1994) suggests one reason for the blossoming interest in the visual, might be the ‘pictorial turn’, a reaction against the, “intense linguistic focus of post-war structuralism, poststructuralism, deconstruction and semiotics” (Mitchell, cited in MacDougall, 1998, p.61).
Like visual anthropology, visual sociology has also developed as a distinct field of study. Despite visual sociology's parallels with the former, the two appear to have advanced with little awareness of each other (Harper, 1998, p.28). While ethnographic film production encouraged anthropologists to more closely study uses of visual research methods, documentary photography – dealing with social issues, such as drug-use, poverty, the anti-war movement, and civil rights – tended to inspire sociologists. The late Victorian work of John Thompson, illustrating the poor in London's streets, and Jacob Riis depicting the living conditions of immigrant tenements in New York; Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans and James Agee, working for the Farm Security Administration during the depression of the 1930s showing poverty stricken families; and Lewis Hine’s photographs of child labour, suggested possibilities for an intimacy with subjects not satisfied by traditional sociological fieldwork (Harper, 1998, p.28). More recently, at the overlap of the cultural and sociological, images that portray social issues have become the objects of, rather than methods for, analysis. It has also become more permissible for social scientific inquiry to broach the personal, allowing for engagement with issues of reflexivity and subjectivity, and providing opportunity for the visual in sociological research to act as a medium through which “new knowledge and critiques may be created” (Pink, 2001, pp.10-11).

At the very least the use of visual images by anthropologists and sociologists indicates recognition and acceptance of the informational and analytic value of photographic and filmic technology. The engagement with, and endorsement of, photography as an epistemological tool further verifies acceptance of visual texts as worthy methods for, and objects of study. At the same time, the practice of visually documenting the social and cultural must also be subject to interrogation. Poststructural and postmodern theorising has levelled some of the most recent attacks on the deployment of photographic and filmic practice in research. Douglas Harper (1998) identifies two aspects of the postmodern critique. Firstly, postmodernists raise questions of documentary photography’s claim to truth and fact, asking whether it is able to accurately represent the interests of the subjects portrayed. Secondly, Harper suggests that postmodern critics such as Martha Rosler see documentary as an aspect of the failed
liberal humanist cause, and that as an unsuccessful emancipatory practice, documentary photography should be held accountable to its focus on the specific and personal. By avoiding or masking the more deeply imbedded, and broader social contexts of oppression, Rosler claims documentary photography has contributed to the commodification of disadvantage and human suffering (Harper, 1998, p.34). These debates raised by poststructural scepticism demand that attention be given to a constellation of concerns over the negotiation and formation of subjectivity, identity, knowledge, truth and the discursive systems which produce and are produced by them (Foucault, 1991b; 1992).

Photography as an image making, evidence-producing exercise, has played a significant role in shaping the representation of reality. As Berger (1984) suggests, the idea of seeing produces a desire to know. The photograph creates reality through the devices of inclusion and exclusion. Together the photographer and the photograph produce and generate truths. Determinations are made about what to photograph, and how to frame it. What can and cannot be seen is negotiated and decided by, and between the agency of the photographer and the limitations and possibilities of the medium. What will be known is constructed out of these complex acts of power that are intricately bound with the politics of representation and also with the relations of power between the seen and the see-er.

Gillian Rose (1997) observes that recent critical analysis of documentary photography is evident along two poststructural axes, the Foucauldian approach which sees documentary photography as, “a disciplinary project of discursive surveillance” and the psychoanalytic, which tends towards analysis of family snapshot photography and concentrates on “uncertainty, desire, and loss” (Rose, 1997, p. 278). Rose argues that separately the dominance of these theoretical approaches has resulted in an over determining analysis of photographs, ascribing images with intent and categorisations that overlook other contexts, while also obfuscating or neglecting factors such as the construction of gender difference. She proposes instead that these approaches should not remain distinct, and, “should be deployed together in order to effect a destabilizing critique of photographies” (Rose, 1997, p.279). In agreement with Rose’s argument I
attempt to interlace psychoanalytic and Foucauldian theorising of visual texts. However it must also be acknowledged that when discussing personal or snapshot photography I have tended to utilise psychoanalytic concepts, and when the subject is associated with the more formal social documentary genre, my analysis leans towards a Foucauldian critique. Subsequently the methodology of this thesis recognises a further point made by Rose, that, “academic theorizations of photographs are an important part of the spaces of representation through which meaning is invented” (Rose, 1997, p.278).

**Writing is reading is research**

A poststructural research approach is concerned with understanding ‘how’ rather than ‘what’. The assumption is that our social world is in a constant state of flux, a state of becoming. Collectively and individually we are perpetually engaged in negotiating and constructing our ‘selves’ in, by and through discursive technologies of knowledge production such as written, spoken and visual texts. Poststructural and postmodern research is wary of uncritically furthering the Enlightenment project through the production of knowledges which unavoidably subjugate, oppress and discriminate while simultaneously discovering, making and progressing (Foucault, 1991b; Harding, 1990). Therefore, rather than setting out to produce new knowledges, which is considered a pointless and potentially dangerous exercise, research focuses on uncovering how existing knowledges came to be produced and how these contribute to establishing truth regimes that include and privilege some, while necessarily excluding and oppressing others. The poststructural enterprise seeks to recognise and deconstruct and in so doing to subvert potential and actual oppressive systems and practices. Implicated as a central focus are academic and scientific discourses that have been specifically concerned with establishing their own expert, and thus privileged voices. In efforts to undo some of the discursive practices that perpetuate truth fabrication, postmodern research methods often involve drawing on voices or perhaps more accurately, texts that modernist scientific and academic epistemes have tended to discredit (Game & Metcalfe, 1996). Popular culture is considered as a legitimate and bountiful knowledge-producing domain and system of practices. Domains such as science, youth culture, the arts, psychiatry, popular entertainment, sport, the disenfranchised and the criminal, are
approached as texts to be ‘read’ rather than sites for discovering new, as yet uncovered knowledge.

Postmodern research methodology assumes that these fields of human organisation and operation are inscribed with the political, juridical, social and cultural methods, mechanisms and technologies that position them and their human subjects. “For poststructuralist writers,” Allan Kellehear explains, “‘research’ is a ‘reading’ of the world, and the task is always persuasion rather than proving ... the model is therefore literary, creative rather than formalistic and scientific-academic” (Kellehear, 1993, p.25). Consequently, in poststructuralist research, writing is itself a research method. Poststructuralism understands our sociocultural existence as realised in, through and of discourse, or language; in short all that we know and can know is produced through and as text. By engaging with this idea, that texts construe our world - be they visual, spoken or written representations - we cannot help but arrive at the position where the act of writing is also the act of searching, sense-making, analysing and realising. In Passionate Sociology (1996) Game and Metcalfe assert, “[t]he inseparability of concepts and language ensures that research is writing right from the start” (Game & Metcalfe, 1996, p.94). Rejecting distinctions between academic and fictional writing as artificial, they posit the denial of metaphor, density, opaqueness, prose and creativity in sociological writing as evidence of the sciences admitting the ‘dangers’ of this subjugated knowledge, and thus truth generating potential in these writing forms. However, as Game and Metcalfe also argue traditional sociology not only denies creative writing forms, it denies that its own writing practices are acts of cultural production for fear of undoing its own claim to be able to uncover and thereby know the truth. They suggest:

If sociological writing denies itself, it does so because there are things at stake in terms of its status as knowledge: a pretension to Truth is retained by a fantasy of standing outside, of not partaking of the material world which one would know. The materiality of knowledge, a central aspect of which is writing, is denied in order to retain a privileged status of knowledge, which in the case of sociology is usually defined as science.

(Game & Metcalfe, 1996, p.88)
Kellehear further notes:

Poststructuralist writers, partly because they wish to avoid the authorial voice of “the expert” and partly because they have no use for self-conscious ‘scientific’ presentation, often write as if they were telling a story … they wish to reveal, in the re-examination of a piece of social reality, that which might not be obvious to the casual observer.

(Kellehear, 1993, p.28)

By ‘re-reading,’ through the act of writing, not only particular photographic images, but also photography itself as a method of visually structuring knowledge, I hope to offer some insights into how visual depictions of disadvantaged women refer to and emerge from the everyday narratives that shape and structure the inequities of social life. While at times a narrative approach is adopted, I am also concerned not to be restricted to any particular form of text, whether visual or written. To deny ‘traditional’ approaches of academic writing would be to replicate its own errors of exclusion. Therefore as a document this thesis is loosely structured according to a traditional social science format, while also introducing forms of writing that might be more often associated with the creative arts. I believe this approach is justified by a project that seeks to analyse visual images that operate simultaneously across the categories of science and art. To do otherwise would be to deliberately elide creative forms of communication and knowledge production while deferring to the master truth claims of the ‘scientific’ method.

Paying homage to a social science format raises a number of problems in this type of project, particularly in clearly articulating a ‘method’ or set of ‘applications’. In approaching the research task with writing/reading as a central method, different sets of concepts become the primary methodological equipment. Some of these concepts launch the journey; others only reveal themselves through the practice of writing. The next section extends this discussion by exploring further methodological issues.
Methodology matters

Feminism, ideology and action

Encounters between feminism and poststructural theorising have elicited confirmations, opportunities, misgivings, reformulations and, “tensions around power, knowledge, identity and the body” (Ramazanoğlou, 1993, p.2). Foucault’s genealogical method, which seeks to recover ‘subjugated voices’, resonates with feminism’s ‘Herstories’, the reclamation of forgotten and overlooked women’s histories (Bailey, 1993, p.101). Postmodernism’s challenge to the assertions of a measurable, knowable, reality, affirms feminism’s critique of androcentrism and science as knowledge/power constructs. The poststructural recognition that rational, logical, knowledge depends on binary oppositions, always privileging one of the pair (the positive) over the necessary ‘other’ (the negative), connects with feminism’s critique of gender as male/female construct. However, there are also inevitable hurdles. The postmodern unbinding of gender categories threatens to undo the position from which women can find voice, averts attention from issues of gender oppression to ‘other’ oppressions, those of men included, and threatens to dilute woman-centred political stands. The attack on Enlightenment ideals such as a knowable and knowing subject, a transcendent emancipatory cause and optimism for a better future, casts shadows upon feminist ideals. Nevertheless, perhaps conveniently in keeping with a poststructural insistence on unavoidable contradiction and paradox, many feminists have positioned themselves to choose that which is useful, and work through, around, or with that which hinders (see Butler, 1990; Gunew, 1991; Kenway, 1992; Lather, 1991a; Ramazanoglu, 1993; Sawicki, 1991).

For example, Patti Lather proposes a feminist research methodology grounded in the conviction that, “in our action is our knowing” (Lather, 1991a, p.xv). Lather’s methodology draws together feminist, neo-marxist and postmodern theory and practice and stresses the importance of establishing speaking positions. Broadening her feminist stance to include the oppression of men, Lather claims that although, “by no means monolithic, either within or across categories of marginalisation, the voices of women, men of colour, the economically oppressed, post-colonials, lesbians and gays, all create a powerful and no longer ignorable conjunction of critical voices in social theory”
(Lather, 1991a, p. 33). Lather’s imperative is for active participatory research that unsettles the self-confirming, self-perpetuating discourses of academic inquiry, which establish and re-establish their own hegemony. Her proposed critical emancipatory praxis demands research maintains and encourages self-interrogation, reciprocity and, “a deep respect for the intellectual and political capacities of the dispossessed” (Lather, 1991a, p.55). Consistent with postmodern and many feminist research approaches, Lather suggests methods should be directed at rupturing the condescending practices of objective observation by requiring active engagement with, and guidance by, the research participants. She argues that the concepts of emancipation should perform inspirationally:

By resonating with people’s lived concerns, fears and aspirations, emancipatory theory serves an energizing, catalytic role. It does this by increasing specificity at the contextual level in order to see how larger issues are embedded in the particulars of everyday life. The result is that theory becomes an expression and elaboration of progressive popular feelings rather than abstract frameworks imposed by intellectuals on the messy complexity of lived experience. (Lather, 1991a, p.61)

In respect of Lather’s assertions, my project is concerned with exploring how visual practices intended to perform emancipatory functions, such as socially concerned photography, can also subjectify and oppress. Lather exemplifies the poststructural feminist concern to retain ideals of overcoming ideological and material repression, in particular that of women, while recognising the contingencies of meaning, truth and lived experience. Although it is tempting to argue, as do Lather (1991a; 1991b) and others (Braden, 1983; Rabinowitz, 1994), that this might be overcome by fostering conditions for observation by the subjugated, rather than observations of the other, the arguments of Judith Butler (1990) should not be overlooked. Butler proposes that any truth producing activity, which allows meaning and identity to fix is by its nature oppressive, despite concomitant liberatory effects.

Lather argues that it is necessary for the researcher to maintain critical self-awareness through, “a discursively reflexive position which recognises how our knowledge is mediated by the concepts and categories of our understanding” (Lather, 1991a, p.39).
Sandra Harding, on the other hand, urges that for feminist research to remain ‘feminist’ it cannot (yet) let go completely of Enlightenment assumptions. According to Harding, all feminist research consistently shares the belief, “in the desirability and the possibility of social progress, and that improved theories about ourselves and the world around us will contribute to that progress” (Harding, 1990, p.99).

While the majority of poststructural feminists have by no means abandoned hope, scepticism exists over the feasibility of liberation existing without oppression, or for progress to occur apart from regression or stagnation. Even the very meaning of these concepts has been set adrift. Sharing a similar set of concerns Paula Rabinowitz laments:

Those who cannot represent themselves and so must be represented have been historically dispossessed. One can read this admonition – they must as a declaration of failure: because they cannot speak for themselves; we must do it for them. Or perhaps it is a plea for recognition: because they have not been heard; we must listen.

(Rabinowitz, 1994, p. 218)

This thesis hovers in a somewhat tenuous and ambiguous location; a place Rabinowitz sums up in her challenge, “how to critique and deconstruct the present and simultaneously imagine and prefigure a future without doing violence to the past; how to sketch a poetics of politics and a politics of poetics simultaneously” (Rabinowitz, 1994, p.219). My personal claim to be feminist is also a declaration of optimism and thus hope. As members of a discursively constructed category, women experience difference, inequality, oppression and violence because they are other than male. This does not mean that all men are oppressors, or that all women are oppressed, nor are women a homogenous group fixed in opposition to men. While homeless women share many of the same oppressions as homeless men, they also confront particular forms of exclusion and violence related to their gendered identity. Despite the obvious importance of these issues, this thesis is not solely concerned with the gender politics of homelessness; rather I am interested in exploring the politics of the representation of homelessness. My questions centre around how visual images have contributed to perpetuating the binary oppositions; female/male; homeless/homed; poor/wealthy;
marginal/central; belonging/non-belonging, while at the same time recognising that socially concerned photographs are the products and producers of these oppositions. Further, I am interested in the social, cultural and political contexts out of which developed the ocular technologies that enabled the production of evidentiary images, representations able to make knowledge claims of ‘having been there’.

**Epistemology and ontology**

I am interested in how the visual representation of women as destitute might contribute to an epistemology of homelessness. Drawing on feminist and poststructural theorising I hope to engage with some of the complexities of being, representation and knowing. The concepts of epistemology and ontology are distinct from one another and should not be conflated; although it is evident they share methodological borders (Crotty, 1998, p.9). Liz Stanley and Sue Wise see the consanguinity of being and knowing as an epistemological resolve:

> ‘[E]pistemology’ is a theory of knowledge which addresses central questions such as: who can be a ‘knower’, what can be known, what constitutes and validates knowledge, and what the relationship is or should be between knowing and being (that is between epistemology and ontology). (Stanley & Wise, 1990, p.26)

Although Stanley and Wise (1990) argue for a feminist epistemology grounded in, and emerging from lived experience, they privilege epistemology over ontology by suggesting the relationship between knowledge and being is determined by epistemology, or the ‘theory of knowledge’. They also state that it is important not to move too far away from the awareness that human subjects, always historically and contextually located, exercise theories of knowing so that objects can be ‘known’, identified and then acted upon. At the same time they make the point that these ways of knowing are directly constructed from the experience of being in the materiality of everyday life (Stanley & Wise, 1990, p.11).

Asserting that dominant systems and institutions of knowledge are masculinist constructs that exclude the voices of women, feminists have moved to establish female experience of the world as different from, but no less legitimate than male experience.
One response has been the development of a woman-centred version of ‘standpoint epistemology’: research which privileges the voice of the oppressed (Harding, 1987; Stanley, 1990). Early versions of this position adopted the Marxist concept of substructure and super-structure, accepted the binary of oppressed and oppressor, and argued that the subordinate (woman) is more likely to know the truth than members of the dominant group (men), who have only a partial view and understanding of the mechanisms of life and social ordering. Sandra Harding proposed:

Men in the ruling classes and races reserve for themselves the right to perform only certain kinds of human activity, assigning the balance to women and men in other, subjugated groups. What they assign to others they rationalize as merely natural activity – whether this be manual labour, emotional labour, or reproduction and child care – in contrast to what they regard as the distinctively cultural activity that they reserve for themselves … For standpoint theorists, this inequality is due to the fact that the activities of men shape the horizons of their knowledge and support interests in ignorance of the misery generated by the domination of women. (Harding, 1987, pp.184-186)

Harding positions feminist standpoint epistemology within the scientific, positivist paradigm, describing it as yet another set of efforts to further justify the objectivity of science. She pits postmodern feminisms against this definition by citing Teresa de Lauretis:

In contrast, we can detect (“In reality”?) that at any moment in history there are many “subjugated knowledges” that conflict with, and are never reflected in, the dominant stories a culture tells about social life. Moreover, some argue that women are a primary location of these subjugated knowledges – in fact, that the female subject is a ‘site of differences’. (de Lauretis cited in Harding, 1987, p. 187)

From this ‘site of differences’ there can never be ‘a’ feminist science, sociology, anthropology, or epistemology as feminism is necessarily multiple: feminisms. The notion of ‘herstories’ replaces history, and these might be retold by an infinite diversity of women while at the same time recognising all women’s capacity to speak from the position of otherness (Harding, 1987, p.188). Stanley and Wise (1990), however see Harding as privileging a materialist as opposed to ideological epistemology. They suggest that feminism within the social sciences must necessarily reject dualisms, and in
doing so recognise that individuals can only exist within social locations, and furthermore that the individual/social dualism which privileges the social over the individual is not a useful construct for framing or informing our understandings of social organisation and practice. They propose that the social is knowable through the ontological accounts of individuals, of both “particular people in particular material circumstances ... and from the accounts of ‘intellectual autobiographies of researchers’ ” (Stanley & Wise, 1990, p.43). This revised and reiterated version of feminist standpoint epistemology calls for recognition of the heterogeneity of women’s experience, and argues that there are innumerable ‘standpoints’ from which women can speak. Stanley and Wise explain:

We emphasise that there is no need for feminists to assign ourselves to one ‘end’ or another of the dichotomies ... which have resurfaced in feminist discussions of methodology. We reject the disguised hegemonic claims of some forms of feminism, and actively promote academic feminist pluralism. (Stanley & Wise, 1990, p.47)

While I embrace the idea of a “deconstructed and reconstructed feminist standpoints epistemology” (Stanley & Wise, 1990, p.47), recognising the multiplicity of women’s ontological experience, and all women’s right to speak from their own positioning, I feel more caution is required to avoid essentialist assumptions about the category of woman. It is unlikely that as women we are able to distil or discover unique qualities exclusive to being female, not the least because we are ontologically positioned and therefore defined in relation to broader masculinities – not all of which are hegemonic or necessarily oppressive to women. This does not discount the need to legitimise women’s experience and knowledge. Although, I attempt to focus on critically unravelling gendered knowledge/power relations in order to better understand how men and women have become differentially and unequally treated as homeless, and how these gendered differences have been employed to further establish and perpetuate divisions when it comes to the representation of homelessness.

Game and Metcalfe deal with the tension between knowing and being by embracing a phenomenological view, proposing a synthesis of epistemology and ontology:
Knowing … takes place in an encounter between self and the world, with no attempt to transcend or master the sensual world or the encounter with it. Knowing is in life. Thus it is an experience that is thoroughly embodied and affective. We know the world, or specific phenomena, through our affective, emotional, sensual responses. (Game & Metcalfe, 1996, pp.169-170)

David Silverman, on the other hand warns against the fruitless and polarising academic trap of attempting to resolve the subject/object dualism. Silverman refers to Foucault’s work on the power/knowledge effect that demonstrates how the sciences have constructed humans as both subjects and objects. Employing a Foucauldian approach, Silverman reminds us that theoretical battles over methodology are socially imbedded; no matter what position we choose, “we remain on the side of the forces of power/knowledge” (Silverman, 1989, p.48). Theorising involves acts of power which in their operation construct and deploy subjectifying and objectifying knowledges and knowledge technologies, of which the sciences, the law, and the arts are examples.

Foucault named three ‘subjectifying’ processes of ‘objectification’. Firstly, the ‘sciences’, in which the human subject is defined or objectified by scientific discourses. Secondly, he drew attention to ‘dividing practices’; these operate internally to divide human subjects from themselves, or externally to divide human subjects from others. Finally, Foucault identified ‘self’ subjectification, as the processes by which people objectify themselves as human subjects (Foucault, 1983, p. 208). As gendered subjects we need to consider Foucault’s suggestions in relation to our own subjectification, both by external knowledge/power systems, and those we exert upon ourselves through the exercise of our subjectivity. One way of approaching this might be through the notion of a feminist ‘unalienated knowledge’ in which, “the ‘act of knowing’ is examined as the crucial determiner of ‘what is known’ ” (Stanley & Wise, 1990, p.12). In this way the academic researcher can be self-consciously grounded within the lived research context.

While being and knowing are distinct concepts, they are at the same time inseparable, as Lyotard argues “concept or meaning is not exterior to Being, rather Being is immediately concept in itself and the concept is Being for itself” (Lyotard cited in Crotty, 1998, p.45). Therefore, neither ontological nor epistemological positioning can
be assumed to be distinct, or treated as one and the same, and efforts to establish precession or ascension of one or the other are pointless.

Knowledge produced out of, and brought to bear on, a set of social and cultural practices such as research into the relationships between people and their social and material world must be considered simultaneously product and producer, in and of, the specific circumstances, locations and experiences of all project participants, whether researching, researched or both. Our social and cultural positioning has no nucleus, and specific locations are themselves adrift in the complex web of human existence and organisation, which is neither indiscriminate nor egalitarian. The subordinate positioning of the construct of woman to that of man in the heterosexual gender order represents one (albeit overwhelmingly consistent across social organisation in all cultures, races and religions) axis of discrimination and oppression. In order to address gendered oppression it is necessary to establish a position from which women can speak with authority about shared experiences of subjugation, without lapsing into essentialisms and the false universalisation of gendered difference. Unavoidably this requires continuous grappling with issues of being and knowing, keeping open the question of ‘how’ we can more completely comprehend our social worlds and ourselves within them.

**Postmodern and poststructural glimpses**

Disenchantment with the promises of the Enlightenment, and modernity’s failure to solve the problems of human existence, turned the philosophical gaze towards questioning the products and technologies of the progressive, modern industrialised and capitalised world. The emergent, somewhat loose collection of theories, labelled variously as postmodernism and poststructuralism, share a rejection of the positivist project of knowledge production: of fixing, labelling and identifying, of exercising power by demarcating knowledge into categories with the object of producing generalisable law-like truth claims.

Jean-Francois Lyotard claims postmodernism is a necessary part of the modern, “postmodernism … is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is
constant” (Lytotard cited in Appignanesi & Garrett, 1995, p.20). By this Lyotard was referring to the dependence of modernism’s progressive cause on constant critique and rejection of what has just been, its turning against itself: the past must always fail, and the future must always promise success. Some theorists, such as Jameson (1984) reject the notion of ‘post’modernism, instead interpreting the postmodern condition as ‘advanced’ or ‘late’ modernism, while others are content to describe postmodernism as “modernism come to its senses” (Parton, 1994, p.27).

Often used interchangeably, the terms poststructural and postmodern represent similar but also distinct theoretical practices. Both might safely (if this is possible) be described as post-Enlightenment. One of the impulses of poststructuralism emerges out of linguistic theory. Extending from semiotic theory associated with French structuralism and the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure it developed into critique and rejection of, amongst other factors, the assumption that it is possible to discover underlying ‘structures’ in language which are consistent across all human groups, and which therefore can determine and explain human behaviour (Cobley & Jansz, 1997, pp.68-69). Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and the latter works of Roland Barthes are commonly identified as poststructural. The concept and practice of deconstruction, developed by Derrida has had wide ranging implications for contemporary humanities and social science research. Michel Foucault’s archaeological and genealogical methodologies interrogate discursive domains including the arts, architecture, the sciences and religion. His archaeology of knowledge is described as, “the process of investigating the archives of discourse” (Kendall & Wickham, 1999, p. 25) in order to show the history of truth claims. Features of Foucault’s archaeological research are to, “chart the relation between the sayable and the visible ... to describe ‘surfaces’ of emergence – places within which objects are designated and acted upon [and] to describe ‘forms of specification’ which refer to ways in which discursive objects are targeted” (Kendall & Wickham, 1999, p. 26).

Genealogy, while closely aligned with archaeology, is also concerned with the analysis of power. As a method it seeks to deconstruct the history of the present – to expose conditions of possibility and in doing so, the concrete specificity of the operation of
knowledge/power effects. Foucault was concerned with the emergence of the psychological and penological sciences of modernity, some of which he understood as disciplinary and coercive, rather than necessarily fundamentally liberatory and humane. Foucault’s approach is shaped by a heightened scepticism that makes the formation of final conclusions not only irrelevant but also impossible due to the assumption that, “we cannot know anything, including the fact that we cannot know anything” [authors’ italics] (Kendall & Wickham, 1999, p.10). Asking ‘how’ rather than ‘what’, Foucault sought to identify the regulatory and governmental functions afforded by, and within the knowledge/power relationship and its consequences. Foucault stated,

My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism.

(Foucault, 1991b, p.343)

As this claim demonstrates, Foucault had not himself abandoned the notion that there is purpose in attempting to move towards an improved, or better understanding of the conditions of knowledge/power, while at the same time acknowledging that a different comprehension is not necessarily better, although this too is always possible.

Postmodernism developed primarily out of the modernist movement in the visual arts, which was itself a critique of modernity (Crotty, 1998), and includes theorists such as Lyotard and Baudrillard. According to Barry Smart, poststructuralism might be best viewed as the set of theories about modernism that contributed to bringing about postmodernism (Smart, 1993, pp.20-21). This understanding is supported by Roger Jones, who proposes, “[p]oststructuralism and deconstruction can be seen as the theoretical formulations of the post-modern condition” (Jones, 2001, para.5). Healey and Fook suggest poststructuralism, “can be understood as the social and political theory aspect of the broader post-modern historical and cultural movement” (Healey & Fook, 1994, p. 46). Despite what might be called arbitrary distinctions or categorisations, together poststructuralism and postmodernism have turned academic research back onto itself, making it accountable to its own knowledge claims and power effects; dislodging the ‘expert’ and calling into question any notions of transcendent
truth. Further, the defined territories of academic knowledge – the disciplines, the sciences, humanities and arts – have seen the traversal and rupture of their carefully composed borders. This has resulted in the opportunity for the social sciences to welcome the knowledges and practices of other disciplines, as the warring over which truth is the ‘real’ truth has been undone in a theoretical implosion.

As discussed, Enlightenment utopian desire has not been entirely abandoned; rather it has been ascribed new forms and new locations. Where modernity is seen to have exhausted its emancipatory potential, the marginalised and disenfranchised can find renewed hope in the reconceptualising of how power and knowledge operate with and through each other to produce truths. If truth is a discursive construct, we can shape our own truths, and we can draw attention to oppressive truth regimes. If power operates through discourse, if we live power, rather than acquire it like a commodity, then it is potentially available to all. A common criticism of postmodern theorising is the tendency to collapse into nihilism where all becomes pluralist, relative and thus pointless, and the notion of a better future is abandoned. However, as feminist writers (for example, Harding, 1987, 1990; Kenway, 1992; Lather, 1991a, 1991b; Stanley and Wise, 1990) have shown there is a sustained refusal to rescind hope, and even Foucault professes, ‘a pessimistic activism’ which would be pointless without hope for some form of change or improvement.

Deconstruction, différence and intertextuality

Kelleheear identifies three analytic forms adopted by postmodern research (Kelleheear, 1993, p.28). The first is phenomenology, seen in Game and Metcalfe’s (1996) approach, and proposes integrating sociological research practice with the sensual, the corporeal, desire and passion. Description is grounded, often in a narrative form, in lived experience. The second form identified by Kelleheear is symbolic interactionism, where the concern is to explain how people interpret the world and how this has knowledge/power effects that can be either negative or positive. This approach can be seen operating in the work of Foucault, which attempts to analyse how people become subjects and the role power/knowledge plays in this milieu. He proposes, “while the human subject is placed in relations of production and of signification, he [sic] is
equally placed in power relations which are very complex” (Foucault, 1992, p.209). Foucault took issue with the notion of a singular, fixed set of theoretical concepts guiding research practice and rejected efforts to identify his genealogical and archaeological journeys as methodologies, asserting them instead as partial histories and explorations. To claim any guiding theory perpetuates an already dangerous knowledge/power episteme and thus reinforces its objectifying effects (Foucault, 1992, p.209). Thirdly, Kellehear cites psychoanalytic and semiotic analysis, which emerged from literary theory. This attempts to uncover one or several hidden or over determined conventions or agendas in the effort to reveal, recover and reinscribe subjugated voices. Associated with this form of inquiry is the work of the French feminist Julie Kristeva, who in 1974 employed the idea of intertextuality to refer to the negotiation and movement of meaning between different texts. The work of Jacques Derrida and the latter works of Roland Barthes also align with this approach to understanding texts as, "owing more to other texts than to their own makers [each text] provid[ing] contexts within which other texts may be created and interpreted” (Chandler, 1999, p.1). As discussed in the previous chapter, Barthes was also concerned with an intersexuality that recognised the relationship between the self-text of the reader/writer and the codified (written or visual) text.

Two of the most influential concepts emerging from postmodern semiotic theory are deconstruction and différence, most famously described by Jacques Derrida. These particular ideas are significant to the project of understanding how photographic images function as socially and culturally imbedded texts. Many of the images considered in this study express or embody advocacy and activist intentions. Some are less intent on documentation of the actual than on using invention and performance to illustrate the political. Whether insistently documentary, or deliberately staged, many are positioned with their subject, homelessness and destitution, as interventions and attempts to redress the social and personal exclusion and marginalisation associated with the absence of ‘home’ as constituted within dominant discourses. As such the photographs and all of their traces form parts of, while at the same time emerging from, a discursively delimited signification system built around sociocultural conceptions of home and homelessness, of belonging and non-belonging, as these are interwoven with myth and
truth. Derrida proposes that escape from this textual web is impossible; there is nothing outside of it. He asserts that all meaning-making activity contributes to and derives from the production and maintenance of a limitless sea of knowledge and truth production. Rosemary Tong iterates Derrida’s claim:

Language does not … provide us with the meanings or essences of objects, concepts, or persons somehow located outside of it … language creates meaning, the only meaning to which it can refer … there is no being (presence) to be grasped, there is … no nothingness (absence) with which to contrast it. (Tong, 1989, p.222)

Tong (1989) explains that according to Derrida western philosophy has spun logocentrism into the supporting fibres of our knowledge base, so much so that we, as subjects, are unaware of its operation. In order to untangle these threads, (but only ever partially, never permanently, and inevitably creating more tangles as we unravel) and commence the task of uncovering meaning, Derrida proposes the process of deconstruction. This involves reversing the hierarchical order of binary oppositions endemic to rationalism, which privilege one of the pair over the other; for example, man/woman, home/homelessness, adult/child, by superimposing the oppositional other onto the privileged concept. This makes it possible to more easily recognise the dependency of the initially dominant concept on the existence of the other, for example home cannot exist without homelessness. In fact home is literally, textually inscribed in homelessness, (as is man in woman, male in female). We are able to not simply reverse the hierarchy, (what would be achieved?) but to reinscribe the set of concepts with an understanding of how it has operated by necessarily oppressing and repressing its other. That known, it is then possible to begin to see how systems of thought are established as regimes of truth and suppress other knowledges. Each deconstructive reading produces ethical and socio-political effects while also revealing aspects of the conceptual and material structuring of oppressive systems of meaning, and how these are inhered into our social, political and cultural systems (Solas, 1995, p.73). Derrida resists, however, fixing any meaning as unarguable, inimitable truth, and asserts the importance of opposing such logocentrism with différence. This concept, which he invented (Appignanesi & Garratt, 1996) refers to the continual deferral of fixing meaning, a state of constant flux, an unending process of contesting and unsettling meaning, activated
through recognising how concepts derive meaning and substance by positing and asserting their difference from other concepts (Coblely & Jansz, 1997). Derridian deconstruction is of assistance in attempting to uncover how photographic images of homeless women might function in the maintenance and perpetuation of the oppositional binaries of homelessness and home; female and male, while also indicating how these might be reinscribed to unsettle purportedly fixed socioeconomic and political categorisations.

Julie Kristeva, although a deconstructionist, objects to allowing deconstruction the horizon Derrida proposes: one that denies anything beyond the reach of language; the symbolic order. Her reasons are founded on the intent to retain the speaking subject. The constant deferral of meaning proposed by différence, according to Kristeva does little more than produce a, “seemingly subjectless field of signifying play” (Moi, 1986, p.16) that does not allow for anything, such as the imaginary, that might exist outside of language and the symbolic space. Kristeva believes that through art, literature and other acts of the creative, the poetic and the imaginary, transformation and change can occur (Moi, 1986, p.17). Rather than seeing différence as going too far, Kristeva believes it does not go far enough (Moi, 1986). She also rejects the very category ‘woman’, seeking a subject beyond gender (Appignanesi & Garratt, 1996, p.99).

Explicating the work of the Soviet theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, Kristeva coined the term intertextuality, to describe how, “any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Kristeva, 1986, p.37). In Revolution in poetic language, (1986) she suggests that the term ‘transposition’ better describes the process of intertextuality as the movement between signifying systems, for example between a carnival scene, the novel, poetry and academic writing, because as a linguistic shift it elicits the requirement to articulate and enunciate in new ways. Kristeva states:

If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an intertextuality), one then understands that its ‘place’ of enunciation and its denoted ‘object’ are never single, complete and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated.

(Kristeva, 1986, p.111)
Drawing on Kristeva’s and Barthes’ ideas, the photograph becomes an always necessarily intertextual, plural and ambiguous object and site, providing an ideal opportunity for exploring how various textual forms have been brought together under the illusion of a represented reality and constructed truth. In the chapters which follow I employ both Kristeva’s and Barthes’ (1993b) ideas of intersexuality in an attempt to explore how a range of sociocultural practices and products, known under the category of ‘socially concerned’ photography have contributed to forming the subject ‘homeless woman’ and how this has concomitantly played a role in discursively producing and delineating ‘homelessness’ itself. The question becomes, not only who or what is the subject of these images - homelessness, homeless woman, or the homeless person - but more importantly how these have been constructed. While undoubtedly the sign, what we see, is destitute woman, how we interact with the image, how we bring our own life-texts and all other texts familiar to us into the process of meaning-making about the photograph determines its significance and influence; the truths it is able to tell and the power it is able to exercise.

In the next chapter I am concerned with emergences of photographic seeing, of viewing the world through a linear, fixed-point, single-subject perspective. Photography as a method of capturing reality not only required a particular ocularity, it also depended on a desire to have the world represented by a machine that could (notionally) replace, or at least improve upon the (imperfect) human eye. Therefore, transpositions between the photographer, the subject, and the photograph are also explored. In chapter five I return to some of the ideas explored here and offer an intertextual exploration of how the gendered construct of woman operates as homeless subject and subject of homelessness.
Endnotes

19 This is a pseudonym.
20 Also known as the “Burdekin report”.
21 This project was auspiced by the Salvation Army Crossroads Youth Project, which took responsibility for all related ethical concerns. All young people who participated signed consent forms, no photographs of young people under 16 years, or Wards of the State were taken without guardianship consent.
22 This project was funded by the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Monash University, and was approved by the Monash University Ethics committee. All participants signed consent forms. Photographs from this collection have been published in Parity, the journal of The Council to Homeless Persons, Blackflash, a Canadian photography journal, and the Big Issue, Australia, a magazine produced to raise awareness about homelessness, and to provide an income for homeless people as vendors.
24 This term is borrowed from Patti Lather’s monograph titled “Feminist Research in Education: Within/Against”, 1991.
26 Even though this culminated at first in the development of distinct fields of study, the current trend of cross-disciplinarity has drawn them more closely together.
28 ‘To avoid the clumsiness of repeating the terms ‘poststructuralism’ and ‘postmodernism’ together throughout the paper, from now on I will use the term postmodernism, while recognising that poststructural theories have been key to the formation of this paradigm.’
Chapter Four

Who the photograph/er?

I say that the power of vision extends through the visual rays to the surface of non-transparent bodies, while the power possessed by these bodies extends to the power of vision. Likewise each body pervades the surrounding air with its image; each separately and all together do the same; and not only do they pervade it with the semblance of their shape, but also with that of their power. (Leonardo da Vinci, 1953, p.117)

Introduction: The visual fantastic

Transported across five centuries, Leonardo da Vinci’s (1452 – 1519) words might be read as a Foucauldian interpretation of how the power of vision operates between images, objects and human subjects. It has been well argued by writers utilising Foucault’s ideas that neither the will to frame and display form and its spatial and temporal locations ‘as the eye sees’, nor the resultant depictions of the ‘mechanical eye’ are as truthful, transparent or innocent as many previous accounts assume (Crary, 1994; Lalvani, 1993; 1996; McQuire, 1998; Sekula, 1989; Tagg, 1988; Wright, 1992). The desire of Renaissance artists/scientists to not only faithfully reproduce what the eye sees, but to know how the eye sees, spawned early contributions to the invention of a machine that could draw with light. Just as photographic images, “mark the point where a process of production gives way to a range of effects” (Fyfe & Law, 1988, p.1) the desire to produce these representations generated an array of other practices, ideas and devices.

As manufactured objects variously accumulated in collections and archives, displayed larger than life in public spaces, privately stored away as personal memories or circulated in print and electronic media, photographic images are produced in, and enabled by a multitude of contingencies and discursive practices. At the same time each image is embedded in specific and localised conditions that have formed and transformed, continuously and discontinuously over centuries. Emerging out of a web of
sympathetic and competing interests, driven by a forceful will to represent and thereby establish the real, the photograph is trailed by threads and traces of a past that can never be completely erased. Although Hélène Cixous describes the historical and textual composition of the self, her words also apply to the photograph:

Our own subjective singularities are in truth composed, on the one hand, of many other near or distant humans, we are carriers of previous generations, we are, without knowing it, heirs, caretakers, witnesses of known or unknown ancestors; on the other hand we are full of others originating from the books we have read. (Cixous, 1994, p.xx)

The aim of this chapter is to explore aspects of photography’s discursive genealogy and realisation prior to its official emergence in 1839. To do this some pre-modern influences are taken into account that I argue remain entwined in the modern genre of social documentary photography. This particular representational form might be seen as antithetical to Renaissance ideals of truth, beauty and the divine, nevertheless, I am interested in how science and art together contributed to the formation of a visual practice that permits and promotes the public display of disadvantage and destitution. Against a predominantly invisible background of more than two and a half millennia of hegemonic, masculinist science, art, religion and philosophy, it is possible that Leonardo’s assertion may retain some truth. Vision might indeed extend power into the surrounding atmosphere and onto the objects within it, as vision itself is subjected to the power of that which is in its gaze.

The visual text of documentary photography seeks to substitute and thus ascend the actual, which is then irretrievably forever referenced against its representation. Subsequently this reproduction informs future documentary efforts. Photographic representations of homeless people, while dependant on the assumed evidentiary properties of photographic technology, draw on a diverse network of visual literacies. These are shaped by, and continuously contribute to shaping the way homelessness and homeless people are construed through knowledge and sight rituals and conventions. Caught in this flux, the documentary photographer as subject is intrinsic to the narratives that shape the history of photography. Thus this chapter considers the question of the formation of a particular post-Enlightenment subjectivity prepared to
simultaneously self-observe and self-regulate while scrutinising and subjectifying others. Also underpinning this brief exploration of photography’s genealogy is the question of how the identity of the photographer might have merged at particular moments with objects of photographic technology, such as the camera and the print, in metaphorical associations between the body, mind, machine and nature. Further, I am interested in emergent ambiguities of the feminine/masculine binary during the establishment of photography as a social practice, and the role this might have played in shaping and promoting the abstracted reality of the photographic image.

**Photographic critiques**

As much as science and the general populace welcomed ‘light writing’ in 1839, the art world treated photographic representation with suspicion for some time. In 1859 the French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) fervently denounced photography for its invasiveness, proclaiming, “[i]f photography is allowed to supplement art in some of its functions, it will soon have supplanted or corrupted it altogether” (Baudelaire, 1965, p.230). During the mid-twentieth century, amid increasing interest in cultural phenomenon and the structuring of meaning, Roland Barthes’ application of semiotic analysis to visual culture once again problematised the photograph as a deceptive text, as a, “message without a code” (Barthes, 1993b, p. 196). Barthes’ work was joined during the 1970s by John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* (1972) and Susan Sontag’s *On Photography* (1977). These texts offered structural critiques of visual imagery inspired primarily, but not solely by Marxist analysis (Batchen, 1997, p.4; Wells, 2000, p.24). Theorising about photography at this time was largely concerned with how the image as text produces meaning.

*Thinking Photography* (1982) edited by Victor Burgin, called for an interdisciplinary theory of photography distinguishable from other cultural theorising (Wells, 2000, p.24). Influenced by semiotic and psychoanalytic theory Burgin’s concern lay not so much with the photograph as image, but with the “practices of signification that precede, surround, inform, and produce any photograph as meaningful” (Batchen, 1997, p.10). Foucault’s assault on the technologies of the gaze, which he saw as comprising a disciplinary panoptic regime of surveillance, provided the theoretical background for
works such as John Tagg’s *The Burden of Representation* (1988) and Alan Sekula’s “The Body and the Archive” (1989). These argued that photography played a significant role in the exercise of governmentality, while at the same time arguing that photography was a disparate set of practices contingent on specific context for producing meaning.


The Freudian/Lacanian conception of desire as the unachievable and forever displaced original self, coupled with the Foucauldian argument that power is inscribed onto, and therefore revealed by, the bodies of its subjects, has dominated texts over the last decade, such as John Pulz’s *Photography and the Body* (1995) and Suren Lalvani’s *Photography, Vision and the Production of Modern Bodies* (1996). Geoffrey Batchen’s, *Burning with Desire* (1997) seeks to uncover the identity of photography, “in the history of its origins” (Batchen, 1997, p.21). Batchen argues that the historical period, during which photography emerged, 1790-1839 was plagued by the epistemological dilemma over the very nature of nature; “at issue was not just the theorisation and depiction of nature, landscape, reflection, or the passing of time but, more fundamentally, the nature of representation and the constitution of existence itself” (Batchen, 1997, p.100).
According to Batchen rather than resolution between two conceptual opposites, such as subject/object, science/nature, early discourses on photography reveal a, “dynamic, even contradictory, incorporation of both” (Batchen, 1997, p.101). Batchen’s project recognises the cultural origins of desire as a collective, rather than individual experience, while also seeking, “to articulate a moment of origin that produced these individuals even as they reproduced it through their various thoughts and actions” (Batchen, 1997, p.53).

The title of Judith Davidov’s Women’s Camera Work: Self/Body/Other in American Visual Culture (1998) neatly captures the concerns of fin de siècle feminist theorising on photography. In her introduction Davidov states, “[r]ead photographs — visual records of time past — is a way of constructing versions of history”. Davidov sees the potential for this process of history-making to foster as many changeable narrative patterns as there are readers of the images (Davidov, 1998, p.3); while Gillian Rose observes that Foucauldian and psychoanalytic critiques of documentary photography have tended to neglect the issue of sexual difference (Rose, 1997, p.278). The work of writing about women and photography has largely remained women’s work, although, as poststructural theory argues, the unwritten, the invisible is always inscribed into the texts of our cultural practices. Referring to the work of Griselda Pollack and Teresa de Lauretis, Rose proposes supplementing Foucault’s discursive analysis of power and the subject with psychoanalytic concepts in order to attend to the less predictable, and more playful role of the unconscious in producing documentary photographs (Rose, 1997, p.270).

Whilst traditional histories search for continuities and logocentric progression, many late twentieth century explorations of how the past produced the conditions of the present seek evidence in discontinuities and elisions. As Cixous (1994), Derrida (1998), Foucault (1972) and Barthes (1993b) remind us, the present always carries with it traces of buried and intercepted pasts, evidences of histories that erase and are erased as they are written. The photographic images central to my research did not begin with a young woman’s brilliant idea, or the benevolence of the welfare state. They were permitted by, and as such belong to an immense network of visual and photographic practices.
imbedded in social, economic and political conditions accumulated and reconfigured over centuries. In their contemporary convergence these cultural products position particular human subjects as objects of a socially concerned gaze. Thus a key question must be how this documentary gaze was formed, constituted and advanced. Like others currently reconsidering photography’s genealogy, I believe retracing some well-worn historical pathways may recover features and ‘realities’ hitherto rendered silent and invisible by discourses that do not share the same interests as my own in photography as a modern representational medium.

That said, I recognise the impossibility of uncovering definitive meaning from a location removed temporally, by hundreds of years; spatially, by tens of thousands of kilometres; and culturally, by unknowable and unrecoverable behaviours and nuances. I am left to retrace a pitted and partial photographic history already inscribed with my own culture, context and, political and personal interests. Nonetheless, in revisiting replications of some (imperfect) archaeological remains from sites of modern photography’s gestation, I hope to join Judith Davidov in her aim to, “retrieve and rehearse the value of gender as an analytical category in photographic production” (Davidov, 1998, p.7). One way of doing this is to draw the role and function of gender into question, as one trajectory in the discursive production of the desire to photographically reproduce what the eye does (or does not) see.

**Time/Technology/Desire**

Emerging as a scientific and representational practice towards the latter years of the Enlightenment, photography’s history of a little less than two hundred years at first appears well contained in modernity. However, most written histories of photography (largely produced since the late 1930s) recognise fixed-point linear perspective, (photography’s ocular logic) as a voracious emergence of the Renaissance, which can be further traced to the origins of geometry in antiquity (Hossaini, 1999; McQuire, 1998). These connections draw on other products associated with the invention of the photograph, such as mechanical and mathematical technologies (see Benjamin, 1970). Not entirely overlooking the significance of these factors, more recent historical and theoretical analysis problematises this techno-aesthetic approach.
Three of the most commonly cited landmarks in the history of early photography are: firstly, the first chemically fixed photographic images in the 1830s; secondly, the camera obscura as the mechanical ancestor of the present day camera; and thirdly, the emergence during the Renaissance of fixed-point linear perspective. This teleological formation of photography’s historical narrative is now considered by many to be problematic. Suren Lalvani (1993; 1996), Jonathon Crary (1994), Geoffrey Batchen (1997) and Ali Hossaini (1999) are amongst those who raise issue with common assumptions of direct and uncomplicated causal technological links between these events and objects and their precession of modern and contemporary forms of photographic practice.

Crary (1994) proposes that photography’s emergence, rather than being enabled through a transparent, artistic will to achieve technical mastery over a particular form of visual representation, was facilitated through a disruption in this endeavour during the early 1800s, prior to the production of the first chemically fixed photograph. Crary (1994) and Lalvani (1996) both argue this involved developing an ability to rationalise and embrace a radical reorganisation of the classical relationship between the subjective knower/observer and the object of inquiry. Batchen on the other hand explores the discursive eruption and expression of the desire to produce an object such as the photograph (Batchen, 1997; 2001). All three authors argue that in order for photography to be so enthusiastically welcomed as social and scientific practice, a particular sense of self in relation to the world was required.

Inventions and contestations

The year 1839 situates two announcements of the production of the first fixed photographic images. In France, on the 7th January 1839 Dominique François Arago, the director of the Paris Observatory made known Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre’s achievements in producing a highly detailed, positive picture on a treated metal plate, (Trachtenburg, 1980a, p.4). Despite acknowledgement of his collaboration with Joseph Nicépore Niépce, (1765-1833), Daguerre (1787-1851) claimed the product as his own invention, calling it the “Daguerreotipie” (Gernsheim, 1986, p.11).
Aware of Daguerre’s efforts, just three weeks later in Britain, on the 31st January 1839, William Henry Fox Talbot announced to the Royal Society his success in fixing a negative image on paper. Of course, the efforts of many other hopeful experimenters preceded those of Talbot and Daguerre. In 1827 Nièpce produced what is at this time considered the first fixed photographic image\(^2\) by placing a metal plate coated with bitumen of Judea inside a camera obscura and exposing it to sunlight for eight hours (Lalvani, 1993, p. 442; Morris, 1986, pp. 30-31). While Talbot acknowledged the contributions of Tom Wedgewood and Sir Humphrey Davey in attempting to fix images projected in the camera obscura (Daniels, 1978, p.5) he was not prepared to relinquish ownership of the developing process. Aware of the potential gain to be made from his discovery, which he named the ‘Calotype’\(^3\) process, Talbot fought for exclusive rights and control, taking out patents in England in 1841 and in America in 1847. Although this appears to have impeded English photographic advancement, Scotland, France and Italy, unaffected by the patent, continued to experiment with the production of positive images onto various chemically treated grounds (Daniels, 1978, p.6). Thus photography was thrust into the commodity system, as both a product and a process of production, giving rise to competition over ownership and control of its exchange.

**Technologies**

The technical means of production highlights another popular point of reference in photographic histories, particularly those written in the first half of the twentieth century. Many of these describe the role of the camera obscura in structuring two-dimensional space (see for example Gernsheim & Gernsheim, 1969; Newhall, 1964; 1990; Scharf, 1986). Crary observes, “[a]rt historians, predictably, tend to be interested in art objects, and most of them thus considered the camera obscura for how it may have determined the formal structure of paintings or prints” (Crary, 1994, p.32). The ocular logic of photography, which links it also with the Renaissance, was developed with the aid of this vision machine, as Newhall explains:

Camera pictures have been made ever since the Renaissance. Artists turned to mathematics and optics for assistance in solving perspective problems, and they found the
phenomenon of the camera obscura (literally “dark room”) a mechanical aid of the greatest value. (Newhall, 1964, p. 11)

This light capturing enclosure in which appeared perfect two-dimensional reflections of three-dimensional life was employed by early photographers to hold and expose photographic plates to selected views and objects. Modification and marketing for this purpose establishes the ‘dark room’ as one of the modern camera’s most directly linked precursors (Morris, 1986, p. 25). However, a complex of elements was at play in the transposition from the fleeting image-sensations of the camera obscura to the carefully framed, fixed, motionless and enduring images of the photograph. These include aesthetic and representational conventions and comprehensions of the body, the mind and the self, coupled with dramatic changes in knowledge, science and the economy.

Even though the invention of the camera has been popularly treated as the technologically significant event or object\textsuperscript{4}, early photographic experiments were less concerned with the projection of the image (that had been achieved by the camera obscura and camera lucida for some hundreds of years) than with the chemical applications necessary to arrest and hold the image. In his first public announcement Daguerre acclaimed the centrality of the chemical process to photography’s invention: “[t]he daguerreotype is not merely an instrument which serves to draw Nature; on the contrary it is a chemical and physical process which gives her the power to reproduce herself” [my italics] (Daguerre, 1880, p.13).

Batchen (1997) makes the point that two components essential to photography’s realisation, “the images formed in the camera obscura and the chemistry necessary to reproduce them” (Batchen, 1997, p.26) were available over one hundred years before Daguerre and Talbot laid claim to their inventions in 1839\textsuperscript{4}. He subsequently endeavours to determine the moment in history when the desire to photograph emerged and began to “insistently manifest itself” (Batchen, 1997, p.36). According to Batchen it appears to have only been possible to think about photography within the discursive domain of Western culture at a particular time: the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, in a particular location: the industrialising nations of Britain, Europe and North
America. Like many of his male contemporaries Batchen overlooks gender as significant in determining not only the individuals who could lay claim to this new art/science, but also how they might be involved in its production. His list of twenty ‘proto-photographers’ (authors and experimenters who aspired towards the production of a photographic image) (Batchen, 1997, p.50) includes only one woman, Elizabeth Fulhamse⁶. While Batchen does include her name when her work is left unrecognised by the majority of photographic historians, he makes no special case over the appearance of her gender on his list. Such an oversight might at first appear consistent with the masculinist hegemony of the time, and perhaps therefore hardly worth mentioning. However it does sit uncomfortably with contemporary historical analysis, particularly, as it would seem women as subjects, together with the idea of ‘woman’ as the opposite of ‘man’, were critical to the advancement and success of photography. Of course, how ‘women’ behaved and how ‘woman’ was thought did not always compliment one another, nor were these necessarily conflictual.

Desires

Photographic vision, or the ‘photographic eye’, what is seen through a monocular lens, is accepted by many writers⁷ to have developed out of the desire to paint what the eye sees before it:

The several attempts made independently in the early nineteenth century to fix images photographically ... seem to have been motivated by an urge akin to that of contemporary landscape painters in their études: to capture single spots of space and time.

(Honour & Fleming, 1984, p.494)

However, the replication of ‘single spots of space and time’ had not always been a central aim of artists. Medieval artwork was unconcerned with linear perspective. Often the same subject, for example a saint, appeared a number of times in the same schema. The viewer could move through significant stages or moments in the represented scene or story as if time itself was three-dimensional.
During the Renaissance, representation revisited, “the classical ideal of the ‘convincing image’ ... the narrative was again to be presented to the beholder as if he [sic] were an eyewitness to imaginary events” (Gombrich 1972b, p.131). At this time in the history of Western culture, the representation of a convincing reality became more and more dependant on careful delineation of the visual field to be represented. Gombrich explains, “you had to know the modifications of the schema caused by the angle of vision, or, in other words, you had to understand that branch of projective geometry known as ‘perspective’ ” (Gombrich, 1972b, p.131).

The Renaissance was “as much an idea as an event” (Spencer, J.R., 1966, p.380) propelled by the desire to establish a new era different from the Middle Ages. Reconstructing how the world was to be represented provided a powerful vehicle for the achievement of this grand aim. During this period the proliferation of optical devices used to mathematically delineate space and form intervened in the human subject’s faith in its own ability to merge with the divine (Virilio, 1994). The voracity of this will to visually re/structure and re/order the world and the relationship of the human subject to it should not be underestimated. Rather than mastery of linear perspective being the sole reason for the development of the photograph’s ocularity, this rampant reorganisation and reassertion of representation was also produced out of a desire to extend man’s control of the physical and natural world. Concomitantly, the bond between the divine and the natural, the transcendent and the human were disrupted, as the mystical was challenged by reason and logic.

The application of linear perspective to painting during the early fifteenth century is accredited to the experiments of Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446), (Gombrich 1972b; Hossaini, 1999; Lalvani, 1996) while credit for its written translation into a theory of optics belongs to Brunelleschi’s friend, Leon Battista Alberti (1404-72), (Hossaini, 1999; Lalvani, 1996). The approach to perspective described by Alberti in his 1435 treatise on painting, Della Pittura traces Arabian scholarship of the ninth and eleventh centuries to the optical theories of Euclid, Galen and Ptolemy in ancient Greece, (Lalvani, 1996).
Alberti is often cited as having described paintings as “windows on the world”\textsuperscript{38}. Twice in \textit{Della Pittura}\textsuperscript{39} Alberti offers descriptions on which this palimpsest is no doubt based. The first reference instructs the painter in how to approach application of colour, and reads: “[w]hen they fill the circumscribed places with colours, they should only seek to present the forms of things seen on this plane as if it were of transparent glass” (Alberti, 1966, p. 51). The second, more direct reference describes Alberti’s own approach to achieving proportion and perspective: “I inscribe a quadrangle of right angles, as large as I wish, which is considered to be an open window through which I see what I want to paint” (Alberti, 1966, p.56). What Alberti ‘wants to paint’ however is not the ‘real’ world, but an ‘istoria’, a composition of exacting proportion, circumscription, definition and colour, with subjects and characters derived from Greco-Roman mythology\textsuperscript{40} (Spencer, J.R., 1966, p.24). Believing painting to be an activity close to Godliness, the realism Alberti encouraged painters to achieve with his perspectival schema is not actuality but a convincingly enhanced representation abstracted from reality.

Painters calculated the effect of ‘reality’ by firstly positioning the human figure in the picture field to establish the horizon line, from this measurement they determined the distance from the picture where the viewer would stand (see Spencer, 1966). Despite claiming in the first book of his two volume treatise that, “[t]he painter is concerned solely with representing what can be seen” (Alberti, 1966, p.43), Alberti opens the second book with religious inspiration, arguing that the dead come alive in painting, defects can be overlooked and ugliness veiled. Thus he espouses, “[g]old worked by the art of painting outweighs an equal amount of unworked gold” (Alberti, 1966, p.64). Alberti likens the picture plane of the painting to Narcissus’ returned gaze and claims that Demetrius failed to achieve greatness as a painter, “because he was much more careful to make things similar to the natural, than to the lovely” (Alberti, 1966, p.92).

Here, in the Renaissance framing, measuring and definition of the real reality is transformed into its own fictionalised depiction. The intention is not so much to replicate the actual, but to use its connotation to arrange subjects and viewers in an architectural, natural and transcendental space. And although a powerful motivation was the wish to advance religious, political and/or economic positions (Spencer, H., 1975),
the careful application of calculations to include the viewer’s experience in the visual schema, indicates that aspirations of the individual subject were being recognised. Power was mobilised through the chimera of a reality that appealed to nascent notions and formations of a self that was distinguishable from God and the universe. Rather than reproduction of the world or experience as lived, the world is re/designed as it is imagined. In this way photographic visuality, also plays a significant role in influencing human practice, and in numerous sites of social organisation. Whether the emergence of photographic vision can be legitimately ascribed to this historical epoch is perhaps less at issue than acknowledging evidences of the formation and institution of a specific and increasingly regulated ocularity. This was exercised through authority invested in not only the visual, but also the ability to represent reality and the experience of being in relation to the constructed reality. Privileging the visual experience of realism allowed influential bodies such as the Church and the Guilds to promulgate an atmosphere of unlimited human possibility.

Alberti’s diagram of the visual field located the painting as a flat vertical plain between two symmetrical pyramids. While one pyramid, or cone represented a formation of the light (rays) emanating from objects and their surfaces as they receded into a fixed distant vanishing point, the other pyramid receded into the vanishing point of the human eye (Lalvani, 1996). Thus the field of vision was geometrically organised and managed. And while this model was not universally adopted, “it constituted a powerful formula for visual standardization; a mathematical vision which could be continually projected onto the real in a social context in which mathematics was increasingly offered as the universal measure of knowledge” (McQuire, 1998, p.19). Hossaini has reasonable grounds for his claim that, “Alberti’s theories founded both our practical and philosophic understanding of camera images, and of photography” (Hossaini, 1999, p.2).

Renaissance perspective involved the conversion of three-dimensional form via a framed and measured grid onto a two-dimensional surface according to perceived rules governing the sight pathway between the human eye and what lies before it (Hossaini, 1999, p. 2). The camera achieves the same process of conversion without the need of
human labour that exacting measurement involves. Even so, rather than allowing the
genealogy of photographic vision to rest in the Renaissance, or even with Greek
antiquity, Hossaini traces linear perspective to Mesopotamia, and further asserts:

Photography did not happen all at once, as some miraculous by-product of the industrial
era. It is instead an assemblage, a weave, of elements that came together gradually over
millennia, beginning when humans first began to explore and quantify the nature of
visible space. (Hossaini, 1999, p. 2)

Hossaini founds his deduction on the Sumerian need to fulfil the requirement of land
division according to the dictates of the sky-gods: all-seeing stellar deities that allegedly
spoke directly to the priests and advised on land allocations. Unable to see the land from
the sky, the Sumerian rulers developed techniques of ground-based survey, a system of
abstract land measurement and delineation designed on a model of vision fixed from
above. The eye of the sky-god not only defined and dictated boundaries, but also
wrought punishment on those who refused to comply. Hossaini sees the resultant
Mesopotamian and Egyptian survey maps as ancient evidence of a nascent linear
perspective, produced not only to apply an abstract geometric grid to the surface of the
earth, but also to fulfil the requirements of an all-seeing eye that sits beyond and above
the reach and sight of humans.

Drawing these ancient religious and governmental connections is possibly no less
logical than associating linear perspective with photographic ocularity. Modern
surveillance cameras do indeed perform as invisible god-like eyes, prepared to
discipline those who transgress socially and legally sanctioned boundaries. The god-like
eye of the camera is a familiar metaphor, and following Foucault’s Birth of the Prison
(1991a) also of central concern in much theorising over contemporary use of
photography and film (for example see Sekula, 1989; Tagg, 1988; Young, 1996). Hossaini outlines the governmental connection:
Photography is the fulfilment of the sky-god. Hovering above the land, sky gods reinforced early government, justifying the obedience and tribute paid to rulers. When devotion failed, fear could prevail – since the gods saw everything that happened, they could punish misdeeds … Since the time of Sumer, surveillance technology has steadily advanced, keeping pace with and stimulating investigations in geometry, optics and analysis. Photography is the outgrowth of this process, and the camera is a surveillance device, a powerful means to ownership and government. Networks of cameras, some earthbound and others in the heavens, record human affairs, subjecting our actions to the rule and wrath of law. (Hossaini, 1999, p.3)

If it is viable that Renaissance linear perspective was in some way informed by the geometry of ancient Sumerian surveying techniques together with the concept of an all-seeing eye of God, then there is some feasibility in locating here early traces of the thought, knowledge and governmental practices that seeded the ideas which culminated in photography’s omnipotent regulatory vision. But this reading of the effects of photography is too reductive, photography has given rise to a range of productive and liberatory, as well as disciplinary practices, while at the same time drifting in confusion over its own meaning and identity (see Batchen, 1997, pp. 3-21).

The photograph/er’s eye

Problems of vision then, as now, were fundamentally questions about the body and the operation of social power … beginning early in the nineteenth century, a new set of relations between the body on one hand and forms of institutional and discursive power on the other redefined the status of an observing subject. (Crary, 1994, p.3)

Absent from much discussion of modern photography’s genealogy is the photographer, the human subject ready and willing to represent the world and its inhabitants according to specific representational conventions. Many histories of photography treat the photographer as an unproblematic, aspiring artist/scientist/inventor of non-specific gender, working to improve the exactness of visual depiction. The struggle that emerged almost synonymously with the first photograph over photography’s status as an art form, suggests more was operating than an uncomplicated desire for perspectively
precise representations of the world. With Renaissance fervour, Leonardo da Vinci exalted the visual:

Oh excellent thing, superior to all others created by God! What praises can do justice to your nobility? What peoples, what tongues will fully describe your function? The eye is the window of the human body through which it feels its way and enjoys the beauty of the world. Owing to the eye the soul is content to stay in its bodily prison, for without it such bodily prison is torture. (Leonardo da Vinci, 1953, p. 110)

Such worship of the eye and vision is not only profoundly Eurocentric when compared to Indigenous and Eastern cultures, it also assumes only the sighted can find beauty and contentment and so be considered complete. The self, without sight, according to Leonardo da Vinci is a torturous prison. It is somewhat ironic, then that by the time of the Enlightenment, some two hundred and fifty years hence, it was sight that turned the body of the human subject into its own prison.

Leonardo da Vinci explains perspective “as nothing else than a thorough knowledge of the function of the eye”, which is to receive, “in a pyramid all the forms and colours of all objects placed before it” (Leonardo da Vinci, 1952, pp.115-118). In explicating, “how objects transmit their images or pictures, intersecting within the eye”, (p.115) he used the example of light passing through a small hole into a darkened room onto a sheet of transparent white paper:

You will see all the objects on the paper in their proper forms and colours, but much smaller; and they will be upside down by reason of that very intersection. These images, being transmitted from a place illuminated by the sun, will seem as if actually painted on this paper, which must be extremely thin and looked at from behind.

(Leonardo da Vinci, 1952, p.115)

Analogy between the human eye and the camera obscura to which Leonardo da Vinci refers extends from ancient Greece to the eighteenth century in philosophical and practical treatises. This merging of sight and knowledge, apparatus and human body, contributed to the camera obscura also becoming emblematic of the relationship between the mind and body. Crary (1994) and Lalvani (1993; 1996) recognise the camera obscura’s role as a metaphorical model and material authentication for René
Descartes’ (1596-1650) belief in the transcendent superiority of objective knowledge formed by a mind uncontaminated by the “vagaries” of the sensual body. Following Descartes, however, with the emergence of the physiological sciences in the early 1800s, the object under scrutiny shifted from the exterior world to the interior world of the body, which had become, “a new continent to be explored, mapped and mastered” (Crary, 1994, p.79).

In 1690 John Locke wrote, “[e]xternal and internal sensation, are the only passages that I can find, of knowledge, to the understanding. These alone, as far as I can discover, are the windows by which light is let into this dark room” (Locke, 1997, p.158). The philosophers, John Locke (1632-1704) and David Hume (1711-1776) perceived the mind as an inner eye that could observe the actions of the body in its surroundings. Both adopted the model of the camera obscura to explain the inspirational, emancipatory and intellectual ascendance achievable through interior-gazing reflection (Crary, 1994; Lalvani, 1996). Crary suggests that in order to understand the camera obscura, or any optical device, observer and apparatus should not be considered as separate entities (Crary, 1994, p.30). He elaborates citing Locke:

The understanding is not much unlike a closet wholly shut from the light, with only some little opening left ... to let in external visible resemblances, or ideas of things without; would the pictures coming into such a dark room but stay there, and lie so orderly as to be found upon occasion, it would very much resemble the understanding of a man.

(Locke cited in Crary, 1994, pp.41- 42)

While Locke used the idea of the camera obscura to explain interior-gazing reflection, his conceptualisation of knowledge also separated the mind from itself. To achieve full understanding the mind should not be accepted as simply an inner eye for observing the actions of the body in its surroundings, as René Descartes previously proclaimed, but must also scrutinise its own actions.
Locke wrote, "[t]he understanding, like the eye, whilst it makes us see and perceive all other things, takes no notice of itself; and it requires art and pains to set it at a distance, and make it its own object" (Locke, 1956, p.34).

Less inclined to accept an uncomplicated artistic and technological progression from the artificial perspective of the camera obscura to modern photography, Crary suggests that by the mid-eighteenth century the camera obscura was no longer used to service the needs and desires of artists. He argues that well before the first fixed photographic image, the ‘dark room’ was attracting most of its praise for the heightened visual experience provided to those who stood within it, and states:

One must be wary of conflating the meanings and effects of the camera obscura with techniques of linear perspective. Obviously the two are related, but it must be stressed that the camera obscura defines the position of an interiorized observer to an exterior world, not just a two-dimensional representation, as is the case with perspective.

(Crary, 1994, p.34)

Crary demonstrates how the camera obscura was implicated in a range of specific ideological and political functions that contributed to the discursive and institutional positioning of human subjects as observers, and argues that the post-Enlightenment photographer/observer overrode the camera obscura’s interiorised knowing subject. Science had become increasingly less tolerant of the musings of an interiorised subject looking at images projected into the mind by a metaphorically disembodied human eye. The self, mind and body together, became subject and object of science.

The ‘scientific awakening’ of Enlightenment knowledge created a scission in the Renaissance unity between humanity and the world, imposing, “a permanent critique of ourselves” (Foucault, 1991b, p. 43). According to Foucault the Enlightenment might be understood as an anti-humanist critique and extensive mistrust of ‘man’ [sic], in the world and in body and mind (Foucault, 1991b). This new era required and produced a reordered and reconstituted relationship between the human mind, body and senses. The primacy of the mind knowing itself, becoming its own object, impelled a shift to an exteriorised self-observing subject. No longer was knowledge the domain of “subjective
introspection”, but of, “objective external induction and experiment” (Crary, 1994, p.81). The mind and body that comprised the ‘self’, organised as a dualism in 1637 by Descartes, fell under the gaze of a (preferably) non-corporeal disengaged observer (Crary, 1994; Lalvani, 1996). This epistemology founded on ‘self’ as object and subject of the mind/body/world was established in an, “emergent visual order fundamental to the advancement of the descriptive sciences” (Lalvani, 1996, p. 444). Divided, the human subject became an object of its own scrutiny, and like the surface of the unexposed photograph itself, the body became a field laid bare to inscription by scientific analysis and observation (Crary, 1994, p. 96). The camera separated sight from the body and removed bodily sensation from the final object of inspection, the photograph. In this way, vision was sustained as a privileged means of knowing, as it was for Leonardo da Vinci, but as prosthesis, corporeally severed in order to retain its status as an authoritative, objective observer of the visible world.

The intimate connection between the human operating the camera and the camera itself, as that of the eye and the body should not be underestimated, either. Crary explains:

> Perhaps the most important obstacle to an understanding of the camera obscura, or any optical apparatus is the idea that optical device and observer are two distinct entities, that the identity of the observer exists independently from the optical device that is a physical piece of technical equipment. (Crary, 1994, p.30)

The camera obscura as a transformer of the vast and unwieldy three-dimensional world into a select, miniaturised and contained two-dimensional vignette may well have been sympathetic with the ocularity of the human eye and the metaphysics of the human mind. On the other hand, the photograph and the surface of the human body also share commonalities: both are inscribed with the effects of knowledge and power, and each shapes, perpetuates and exercises these effects. A concealed, desensitised mind no longer able to reflect in isolation, is itself observed by an exteriorised gaze, which unlike the camera obscura, has the capacity to suspend at will the movement of the human subject for endless contemplation. As Mary Price puts it, “to photograph is one way of arresting time in order to contemplate it” (Price, 1994, p.177). Similarly in
photographic spaces, moving, feeling, thinking, knowing, bodies and selves are
captured for endless inspection.

**Dis/continuities**

It is overly reductive to allow photography’s objects, either the machine of its
production, the camera, the product itself, the photograph, or even its visual regime to
mark the emergence of modern photography. The production of the photograph
depended on a multivalence of practices, beliefs and epistemological ruptures, as many
writers recognise (for example, Berger, 1972; Burgin, 1982; Crary, 1994; Hossaini,
to its modern formation are particular conceptions of seeing; of who can see, how they
can see, what they can see, and who or what will be seen. The realisation of the dream
of photography required a human subject willing to use a machine such as the camera to
translate the world into a manageable and fixed space. One product of this spatial and
social ordering was more expedient division and classification of the population.
Lalvani observes:

Power operating in the grids of photographic space produced iconic bodies, analyzed
bodies, disciplined bodies and regulated bodies, eliciting and disseminating knowledge
with each frame of space. In each case, individuals were constituted either as isolated
subjects or isolated objects, enjoying greater visibilities or being made more visible to the
dynamic of power and knowledge. (Lalvani, 1993, p. 462)

Positivism seeks historical continuity through imposing a logical and progressive
narrative, culminating in a retrospective demonstration of success or failure, as if
outcomes inevitably resulted from applied and deliberate intent. Observable products,
objects, artefacts, events and subjects are the foci on which these rational histories are
built. A postmodern approach to tracing the past, while not “assert[ing] a principle of
historical discontinuity” (Lemert, 1992, p.31), seeks to make explicit and insert
moments of rupture within and through dominant practices and knowledges. “The world
is not thrown over but rethought or, better, rewritten.” (Lemert, 1992, p.31). A strategy
of deconstruction is to use the structure of the dominant discourse to make explicit, and
overlay entrenched narratives with irony. In order to better understand and expose
strategies of power Foucault suggests reading outside or beyond the borders of central organising principles, proposing that it might be more productive to analyse the strategies of power in the struggle between resistance and domination:

To find out what our society means by sanity, perhaps we should investigate what is happening in the field of insanity ... And in order to understand what power relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations. (Foucault, 1992, p. 211)

In the circularity and at the junctures of stability and instability, order and chaos, acceptance and resistance, we might be able to more clearly comprehend how we are subjected by a form of power that at once totalises and individualises (Foucault, 1992, p.213). Foucault claims this is achievable not by favouring either side of the opposition as a more accurate representation of the truth, but rather in the differences between the op/positions. It is worth quoting him at length here:

In effect, between a relationship of power and a strategy of struggle there is a reciprocal appeal, a perpetual linking and a perpetual reversal ... The consequence of this instability is the ability to decipher the same events and the same transformations either from inside the history of struggle or from the standpoint of the power relationships. The interpretations which result will not consist of the same elements of meaning or the same links or the same types of intelligibility, although they refer to the same historical fabric and each of the two analyses must have reference to the other. In fact it is precisely the disparities between the two readings which make visible those fundamental phenomena of ‘domination’ which are present in a large number of human societies.

(Foucault, 1992, p.226)

Foucault’s genealogical form of historical inquiry seeks evidence of the actions and relations of power through an array of locations, including the surface of the individual human body, and in the products and practices of the collective public body. His, “methodological scheme of visualisation provides ‘visibilities’ – ways in which things are made visible [and invisible] during a particular period by the dynamic of knowledge and power” (Lalvani, 1993, p.446). At the core of this approach is the understanding that through the public visibilities of a particular historical period the seen and the unseen, the acceptable and the unacceptable are at once made explicit. In the dynamic
operation of these oppositions humans are collectively and individually objectified and subjectified, regulated, ordered, and rendered accountable to mis/representations of the idea of the individual self. In “The Subject and Power” (1992) Foucault claims this condition of modern subjectivity can be attributed to the operation of a pastoral form of power operating in an array of institutions, among them the churches. However, his concern is not with the church as a state institution, instead he focuses on the techniques of power exercised through the governance of pastoralism: the care of the self and others. Human agency is not necessarily completely effaced, as much as employed in the service of this pervasive governmentality (Foucault, 1992, p. 214).

Photography’s representational paradigm has operated as a key technology for implicating and investing human subjectivity and identity in dominant discourses of democratisation (Lalvani, 1993, p.447). As such it exercises considerable power in determining the possibilities of the collective and individual self. Foucault elaborates this point:

> Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only in so far as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realized … Consequently there is no face to face confrontation of power and freedom, but a much more complicated interplay. In this game freedom may well appear as the condition for the exercise of power. (Foucault, 1992, p. 221)

It is therefore vital to take account of the links and continuities that carried the human subject through the transformations between the classical and modern visual paradigms (McQuire, 1998). Both historical periods treated the world and the knowing subject, and the relationship between the two in particular and unique ways. At the same time, these locations share connecting streams that facilitated the shift from a humanity seeking oneness with the universe to a subject governed by the division and instability of incessant critique and definition of the self, and the self in the world. All the while, certain human subjects participated willingly in the aspiration to expediently represent the world, themselves and others as they believed the eye saw, while those
disadvantaged by the disciplinary uses of photographic images resisted and complied in a diversity of ways.

Imbedded in the establishment and maintenance of widely accepted notions of selfhood, alongside what can be spoken and who can speak are the subsumed discourses; the censured words, images and texts, and the silenced subjects; those excluded from participating as fully cognisant and knowing. A postmodern search for meaning requires taking as its object evidences of epistemes: systems of knowing and organising that simultaneously include and exclude. The products, objects and practices of the subordinated, who it must not be assumed share oppression equally, cannot be read simply alongside that which dominates, misrepresents and/or silences them, they must also be read through them.

The argument that photography emerged in an ocular regime informed by a fundamentally different epistemology disturbs teleological histories of photography’s invention. However artistic intention and perspectival vision cannot be severed from the complex operations of power seeking to establish a new truth regime that depended on the division and re/formation of the corporeal and cognitive human subject. In my view, the formation of a self-objectifying, self-critical and self-defining subjectivity was made possible by, and facilitated through legitimacies and continuities upheld by artistic traditions, aspirations and allusions. These acted to congeal, produce and reassure a self that might otherwise have been rendered dysfunctional by the effects of scientific and governmental scrutiny and classification.

Perhaps more attention might also be afforded to the multiple functions of the camera obscura rather than seeking precedence of either the social, epistemological or the representational. These cannot be realistically segregated. The representational and the spectacular, the aesthetic and the voyeuristic do not derive from essentially different visual regimes. Rather one authorised the other within an emergent social and economic formation founded on a self-policing populace. The modern episteme required an at once reasoning, critical, compliant and productive human subject who obeyed limitations while embracing and expressing their freedom (Foucault, 1991b, p.36). The
various employments of the camera obscura is of some significance during this time when the notion of a fundamental unity of the universe was fracturing.

**Reproduction and the Camera Obscura**

In the service of artists the camera obscura became smaller and more mobile, its purpose in replicating 'nature' resulted in the invention in 1806 of the camera lucida. This easily portable apparatus refracted light through a three or four-sided prism onto a drawing surface so the image could be traced and then rendered (Baldwin, 1991, p.17). From the early eighteenth until the nineteenth century, the camera obscura room, on the other hand, provided amusement to the emerging bourgeois class.

Situated in a park, fair ground, or at the seaside, participants would stand around a white circular table and by manipulating the rotating lens attached to its roof could marvel at the 'fairy-pictures' created before them of the people and scenery outside. A highly attractive aspect of its amusement value was the concealment of the observers, who could spy on children and adults alike who were unaware of being watched. Complaints appeared in newspapers over young men using the camera obscura to, “enjoy the beach views of women in their bathing costumes” (Museum of History of Science, 1999, p. 1). Along with photography the camera obscura became both a tool and a metaphor for voyeurism (Wilgus & Wilgus, 1999, p.1).

Although covert observation of human behaviour was clearly an attraction of the camera obscura there also appeared to be a strong allure to experience these events as contained, miniaturised images. In 1824, following the arrest of a pick-pocket who was observed ‘in the act’ by a person enjoying the experience of watching fair goers from within a camera obscura, a Glasgow newspaper called for their placement in all, “places of public amusement and exhibitions”. The report stated:
A person happened to be examining, with great interest, the various lively and entertaining figures which were portrayed upon the white tablet during the exhibition, when he beheld, with amazement, the appearance of a man picking another man’s pocket. *Perfectly aware of the reality of this appearance*, he opened the door and, recognizing the culprit at a short distance, ran up and seized him in the very act of depredation. It is perhaps unnecessary to add that he was immediately handed over to the Police.


The will not only to re/produce the real, but to have faith in the reality of the reproduction found realisation in the plurality of the camera obscura as idea, object and experience. The detailed, meticulous depiction of actual life, however was not valued as high art, although it did fascinate eighteenth and nineteenth century society (Henisch & Henisch, 1993, p.5). Crary citing Deleuze, states:

The camera obscura is what Gilles Deleuze would call an assemblage, something that is “simultaneously and inseparably a machinic assemblage and an assemblage of enunciation”, an object about which something is said and at the same time an object that is used. It is a site at which a discursive formation intersects with material practices. The camera obscura, then cannot be reduced either to a technological or a discursive object: it was a complex social amalgam in which its existence as a textual figure was never separable from its machinic uses. (Crary, 1994, p.31)

Referring to the early seventeenth century, Arthur Wheelock Jr. claimed, “the division between science and magic was blurred [and] the camera obscura occupied the grey zone joining the two extremes” (Wheelock, 1977, p.93). Undoubtedly the need for mystery and magic, for the viewer to be amazed by the realism of the image, was a necessary ingredient of early photographic imagery. The transition from the spying eye of the camera obscura to the photographic print was not immediately taken up by all middle and upper class viewers, some preferred the magical atmosphere of a darkened room, in which they could be transported by the experience of illuminated, colourful and apparently ‘live’ images. The popularity of magic lantern slide shows during the late nineteenth century as a means of informing and educating the affluent about issues of moral and social concern lends support to this position (McHoul, 1996). These carefully staged, illustrated public lectures, popular with social reformers such as Jacob
Riis and Dr. Barnardo seem to have played a bridging role between camera obscura imagery and the stark colourless paper print in establishing the genre of ‘documentary’ realism (see chapter six).

Despite a redirected gaze towards new objects of study and sources of truth, the subjective formations of vision, knowledge and experience, that developed within the diverse conceptual and material domains of the camera obscura, were implicated in a shifting sociocultural field that had rescinded none of the Renaissance fascination with the visual re-presentation of the real. Perhaps as Crary claims there is discontinuity between the human subjectivity of the regime in which the camera obscura as metaphor for the relationship between mind and body was located, and the post-Enlightenment selfhood that embraced photography. However, it is difficult to deny that the gestation of this divergent self-observing subject took place within the protected physical and metaphorical confines of the ‘dark room’ where ‘the light of reason’ flooded the mind, and conceived of a human outside of itself.

**The subject of photography**

Catalysed by an, “unprecedented demand for images among the newly dominant middle classes” (Tagg, 1988, p. 41) within an increasingly liberalising sociocultural ideology, particular manifestations of the experimental sciences and political economy intersected and colluded in photography’s advance. By August 19th 1839, when Daguerre officially demonstrated his allegedly new discovery, the French public were well prepared to participate in photographic production. Daguerre, an astute businessman, had ready-made cameras and developing equipment available for purchase. Within four days, the *London Globe* reported: “a few days later, you could see in all the squares of Paris three-legged dark boxes planted in front of churches and palaces” (cited in Newhall, 1990, p.27). Four months hence twenty-one editions of Daguerre’s instructional manuals had been sold throughout Britain and Europe (Newhall, 1990, p.28). It can be assumed the bulk of the purchases involved ownership or intended ownership of a camera. A lithographic caricature, titled *Daguerreotypomania*, published in 1840 portrays a crowd scene in which box-like objects, such as clocks and train carriages, take the form of Daguerre’s converted camera obscura. The crazed crowd, if not posing
or shooting, adore, worship or are otherwise engaged in the labours of distributing and marketing the magic box. In the top left corner, emblazoned on a cloud the borderline manicical face of Daguerre, depicted as if part of the camera itself, beams down with greedy delight on the scene below him (see Newhall, 1989, p.29). It seems indeed that here, in the frenzy of the mid-nineteenth century the simultaneously observing and observed human subject has emerged. The cartoon is not about the photographic image per se, but the performance of taking, and being seen taking a photograph.

Despite claims of an extraordinary immediate response, photography as a viable profession was to take at least another decade. It was not until the 1850s, with the development of the negative and positive process enabling production of multiple prints from a single copy, that photography became firmly established (McCauley, 1986). By this time accessible, affordable and speedy portraiture met the desire to inscribe the faces of the nouveau-riche alongside, and within the tradition of painted portraiture previously exclusive to the upper classes (Tagg, 1988). Photography’s promoters promised opportunity for ‘everyone’ to participate in creating a clear and certain future. By 1857, eighteen years after the announcement of its invention and fifteen years after the first public exhibition of photographic portraits, it had apparently met this aim in all private and public domains, leading Lady Elizabeth Eastlake to write:

Photography has become a household want; is used alike by art and science, by love, business, and justice; is found in the most sumptuous salon, and in the dingiest attic—in the solitude of the Highland cottage, and in the glare of the London gin-palace—in the pocket of the detective, in the cell of the convict, in the folio of the painter and architect, among the papers and patterns of the mill owner and manufacturer, and on the cold brave breast on the battle-field ... Where not half a generation ago the existence of such a vocation was not dreamt of, tens of thousands (especially if we reckon the purveyors of photographic materials) are now following a new business, practising a new pleasure, speaking a new language, and bound together by a new sympathy.

(Eastlake, 1980, pp.40-41)

In the social domain photography was promoted by the discourses of democracy, claiming it traversed class boundaries and produced a shared cohesive outlook on the world. Eastlake’s praise however is based on assumptions of Anglo-European
nationalism. As much as photography found employment as a social leveller, it also
became a key technology through which new divisions and distinctions were woven into
the social fabric. The emerging regimes of the capitalist industrialising world; the
medical, psychological, social, penological and anthropological sciences, made
extensive use of this evidentiary medium.

Gendering the photographic

It’s as well if you are frightened of solitude. It’s a sign that you have come to the moment
of your birth. (Cixous, 1994, p.61)

Perhaps there is substance to be found in another reading of the camera obscura as a
discursive construct, in the parallels between the work of the camera in reproducing
nature and the ‘reproductive nature’ of woman. As already outlined in this chapter,
photography depended on a number of factors: a specific ocularity; a certain kind of will
to observe, record and represent the world, its objects and subjects; and the ability to do
so. Prior to the first fixed photograph, for the two hundred years following the Cartesian
radical restructure of human knowing, scientific discourses conceived and asserted an
epistemology that produced a series of hierarchical dualisms. These were used to
classify, regulate, order, include, exclude and delineate as knowable the physical world
and its inhabitants, whether topographical, geographical, human, animal, botanic,
organic, inert, soul or spirit. The camera, its objects and subjects, were drawn into this
will to classify and know, to establish truth apparently unencumbered by the
interferences of the living human body (see Hamilton & Hargreaves, 2001). The
imaginative and creative, passion and desire, in short the unmeasurable and
uncontrollable, associated as they were with femininity and nature, were located
alongside an aggressive form of modern masculinity.

Beginning with the Renaissance, art, barely differentiated from science, ruptured the
surface of the human body, scrutinising its interior in the quest to better represent
human form and movement (Richardson, 1987, p.32). The mysteries of the foetus in
utero, the actions of the ligaments and muscles, how the eyes see, were but a few of the
body’s mysteries subject to inquiry. This inquiring gaze (not yet under its own scrutiny)
was gendered, as were all realms of the body and soul. The body, both public and private was subject to mastery, to be entered and thus known. Woman’s exclusion as a knowing subject legitimised dominant masculinist assumptions about the female body and soul performing the work of the mysterious and unknown; especially nature (herself female). This gendered dualism finds articulation in the words of Leonardo da Vinci, who wrote:

Though human ingenuity may make various inventions answering by different machines to the same end, it will never devise an invention more beautiful, more simple, more direct than does Nature ... She needs no counterpoise when she creates limbs fitted for movement in the bodies of animals, but puts within them the soul of the body which forms them, that is the soul of the mother which first constructs within the womb the shape of man, and in due time awakens the soul that is to be its inhabitant.

(Leonardo da Vinci, 1952, p.163)

While the Renaissance realised and fuelled the desire to create objects for mechanically reproducing images of the world, its inhabitants and its objects, Leonardo da Vinci’s words leave me wondering about the extent of bourgeois masculinist desire to appropriate the skills of ‘nature’ to create another human being, if only through capturing the images which, as light rays, pervaded the air. There are similar discursive parallels in the writings of Descartes. In Discourse on Method and the Meditations (1637), Descartes recounts his solitary retreat to a warm room where he achieved inspiration for his ‘method’ of knowing. Embedded in the description quoted at length below, is his desire for rebirth as an uncontaminated self-reasoning subject:

I spent the whole day shut up in a room heated by an enclosed stove, where I had complete leisure to meditate on my own thoughts. Among these one of the first I examined was that often there is less perfection in works composed of several separate pieces and made by different masters, than in those at which only one person has worked ... So, finally, I thought that as we have all been children before being men, and that we have had to be governed for a long time by our appetites and our teachers, the ones being often in opposition to the others and neither perhaps always giving us the best advice, it is almost impossible that our judgements be as rational or as sound as they would have been if we had had the full use of our reason from the moment of our birth, and if we had never been guided by anything else. (Descartes, 1972, pp.35-36)
In this text Descartes makes no explicit reference to the female body, yet he describes his containment in a surrogate womb, implicitly motherhood and the female body, both of which are rejected as providing the conditions for the production of rationality. Descartes’ reference to the female is notably infrequent, even on the topic of love he talks about a loved ‘object’. In discussing the passions of the soul, he offers a somewhat enigmatic example of how the ‘protective’ emotions of the intellect have the capacity to override the ‘unregulated’ passions, both of which he considers to emerge from the soul; he writes:

When a husband mourns his dead wife, it sometimes happens that he would be sorry to see her brought to life again. It may be that his heart is torn by the sadness aroused in him by the funeral display and by the absence of a person to whose company he was accustomed. And it may be that some remnants of love or of pity occur in his imagination and draw genuine tears to his eyes. Nevertheless he feels at the same time a secret joy in his innermost soul, and the emotion of this joy has such power that the concomitant sadness and tears can do nothing to diminish its force. (Descartes, 1972, p. 381)

The virulent patriarchal dualisms deriving from Cartesian thought strengthened and sustained the feminine position as variously destructive, irrational; devious and uncontrollable, nurturing and contaminating, and sought to prove rather than undo the existing systems of knowledge that subordinated woman and the female body.

Even Crary’s association of the camera obscura with Descartes’ elevation of bodily denial, evokes a womb-like reclusiveness, for instance: “[t]he space of the camera obscura, its enclosedness, its darkness, its separation from an exterior, incarnate Descartes’ ‘I will now shut my eyes, I shall stop my ears, I shall disregard my senses’ ” (Crary, 1994, p.43). The camera obscura provides an interior world, devoid of corporeal sensation except for visual projections, which pierce the darkened cavern. As metaphorical and actual object, it gestates twins, the perfectly balanced rational man and, the perfectly proportioned realistic image. The light of reason penetrates and structures an objective (dominant) mind, while visual light rays penetrate and structure delimited space.
When in 1839 as the dream to ‘write with light’ was being realised, the French inventor of the Daguerreotype process, Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, stated, “[t]he Daguerreotype is not an instrument to be used to draw nature, but a chemical and physical process which gives her the ability to reproduce herself” [my italics] (Daguerre, 1980, p. 13). His pronouncement expressed the desire for scientific mastery over nature’s process of reproduction. ‘Her’ ability is supplanted with technology while at the same time the realistic representation of nature is represented as free from the control of the artist. Batchen (1998) argues that in the fervent mood of Enlightenment scientific progress, certainty over order and category was shaken. Once prevalent Cartesian dualisms began to unravel as inventors, philosophers and poets alike struggled to come to terms with new knowledge about the natural world and its relationship to scientific technology, and the identity and location of the social and the self in all of this. As suggested earlier, rather than resolution between the conceptual opposites of science/nature, subject/object, there was a, “dynamic, even contradictory, incorporation of them both” (Batchen, 1998, p.101). For example, in Daguerre’s statement the Cartesian dualism of science/nature, in which the body is separated from the act of reproduction, is realised, while at the same time obstacles between the transposition from nature to image are reduced. In a fall of the shutter, the camera could simultaneously harness nature, reproducing her without need of her effort or involvement, and facilitate with minimal human interference her reproduction of herself.

But nature is not left to be herself. Daguerre further comments, “[n]ature is reproduced in them not only with truth, but with art” (Daguerre cited in Newhall, 1990, p. 23). Fox Talbot also exalted ‘light writing’ for the way it allowed nature to draw ‘herself’, while he also seemed caught in a flux between the simultaneous activity and passivity of nature in the process (Batchen, 1998, p. 68).

While Daguerre’s and Fox Talbot’s words may reveal their struggle with reconciling oppositional dualisms, their symbiosis of nature and the feminine remains immutable. Although arguing that the concept of nature at this time was unresolved, Batchen also assumes the gendered association: “[e]veryone was sure that nature was central to his
idea of photography, but no one was quite sure what nature was or how to describe her ‘mode of existence’” [my italics] (Batchen, 1998, p.69). Questions remain over how and in what ways mastery over the representation of the feminine and nature was attempted through photography, and moreover, how simultaneously woman became its object, commodity and practitioner as men strove collectively and individually to represent and thus establish the identity of ‘man’ and self. From the moment of its public debut, photography was promoted (by men) as a suitable pursuit for women:

Everyone, with the aid of the Daguerreotype, will make a view of his castle or country-house ... The leisured class will find it a most attractive occupation, and although the result is obtained by chemical means, the little work it entails will greatly please the ladies. [my italics] (Daguerre, 1880, pp. 12-13)

Despite the complicated procedures involved in producing ‘light drawings’, photography was couched within a discourse of rendering the difficult manageable. As a consumer product it was marketed on imagined future possibilities, rather than extant abilities. At the same time, the objects and subjects knowable through scientific applications, analysis and definition proliferated and multiplied. Within this social, economic and intellectual milieu, there was increasing emphasis on the democratic, on the liberalisation of the self. Science had already invited women to participate in seeking new discoveries. The rise of the new economy afforded women of the bourgeois and noble classes more leisure time. Francesco Algarotti’s Newtonianism for Ladies (1739) fostered interest in the action of light through prisms, lenses and microscopes, leading to, “curiosity about cameras, optics, and chemical-fixing processes” (Rosenblum, 1994, p. 39). Photography’s rhetoric promised a respectable and lucrative profession for women, although this was in actuality met with considerable resistance from many men of the trade (McCauley, 1986, p. 74). Even so, the justifications these men gave for encouraging women’s involvement should be regarded cautiously. Not only was photography notionally a ‘simple’ practice involving ‘little’ effort (the qualities which later drove Kodak to design and market cameras for mothers) it also required particular skills of perception, patience, intuition and sensitivity (Palmquist, 1989). Qualities more commonly associated with a femininity clearly positioned in opposition to constructions of the masculine at this time.
For example, in 1873 Jabez Hughes, a British writer, advocated that women should move out of studio back rooms to stand behind the camera lens, because photography was, “an occupation exactly suited to the [female] sex; there are no great weights to carry, no arduous strain of body or mind; it is neat and clean, and is conducted indoors” (cited in McCauley, 1986, p. 74). Fifteen years later Richard Hines Jr. wrote:

There is no more suitable work for woman than photography, whether she takes it up with a view of making it a profession, or simply as a delightful pass time to give pleasure to herself and others. She is by nature peculiarly fitted for the work, and photography is becoming more and more recognised as a field of endeavour peculiarly suited to women. There is scarcely a woman who has not some inborn artistic feeling, latent though it may be till brought out by study and training ... cleanliness and patience are two of the cardinal virtues necessary to the successful pursuit of photography. The light delicate touch of a woman, the eye for light and shade, together with their artistic perception, render them peculiarly fitted to succeed in this work. (Hines, 1989, p.77)

No more suitable work indeed! Even here, the ‘natural’ relationship between photography and woman is reproduced. Such allusions to the feminine no doubt reveal more about patriarchal fantasies of the time, than they do about the women to whom they were addressed. Women were also participants in this construction of their gender. For example, Elizabeth Eastlake lauded photography as a new form of social catalyst, cutting across class, profession, and even gender boundaries, bonding ‘men’ in a new unity based on a common interest, all the while referring to photography as ‘female:

And it is not only in what she can do to relieve the sphere of art, but in what she can sweep away from it altogether ... Photography at once does away with anomalies with which the good sense of society has always been more or less at variance. As what she does best is beneath the doing of a real artist at all, so even in what she does worst she is a better machine than the man who is nothing but a machine. [my italics]

(Eastlake, 1980, pp. 66-67)

Gendered with the femininity of patriarchal desire, photography becomes art’s handmaiden, emancipating art and artists from the drudgery of replication, and further, saving the world from ‘bad art’ and the ‘bad artist’. In 1859 Baudelaire would also
relegate photography to the same status, “[p]hotography must therefore return to its true duty which is that of handmaiden of the arts and sciences, but their very humble handmaid” (Baudelaire cited in Wells, 2000, p. 13).

For Eastlake photography represented the new, as a, “new form of communication between man and man — neither letter, message, nor picture — which now happily fills up the space between them” (Eastlake, 1980, p.65). In her discourse photography as female is responsible for ensuring an exact telling of the past, for keeping memories alive and clear, while at the same time peace–making and healing wounds. Applying Batchen’s notion of the ‘contradictory incorporation’ of binaric pairs at this time, Eastlake’s Victorian feminine/photographic, invested with qualities which transcend border and difference is heterogeneous and paradoxical, simultaneously the difference between science and art, the arbiter of, and the solution to that distinction.

Mastery and possession of realistic representation obviously appealed to a complex set of gendered collective and individual desires and pleasures. The reproduction of nature through the harnessing of light, involving little more than the effort of looking, was the expressed primary motivation of Talbot, Daguerre and many of their contemporaries. However, the power exercised in, and derived from, the public demonstration and celebration of these newly acquired technical skills within the recently delimited scientific domain should not be dismissed. The public display of taking photographs represented an appropriation of nature’s innate self-reproducibility. While the new science/art of photography multiplied and expanded, giving rise to new technologies, practices and opportunities, it also constrained by defining, describing and delineating the social organisation of individuals and groups. Photography became a tool of the police force and the medical and psychiatric sciences, as it simultaneously enhanced parlour walls with previously unaffordable portraits and vistas. And within this frenetic urge the camera focussed on singular subjects, whether architectural, natural or human, compiling and contributing to the ever increasing desire to scrutinise, know and thus define the self.
Circumscribed by a hegemonic, logocentric epistemology in a forcefully mobilised discursive field, photography accumulated in monochromatic light and shade, a rapidly multiplying and tessellating discourse of its own. At every location the photographer/subject was captured by and implicated in the flux between the real and the imagined, oscillating between observer and observed, between machine and corporeality. Ultimately the individual as viewer provided the apex of this pyramidal construct first developed by the Renaissance artists. The formation of an observing and observed female subject amid all of this must take account of the pervasiveness of androcentrism. Photography construed as female was employed by some to promote its (almost) unimaginable potential and multifarious qualities. At the same time, as suggested above, women’s entry into the profession during an increasingly emancipatory period was not without opposition (McCaul, 1986). For example, Julia Margaret Cameron was a middle-class woman and amateur art photographer who received encouragement from fellow artists and her family, but was criticised by more precious (male) practitioners and members of the Royal academy (Rosenblum, 1994). Perhaps the words of Helene Cixous have application here:

Male privilege, [is] shown in the opposition between activity and passivity, which he uses to sustain himself ... Ultimately the world of “being” can function while precluding the mother. No need for a mother, as long as there is some motherliness: and it is the father, then who acts the part, who is the mother. Either woman is passive or she does not exist.

What is left of her is unthinkable, unthought. (Cixous, 1994, pp. 38-39)

Women’s economic and expressive freedom was certainly not the primary goal of those who promoted photography as a democratic pursuit. However, the success of photography as a technology and a profession depended on its marketability, and after all, women constituted half that market, albeit accessible to only those few women and men who could afford it. Although early photographic discourse may have positioned nature and science paradoxically, the question of nature as feminine is less ambiguous. Foregrounding the event of the stabilised, accurate photographic image, in the quest for self-awareness, the camera obscura as philosophical metaphor for the separation of mind and body performed also as a reproductive body which nurtured the embryonic fixed image of the self. This desire to photographically re/produce a viewable body-and-
self is explored in the next chapter through a selection of ‘mother and child’ or Madonna images. The discussion also considers associations between the visual representation of poverty and this pervasive Christian archetype.
Endnotes

29 For example, Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564), Fillippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446) and Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472).
30 First published in 1939, Agee and Evans' artistically inspired documentary collaboration was in itself a ground-breaking work.
31 In common use from the 1400s until the late 1800s.
32 Still in existence in the University of Texas (Hossaini, 1999, p.1).
33 The calotype process involved producing a positive from a negative impression, thus enabling the production of multiple copies of the image. Talbot developed the word calotype from the Greek, kalos, meaning beautiful and the Latin, typus meaning image, (Baldwin, 1991, p.16).
34 Crary draws attention to the parallel between photography and Muller’s nineteenth century ‘subject’, both are dependant on physical and chemical application to a sensitised surface, see Crary, 1994, pp. 89-92.
35 Johann Schulze, a German anatomist is commonly credited with having discovered the photochemical reaction between silver salts and light in 1725. This was subsequently confirmed and further developed by others, whose work formed the “optical and photochemical base” for 19th century experimentalists (Morris, 1986, p. 26).
36 In 1794 (Mrs) Elizabeth Fullame published An Essay on Combustion; with a View to a New Art of Dying and Painting, wherein the Phlogistic and Anti-phlogistic Hypotheses Are Proved Erroneous. Her “original and important” claims contributed significantly to the advancement in understanding about photochemical processes (Eder, 1978, pp. 116-117).
38 According to Gombrich, “Alberti...described the frame as a window through which the beholder looks into the world of the picture,” (Gombrich, 1972, p.131). Ali Hossaini suggests that Alberti saw paintings as “windows on the world, extensions of our eyes that reached across the barriers of space, time and even fiction.” (Hossaini, 1999, p.2). Scott McQuire claims Alberti described the picture “as a ‘window’ through which the world could be viewed” (McQuire, 1998, p.18).
39 I have referred to translations by JR Spencer translated from the oldest existing Italian and Latin manuscripts and Cecil Grayson taken from the Latin texts only. None of these existing texts are believed to be in Alberti’s own hand (Spencer, 1966).
40 As Spencer (1966) explains, tales from antiquity constituted the avante-garde. Painters at this time were unaware of subject matter other than Christian themes.
41 Latin for lighted room. Talbot expressed his frustration with this device, claiming that its effective use still required artistic skill, and thus his desire to ‘invent’ a chemical process that would do this for him (see Talbot in Trachtenberg, 1980, p.28). Talbot’s desire reveals the separation in his own mind between inherent talent and the capabilities of technology.
Chapter Five

The divine and the destitute: Madonnas of the streets

Maternal transcendences

This chapter reflects on photographic images that employ the Christian archetype of the Madonna to portray the poverty and destitution of women and children. The analysis incorporates themes of gender, self and desire in exploring possible reasons for the efficacy of this iconic image as a symbol of material and social need. In so doing, consideration is also given to the notion that shifts in the epistemology of the human subject were facilitated by particular continuities in visual representation between the Renaissance, classical and modern epistemes.

The Virgin Mary holding the Christ child is a pervasive image in western culture, so much so that a great many representations of women with young children are referenced against this archetype. Jaroslav Pelikan states:

The Virgin Mary has been the subject of more thought and discussion about what it means to be a woman than any other woman in Western history ... explanations about Mary or portraits of her in words or in pictures can tell us much about how ‘the feminine’ has been perceived. (Pelikan, 1996, p. 219)

From the beginning of drawing the human form with light (a religious allusion in itself) photographers have incorporated Marian symbolism. The Virgin Mary’s conception and birth of God without sexual intercourse distinguishes her from real, earthly women while at the same time Mary as a human being, as a mother, guarantees Christ’s own humanity. As she was heavenly and immaculately impregnated, so too are representations of actual women when infused with her iconography. The transcendent Virgin Mary offers a never-completely-achievable state of divinity that real women might approach by denying self-determination and choice in their own sexuality. As the
antithesis of Eve, the sexually undisciplined, the Madonna models eternal maternal selflessness. Carol Christ writes:

The misogynist antibody tradition in western thought is symbolized in the myth of Eve who is traditionally viewed as a sexual temptress, the epitome of women’s carnal nature ... The Virgin Mary, the positive female image in Christianity, does not contradict Christian denigration of the female body and its powers. The Virgin Mary is revered because she, in her perpetual virginity, transcends the carnal sexuality attributed to most women. (Christ, 1991, p.295)

The Catholic Church is well aware of the power that can be exercised through the Madonna archetype (see Warner, 1985). Throughout history her omnipotent maternal image has carried substantial propaganda value. During the Renaissance period in the Tuscan region of Italy, Mary’s popularity ran parallel with that of Christ, and furthermore she was presented as the model for women (Miles, 1986, pp. 200-205). Miles explains, “the similarity of the Virgin and actual women was one of the immediate visual associations of the image” (Miles, 1986, p. 197). Although devastated by famine and the spread of the plague throughout Europe, it was common practice for the privileged classes to hand newborns over to wet nurses, usually peasants or slaves. Beginning in the early fourteenth century, representations of the Virgin Mary baring her left breast (figure 9) were deployed strategically by the Church to encourage women to nurse their own children. Margaret Miles (1986) proposes the intention of the Church leaders was to encourage women to adopt Mary’s maternal devotion by suggesting that breastfeeding their own children would bring them closer to divinity. Miles explains that, “unlike actual women who might or might not be acceptable mothers, the Virgin represented a fantasy of a totally good mother” (Miles, 1986, p. 205).

During this period, which ran from the beginning of the fourteenth century until the early fifteenth century, depictions of the Virgin Mary transformed from a bejeweled Byzantine princess attended by angels to “a humble peasant woman, sometimes barefoot and seated on the ground”. In many of these portrayals the viewer is entreated by the infant Christ to participate in the pictured scene (Miles, 1986, p.202).
Figure 9
Museo Dell’Opera Metropolitana, Siena.
Photo Copyright 1986 © Scala, Antella, Firenze
This ‘new’ Virgin was accessible and sympathetic, symbolising humanity, and providing an exemplary model of humility for Christian worshippers (Warner, 1985). According to Miles, (1986, p. 207) this humble, bare breasted figure was an attempt to exercise control over women’s power to nourish and nurture.

Although produced five hundred years hence, Dorothea Lange’s photograph; Oklahoma Drought Refugees, 1936 (figure 10), portraying a young mother breastfeeding her child resonates with an early fifteenth century Sienese painting of the Virgin feeding the Christ child, Madonna del Latte (figure 9). Her breast extrudes from amongst her clothing, almost as if it were not a part of her body. The child reaches his hand up to touch his mother, bare legs extending from draped clothing. Despite her impoverishment she nourishes her child from her own underfed and poorly clothed body. Lange may not have been familiar with the ‘Madonnas of Humility’, however her work as a portraitist during the late 1920s drew on traditional pictorial arrangements, and her marriage to artist Maynard Dixon suggests she may have had exposure to this artistic form (Davidov, 1998, p. 244). Oklahoma Drought Refugees, with its centrally positioned ‘Madonna del latte’ surrounded by nature, drapery and light alludes to a painterly aesthetic; creating a sense of ascendance as it simultaneously expresses the nobility and humility of motherhood amid poverty.

Both Madonna del latte and Oklahoma Drought Refugees were produced during times of extensive famine and human need, however they are clearly polarised in terms of the portrayal of finery and wealth. Lange’s Madonna turns to the right, feeding from her right breast, while the Virgin Mary is invariably depicted offering nurture from her left breast (Miles, 1986). Both expose breasts that do not conform to the patriarchal eroticisation of the female body. As Miles observes, the conical shape and appearance of detachment from a sensuous body ensures that sensual pleasure and desire do not dominate the viewing experience.

The light flooding from the left of Lange’s image suggests hope of escape from poverty for the family and from their exposure to nature; indicated by the use of a tree as a wardrobe. Lange’s depiction includes a severed body; in the bottom right corner we can see the hips and legs of a figure.
Lange’s portrayal offers a second inversion. Severed legs and bare feet extend diagonally out of the lower right frame, delineating the vanishing point behind and to the right of the seated pair. The family’s earthly humility is symbolised by their close proximity with nature. The dark, almost ominous coat hanging from the tree, juxtaposed with the undefined, emancipatory light on the opposite side of the mother and child,
absorbs the viewer’s trajectory of sight. However, unlike the early Renaissance example we are not offered relief from the unknowable territories of the black coat, our sight is drawn back to the reality of the family’s destitution. While the Oklahoma Madonna’s rags are thrown into relief by the blackness of the drapery hanging in the tree behind her, Gregorio di Cecco’s Madonna is draped in a black robe embroidered with gold. The painted Madonna and Christ child gaze into one another’s eyes, whereas the drought refugee mother and child both appeal to the viewer beyond the frame.

In the twentieth century, the painted altarpiece Madonna could not match the humility of the social documentary Madonna taken directly from the lives of real women, even though both humble their onlookers by expressing selfless maternal love. Techniques of contradiction and obfuscation maintained the influence of the Madonna icon with early Renaissance women. These images positioned women ambiguously. The nourishing, humble, accessible Virgin entreated women to accept the Virgin’s example and to use her as a model. At the same time, Church preaching consistently denied any possibility that women might actually become like the Virgin Mary and thus achieve her religious and social power. Woman’s role was centrally maintained in the church as a means of ensuring human reproduction, while at the same time women were deliberately excluded from the possibility of divinity (Miles, 1986, pp. 205-206). Nevertheless the Virgin Mary’s plurality has allowed her image to retain its influence through all forms of visual media, across class and culture, as Nicholas Mirzoeff observes:

The Madonna icon and her attendant angels mark a curious trajectory across the history of modern art, connecting popular imagery, official art, photography and avant-garde painting. It was an image that required constant repetition, yet whose definition was always in dispute. The boundaries between the Madonna, the domestic woman and the fallen woman were sufficiently fluid that these categories became confused and overlapped. (Mirzoeff, 1995, p.98)

Mirzoeff further notes that the representations of the Madonna produced by the high Renaissance artist Raphael are considered by the Church to be true images of the mother of Christ (Mirzoeff, 1995, p.104). Gombrich also refers to the laity’s acceptance of Raphael’s Holy Virgin, pointing out that it, “has been adopted by subsequent
generations in the same way as Michelangelo’s conception of God the Father. We see cheap reproductions of these works in humble rooms” (Gombrich, 1972, p.240).

Raphael’s Madonna embodies beauty, grace, serenity and innocence, but she is a detached mother, touching her child, but not connecting with him (Mirzoeff, 1995, p.123). While this deliberate depiction of emotional distance defines the separation between the godly and the human, even though the subjects are mother and child, it also symbolises sexual purity by showing motherly love as devoid of visible passion. By the advent of the high Renaissance the Virgin no longer breastfeeds her child, nor is she fashioned on humility; her image aspires to a more ethereal maternity⁴⁴. And yet Raphael and his contemporaries reproduce some features of the late Byzantium/early Renaissance earthly Virgin. Although in many depictions she again appears on an architecturally ensconced throne, she is also frequently represented seated in nature, with her bare feet firmly on the ground⁴⁵. From her saintly halo to her earthly barefootedness, the Virgin connects heaven and earth. The transcendent and ethereal, and the harshness of real life are mediated through the imagined body of the Virgin. While she acts as intermediary between God and humanity (Pelikan, 1996, p.220) her image forms, symbolises and draws the connections in an everyday trinity of nature, humanity and divinity.

In the effort to establish photography as an art form by infusing it with, “respectability, utility and morality” (Mirzoeff, 1995, p.119) nineteenth century pictorialist photographers such as Margaret Cameron (1815-1879), Alice Hughes (c.1860-c.1945) and Oscar Rejlander (1813-1875) employed the iconography of Raphael’s Madonna. Not surprisingly contradictions emerge in the juxtaposition of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century artistic Madonna portraits taken by these photographers of middle-class families, and those taken for documentary purposes to show the plight of poverty-stricken families. For the middle-class mother, “[w]hat could be more charming and more natural than the portrait of a pretty young woman with her baby in her arms, or with her children grouped around her?” (Hughes, 1996, p.5). Lange’s Oklahoma Drought Refugees, 1936 (figure 10), John Thompson’s The “Crawlers”, 1877 (figure 11), Lewis Hine’s A Madonna of the Tenements, 1904 (figure 12), and Jacob Riis’
Home of the Italian Rag-picker, 1890 (figure 13) display no illusions of a charmed life. In these photographs, the ethereal, evoked by artistic, aesthetic device is used to contrast, and amplify the harshness of impoverishment. The transposition of the Madonna from heavenly royalty to humble, barefoot peasant however was not just the invention of socially concerned photographers, but of church leaders, image-makers and their patrons in the attempt to influence the maternal behaviour of women. The poignancy of these documentary images is dependent on the Madonnas of the Roman Catholic Church, already indelibly inscribed into photographic portraiture.

Social documentary photographers, such as Lewis Hine (1874-1940) referred to Raphael’s Madonna to inspire positive responses to the plight of poverty stricken families. Hine began his career as a ‘social’ photographer with the National Child Labour Council, documenting and publicising the exploitation of children in New England factories and textile mills. Hine’s camera work was firstly social work, not only using photography as evidence to raise awareness of social justice issues, but also demanding viewer participation (Davidov, 1998, p. 240). In order to develop his student’s social conscience Hine paid homage to Raphael’s Madonna della Sedia (figure 14) to demonstrate what he perceived as the, “beautiful and picturesque in the common place” (Davidov, 1998, p.238). Even in circumstances of dire poverty woman is maintained as a transcendent signifier of beauty, selflessness, hope, and nurturance – the means toward salvation. The question is, whose redemption is being imagined and orchestrated?
Figure 11

Figure 12

Copyright 2001 © George Eastman House, Rochester, NY.
Figure 13

Jacob Riis’ *Home of Italian Rag-picker*, 1890. Copyright 1974 © Aperture Inc.
Figure 14
Points of focus

As discussed in chapter four, perspective was new to Italian painting in the early fifteenth century. The trecento ‘bare-left breast’ depictions of the Virgin to which Miles (1986) and Warner (1985) refer often have numerous points of focus in the picture plane. The Virgin and Christ child are invariably seated centrally, dominating the picture before a flattened background that expands outwards and upwards in heavenly allusion. Conversely, the photograph’s lack of linear perspective and colour reduces our focus, limiting and directing the eye to a single point. Lange’s Madonna of *Oklahoma Drought Refugees* (figure 10) looks out of the frame, beyond the picture’s flat surface, to a vanishing point somewhere over the viewer’s left shoulder towards yet another undefined, but possibly luminous place. Perhaps a mirror image of the light we can already see? Whatever lies beyond and behind is knowable only to the young woman nursing her child. Like a Renaissance Christ-child, the baby catches the gaze of the viewer (and photographer), ensuring our participation in their drama. As ‘he’ tugs at ‘his’ mother’s breast, as ‘he’ is nurtured, ‘he’ engages us. Davidov identifies this demand to engage with the subjects in Lange’s photographs as intentional political, cultural and social work, rather than merely camera work (Davidov, 1998, pp. 239-240). Lange’s use of low horizon lines, positioning of subjects above the viewer’s eye level and sun back-lighting allowed her figures to seem, “heroic in size and part of the sky ... forc[ing] us to embrace them, hold them up, acknowledge their existence and humanity” (Stott cited in Davidov, 1998, pp. 240-241).

The Madonna of Lange’s photograph resides in this paradoxical positioning, between and beside ethereal ascendency and grounded earthly humanity. Sitting with her family, amongst a collection of visual cues about poverty and destitution, she skims her gaze past us, and delivers her message to a viewer standing behind us and out of our sight. As observers of her need we are implicated in her drama. She maintains tension between passivity and assertiveness, with her eyes deftly averted, but not lowered; she stops short of engaging with Lange as the photographer, or with her imagined audience. This refusal effectively positions us as simultaneously witness and target of her averted gaze, and it becomes the sentimental solicitation of her child that entreats our identification with the image.
Also photographing America’s dustbowl during the Great Depression, Walker Evans set out to deliberately engage with subjects, aspiring for images that communicated a relationship between photographer and the photographed. Many of his images depict women, men and children looking straight into the camera lens, creating the illusion of eye contact with the viewer, and acting as evidence for Evans of the intimacy between himself and his subjects. Evans’ collaborative work with James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1965) begins without written text. Instead the reader is presented with close-up portraits of men, women and children against backgrounds of rough weatherboards. The portrayals of these people are alternated with images of furniture, houses, rooms, hearths, streets, shops and occasional public buildings. The poverty is so bare that Evans’ photographs are imbued with a painterly aesthetic; a modernist abstract pictorialism, as W.J.T. Mitchell explains:

Evans’s photos are like aggressively untitled abstract paintings, bereft of names, reference, and “literary” elements. They force us back onto the material features of the images in themselves. The portrait of Annie May Gudger⁴⁶, for instance, becomes a purely formal study of flatness and worn “graven” surfaces: the lines of her face, the weathered grain of the boards, the faded dress, the taut strands of hair, the gravity of her expression all merge into a visual complex that is hauntingly beautiful and enigmatic. She becomes an ‘icon’ … a pure aesthetic object, liberated from contingency and circumstance into a space of pure contemplation, the Mona Lisa of the Depression.

(Mitchell, 1994, pp. 293-294)

Must all photographs unaccompanied by written text be limited to interpretation as art forms, as aesthetic objects? Or does this reading result from the constraints of a written language that privileges fixed objective meanings? Margaret Olin (1991) discusses the oscillation between documentary and artform in Agee and Evans’ text. She argues that the documentary technique exhorts the observer to participate and ameliorate the conditions represented, while the artistic technique is concerned with, “the problematics of selfhood and otherness” (Olin, 1991, p.92). According to Olin, the juxtaposition and overlaying of these two modernist discourses results in the differences between them being enhanced, rather than resolved. Reflecting on Evans’ confronting, frontally posed portraits she states: “What is hard about gazing into someone’s eyes is that oneself is
seen as well ... But because it is these specific people whose gaze we return, the shame we feel is that of being privileged, separate and unlikely to change” (Olin, 1991, pp. 96-97). The device of photographic subject vicariously looking straight into the eyes of the viewer through the camera lens attempts to bring the subject into the present. Because they look at us, “we are entreated to participate with them in life,” (Olin, 1991, p. 94). However as soon as we attempt to, “reconcile [the] actuality of presence” the modernist art ethos of, “distance and autonomy”, prevents the viewer from forming any connection capable of generating activism (Olin, 1991, p.94). Olin reflects upon the passivity of twentieth century North American wealth, where social concern was expressed, but rarely acted upon, all too often leaving social documentary to collapse into little more than a voyeurism of pity.

Working in the last decades of the twentieth century, Howard Schatz also achieves the illusion of eye contact between observer and observed in *Homeless, portraits of Americans in hard times* (1993). Schatz explains that he uses a black background to remove all environmental context, “so that no other information (locale, street signs, other people) would distract from the eye-to-eye, face-to-face experience” (Schatz, 1993, p.viii). With close-up portraiture, and the careful framing out of signs of destitution he creates a sense of diminished distance, maximising the viewer’s feeling of engagement with the photographed subject (figures 15 & 16). Rather than positing these portraits as generalised signifiers of homelessness Schatz attempts to portray each homeless person as having a unique identity, while at the same time neither erasing their poverty, nor their struggle. Accentuated by the stark chiaroscuro of the contrast between subject and backdrop, the sitters’ faces and bodies clearly bear the marks and scars of transience and marginalisation. And thus their images contribute to, and are unavoidably referenced against established stereotypes of the homeless subject. For each portrait Schatz offered to tape an interview, then with the sitter's permission he extracted and published statements alongside their photograph. These written transcripts undo his careful elision of physical context.
Although Schatz wanted the ‘faces’ to speak for themselves, to tell their story, beyond immediate environment, the testimonials do not undo context. Rather, the words contract meaning, reveal modes of speech, and expose thought structure. As Vicki Goldberg recognises, photographs rarely, “prove effective without words to explain and amplify and propel them forward” (Goldberg, 1991, p. 84). The ‘speaking’ subjects of Schatz’s portraits are defined in the book’s title as “homeless” before the cover is even open. This is subsequently confirmed by their images, and their words. For example, Michele Chyrm’s testimony reads:
I'm looking to get into a hotel. Got kicked out of the last hotel. Can't stay too long because it would be declared residency. If I have residency, can't get benefits, so I stay in a hotel for a minimum of time and keep moving from hotel to hotel.

(cited in Schatz, 1993,p.10)

By personalising 'street' portraiture and vernacular text, the reader is able to imagine and feel a sense of connection with the person/subject composed before them. Whether or not this is sufficient to facilitate change in the way those who can afford to purchase coffee table documentary photography texts think about, and approach transient people remains uncertain.

Figure 16
Howard Schatz, Eugenia Teaford, 58, 1993.
Copyright 1993 © Howard Schatz.
Reading (and writing) the language of the photograph

The reading of the photograph is always historical; it depends on the reader’s ‘knowledge’ just as though it were a matter of a real language ... intelligible only through knowing the signs. (Barthes, 1993a, p.207)

Roland Barthes argued that the paradox of the photographic image^7 is that, “the coded message develops on the basis of a message without a code” (Barthes, 1993a, pp.198-199). The photograph is at once denotative and analogical; without a code and connotative; rhetorical and infused with cultural meaning. Because of the photograph’s currency as a continuous, transparent, unencoded message, readers and authors of the image are able to invest cultural meaning, and thereby link the signified (the person/object depicted by the photograph) to the signifier (the photographic image), and thus read truths and ethical values in the sign (the photograph itself). Barthes further proposed that this cannot and should not be fixed (Barthes, 1993a, pp.206-207).

Barthes argued in his final work, *Camera Lucida* (1993b) that interpretation of codes and signifiers is more likely to reveal a historical understanding of a society if the analysis is mindful of the photographic paradox. He asks, what is it that makes it possible to create and perpetuate a language from the inert object, the photograph, and how has the mechanical art of photography developed such a powerful social and cultural existence? Barthes’ early writing on semiotics raised many of the questions and challenges that foregrounded the poststructural shift to recognising the reader (or viewer) as author. His work also pursued the idea of the arbitrariness of the link between the signifier and the signified, and thus the centrality of culture in the production of meaning (see Shawcross, 1997)^8.

As a collapsed sign, the mimesis of the photographic image masks its codification, producing an effect of transparent objectivity. Therefore, social documentary photography is readily adaptable to unproblematic reflection of the status quo, rather than the disruption of it. The photographic paradox described by Barthes can be observed in the desperate mother and child portraits taken by Lange, and in the consciously allegorical pictorialism of the Madonnas by Cameron (figure 17) and her contemporaries.
Figure 17

Julia Margaret Cameron, Mrs Julia Stephen (nee Jackson) with unidentified child, 1872. Copyright © National Portrait Gallery, London.
Across the specific and the general, between the assumed actual or corporeal existence of the signified woman and child, and masculinist ideals of maternity and femininity, woman as signifier is coded with the Virgin Mary’s iconography. How, then can we know the actuality of the signified woman? What are the representational commonalities that draw middle-class and destitute women together to transcend their ‘real-life’ distance from one another? How is the felt degradation of dire poverty translated into a state of selfless love and sacrifice? How, and why is this imagined as religious experience, or state of grace? Concomitantly, how are privilege and material comfort transformed into a holy state? The main commonality shared between the middle-class and the destitute Madonna is her maternity, demonstrated by the presence and physical handling of her child. These images speak far less of material circumstance than they do of the need to exalt the state of motherhood, to position and revere woman as nurturer and carer, regardless of the urgency of her own need. Woman defined in this way is always accessible, always accepting, always responsible for someone else’s physical and emotional well being. These representations perpetuate and promote an omnipotent, untiring, selfless, nurturing femininity, and thus reveal something about the desire to re-experience a neonatal state of dependency.

The next half of this chapter extends this exploration of representations of maternity amid impoverishment and destitution by engaging with the concept of intertextuality (see chapter 3). The photographic image is treated as an ambiguous, unfixed text that in the process of acquiring meaning oscillates between the personal and the public; the subjective and the objective. At the same time, there is movement, or transposition (Kristeva, 1986) between forms of signification, in this case, academic writing, personal reflection and prose. The discussion builds around three images that were products of the photographic projects described in chapter three: *Images of homelessness* and *Looking you in the face*. To begin I offer several readings of the same photograph by moving between the image text and my own experience. I then consider a further two images and incorporate ideas drawn from psychoanalytic theory.
Figure 18

Copyright © Salvation Army, Victoria, Australia.
Photofictions

The Madonna of the Coke can

Reading 1

I am looking at a black and white photograph taken in 1987 for the Images of homelessness project (figure 18). It depicts two females, one a small child of about three years, the other obviously older, perhaps in her late teens or early twenties. Both are posed to face the camera, the older of the two embraces the child from behind, a position that protects them both at once. Because of the intimacy of their intertwined pose the older one appears to be the child’s mother. Her arms encircle the young girl’s waist, creating a barrier between the viewer and the child’s body, which in turn shields her own body and face. In a mutual embrace, leaning into and against the other’s buffering body, the child partially eclipses the mother, their bodies visually merging into a solid mass.

The child looks out at the viewer, as if straight into my eyes. Her intention is unclear, is she appealing for help? Is she being challenging? Perhaps she is laughing at her observers? Or is she just looking up, wondering why we are looking at her? There is no lack of clarity about the confidence she communicates through her confronting gaze, she is assertive. She drinks with a straw from a Coca-Cola® can (there is no confusion about the product she holds in her hands). Those concerned about children’s diets might find this somewhat disturbing. Those concerned about the insidious entry of the multi-national company into every facet of life, even the lives of the destitute, will be similarly discomforted. Together the (incomplete) family crouches together in front of an aerosol can graffitied wall. The wall seems to be made of vertical weatherboards. The graffitied shelter signifies disorder, chaos, ‘the street’. The light falling on the wall lends support to the impression that we are viewing an outdoor scene. The young mother’s jeans are torn at the knees, perhaps an intentional display of poverty, although the unreppaired denim is also fashionable. No bare flesh is revealed. Under the jeans she wears dark tights, matching the darkness of her jacket. In fact, her clothing obscures her body. We can only see the flesh of her (obviously attractive) face and the back of her right hand. Similarly the child’s face and hands are foremost in our sight.
To the right of the pair is a collection of plastic shopping bags, alluding to the familiar bag-lady image. Our gaze is directed left from the eyes of the child that capture our attention so intently, to the face of the mother, down the curve of their co-joined bodies. Here, the defensiveness of the child’s look gives way to the protection afforded by her mother’s body, whose arm, together with the inclination of her head and her line of sight, guides our eyes across the picture’s fore plane to the bags fading out of focus in the right bottom corner, drawing our gaze into the wall and out of the picture frame. But this drift is brief; we are hauled back again by the bold lines of graffiti to the child’s intense dark-eyed stare/glare.

The image needs little accompanying text, or even a title. There is sufficient meaning in its significations of homelessness and motherhood; we see a woman and child crouched together near a pile of shopping bags in front of street graffiti. A contemporary reading suggests the mother’s body is hunched over, perhaps indicating shame, while her head is bowed modestly like a Raphael Madonna. She averts her eyes from the photographer/viewer, as she protects her child; who has all the cheekiness (because she dares to look straight at us) of a ‘Street Arab’ (see chapter 7) or perhaps the fragile aura of a Botticelli angel? Or, does this image bear the performance quality of a Dr. Barnardo ‘artistic fiction’? (Koven, 1997) (see chapter 6). The can of Coke suggests that the child is perhaps wiser than her years, more assertive than she should be. Maybe it tells us she must consume whatever is available. Perhaps the Coke replaces the nutrition of mother’s milk, rendering the mother impotent. Here is a child fed by a less-than-nutritious billion-dollar a year product that has infiltrated almost every part of the globe. Even though the picture is without colour, we know the can is red and white. We can be less certain about the colour of the subjects’ clothing, hair, or the marks on the wall behind them. More pertinently, we are left to speculate on where the pair might go to from here. Home, privacy, protection, safety, security must be imagined for them, by us, the spectators. The child’s confronting look is asking us what we are imagining about or for them, it is a deflection of our gaze.
Reading 2

This is one of the sixty-five black and white photographs from the *Images of homelessness* collection, referred to by the organisation and workers at the time as the ‘Streetkids photography project’. A mother and child are depicted sitting in a street, apparently homeless. The viewer is told this through a collection of signs denoting homelessness: plastic shopping bags that appear to hold clothing; a graffitied back-drop; principle figures sitting on the ground; torn clothing; the shame in the mother’s bowed head; the juxtaposition of this with the child’s challenging look. The young child drinks out of a Coke can, disturbing middle-class child rearing practices. I look into the eyes of this child and they are my eyes, her hands are my hands, clutching at that can of Coca-Cola. She is laughing at me just a little bit, amused perhaps. A silent, private joke between her and me mediated through the camera lens. I asked her to look straight into it. She knows I disapprove of the Coke. I am pinned here, between this precocious child and the baby, who I am still breastfeeding, crawling at my feet, deliberately out of the camera’s range. He’s too chubby to play the role of a street-child. Saturday afternoon, 2 o’clock, doing my part-time job. Babies all over me, still I can frame and shoot while small hands hug my legs and knowing eyes hold my gaze; momentary undivided attention. Am I there in the glint of her eye? Does she understand what is happening here? Why she is here? Is this what good mothers do with their children? Pose them as homeless, give them to other women to hold and pretend they are their babies? Patriarchal fantasies, Matchgirls and Cinderellas, Snow White, Hansel and Gretel, and other pervasive imaginary cast-out children flood into mind as I reflect on this contrived image. The characters of fictive photographic fairy tales elide and define our identities, mine, hers and hers and theirs; who are the mothers and children we are doing this for?

What is it to be a woman/mother/other?

There in the frame, sister of mine, daughter of mine; each a third-child-in- the-family woman in the camera’s sight-scrutiny. Both third girls of four children, even. Joined here in pictorial space they become mother and child. It is their job to play the Madonna role today. My sister does not look at me, cannot match the monocular lens. She is self-conscious, honest at heart. How tenuous this all is, barely graspable. Identities like
clothing, torn open to reveal just another layer. Nothing fixed but the final print, and that not even forever. The negative, the key reproductive object, a lack that refuses to be one, is dependent on techniques of photographic care. The subject/actors will be implicated until all the images are torn up and the negative destroyed; rendering this play-acting family separate, again. Even then it/they/the day/ the represented past, won’t completely disappear. Sole parenthood is not to be taken lightly. It is not a game. Serious causes reside here with this presentable, permissible pair. Is there death or life in this image? The object/subject is home/less/ness, the subject/objects are marginalised women and their children. Like a dutiful woman, I am keen to please; I want to create a ‘good’ picture. Why do I want to ‘do well’ for the agency that employs me? Because it is managed by men who care, because they can/will find homes for women and their children? Can these men make a positive difference to destitute women’s lives, women who have been badly treated by the men in their lives? I want to make a sensitive/good image/impression, help people with my artwork. Is it to justify the selfishness of a creative existence? Feminism tells me I have to be more than a mother, I am easy to convince. My sister would like to be a model, she is the photogenic one in the family, I was the artist/photographer, she posed, I snapped. She helps me out all the time. I do not know what I would do without her. She loves my children (all four) like they are her own. She likes to string moments together and be a mother in them. It helps me breath, it keeps me sane, maintains order. I do not have to parent alone. Not like the sole mothers I am trying to re/present in the picture. Our bodies share common cells of flesh. But we are torn apart, because we have our roles to play, women in separate cell/spaces, competing with each other to find territories for ourselves, housed in rooms that be/come us. The wolf threatens to eat you if you stick your nose too far outside the door. What (un)imaginable terrors await women who are caste out of the (un)safe confines of home? What places can women imagine for ourselves?
Reading 3

The photograph now twice discussed was reproduced more times than any other from the *Images of homelessness* project. The auspice social services organisation used it on a diverse range of promotional products, including a record cover, posters, pamphlets, a television commercial and postcards. Why did it hold such appeal for the agents whose role it was to advertise the needs of homeless people in order to attract financial support? An immediate supposition is that the image engendered an emotional response to gain public sympathy. Reflective viewers might ask who could resist the child’s piercing stare; who could not feel for this (attractive) young mother on the street? How does the portrayal position benevolent observer/participants? What aspects and elements in this image might encourage, or perhaps more accurately, instruct, members of the accommodated public to feel sympathy for, even empathy with homeless people? By what mechanisms does it resonate between the particular, (assuming it can ever operate in a specific, personal context) and the general through its public display? While clues might be found in the triadic inter-relationship between the viewer as subject, the photographer as subject and the subject/s of the image itself, the image and what it signifies is unavoidably implicated in, and bound by specific historical and social circumstance, and a cultural reality made possible only through imagination.

The photographic portrayal is staged, the frontally posed woman with bowed head, performs the role of a destitute mother. This is not a photograph of *actual* homeless people. I created this image out of frustration over my inability to capture any *suitable* representations of homelessness. In order to meet the requirements of the project a few ‘shots’, at least of ‘kids in the street’ were required. It was suggested (by my supervisors) that I set up some shoots. I acquiesced to the rationale that the purpose was to communicate the social cause, and that advertising uses models to convey its messages; therefore nothing could be wrong with doing the same to advertise the problem of homelessness⁹, even though the truth would be eclipsed in the final exhibit.

Encouraged by stories of past mock-ups for news reportage, it took little to overcome my initial concern over authenticity. Remembering the photographs deliberately left untaken, images that I judged as ethically unsound because they would dehumanize the
subjects to such a degree that the humanitarian goals of the overall project would be
overwhelmed; young people lying drug affected and unconscious on the floor of a crisis
aid centre; others caught in violent moments of anger and fear at their uncertain futures,
I decided to see what I could come up with.

Writing this over a decade later, I am still uncertain, but prepared to defend the position
that authenticity is not so much contingent on an objective accuracy but on good-will
and informed, ethical choice. The belief that fiction contaminates the truth; that the real
is tainted by the imagined, is a fabrication of positivist science, of the need for
objectivity to exclude the uncontrollable, the unlimited, the unpredictable, the creative
and the passionate in order to establish and retain sovereignty over an abstract, tightly
delimited terrain of knowledge (Game & Metcalfe, 1996). For cartographers of this
kind, photography has helped to delineate a field that asserts and reinforces the
superiority of a reality only definable by an objective visuality (Slater, 1997). To
exclude or deny the presence of fiction in the represented moment is in itself an
unethical and dishonest act. It is an amputation which takes away the real experience of
the unseen and immeasurable, of potential, imagination and emotion, leaving remnants
that may provide a more convenient and manageable truth, but one that can only ever
offer partial pseudo-truths.

**Yet another telling**

The child and the young woman in figure 18 are related to one another, the child is the
young woman’s niece. The young woman is my sister, and I am the child’s mother. Of
course, none of us were homeless at the time, but I do not wish to denigrate the fictions
of this photograph. More crucial for me than the issues of empirical authenticity are the
coded messages intended for the imagined audience. Between the levels of the general
and public, and the specific and personal, the photograph serves at least two functions; it
represents and publicizes homelessness and it records the faces and bodies of my sister
and daughter posed as mother and daughter.

At the personal level this image shares similarities with the photograph of Alyse
described in the prologue. In both depictions the roles of mother, sister and aunt move
fluidly between one subject/object. The representational face and body of my sister seen as a mother in this image, is at once sister, aunt and mother. In this photograph of my sister holding my daughter, I have represented an in/deliberate act of homage, the slippery contingency of identity. The person who is actually my sister is not a mother, and yet through the photographic image and its web of signification, she contributes to, and at the same time becomes, a ‘Madonna’. Similarly in Alyse’s portrait, my own mother orchestrated a fictional maternity for her sister while simultaneously utilising and occupying her sister’s image in order to tell their shared stories of family violence. While it is unlikely I will ever be confused with my sister in ‘real life’, in this particular image I am able to view her occupying my role, as the mother of my child. This image provides a way of seeing myself, as well as the fictions created by the icon of the Madonna, through the devices photographic of illusion. Psychoanalytic theory, perhaps, has something to offer in attempting to explain the efficacy of this transposition.

Lacan, following Freud, is centrally concerned with the child/mother relationship. He asserts that in the first six months of life our ontological existence as pre-linguistic beings, coupled with our unavoidable state of dependency, requires that our identity is fused with others, especially our main other or (m)other. Unable to distinguish ourselves separately from our (m)others, (or primary carer), we mimetically identify with her (him), adopting a mirror identity to compensate for the self that we lack. Our accommodation and adoption of coherent language, or symbolically, the phallic ‘law of the Father’ forces us to realise our separateness from our (m)others at around the age of six to eighteen months. This phase, which Lacan calls the ‘mirror stage’ is symbolised by the act of looking into a mirror and seeing our reflected selves in the arms of our (m)other, from whom we begin to realise we are distinct. “The child must become two in order to become one” (Tong, 1989, p.221). We experience this split as a rent with our ideal self; our (m)other, the body and identity from which we have emerged (Grosz, 1990). The realisation is so painful that Lacan describes the experience as castration. However, the resultant feeling is one of incompleteness and inadequacy, rather than loss of an organ. Ragland-Sullivan explains, “[t]he phallic signifier of difference imposes a sense of limitations and ‘self’-boundaries on a mirror-stage psychic illusion of
symbiotic wholeness. At the same time the phallic signifier introduces the possibility for reflective self representation through naming” (Ragland-Sullivan, 1991, p.214).

Never again able to achieve congruence or communion with our (pre-literate) ideal identity form; we are instead only able to observe wholeness or completion in what we see before us, in others around us. We pursue a sense of wholeness and connection with others through language, which is both a constant (unconscious) reminder of our incompleteness and permanent sense of loss, and a means for addressing it. The self that we know is always and forever a mirror image (a Gestalt), which through simultaneous affirmation and destabilisation constantly alienates us from our pre-literate (authentic) self (Lacan, 1977). Consequently, we can only know the ‘self’ that is reflected back to us through others. Facilitated by the acceptance and acquisition of language, or the ‘symbolic order’ (modelled on Freud’s concept of super ego) this refracted formation of identity occurs through internalising the concept that it is impossible to see our own face as others see it. Our true ‘self’ exists interminably imprisoned in the order of the real (a preliterate existence roughly equivalent to Freud’s concept of the unconscious). According to Lacan, it is through the desire to overcome our lack, or loss of a whole self, and to re-enter the real that exists outside of language, that we develop a sense of the ‘imaginary order’ (a displacement of Freud’s concept of ego). This provides the basis of the dialectic of intersubjectivity; of difference and sameness and exists essentially as a system of projections and identifications (Leupin, 1991, p.7).

The Lacanian concept of the mirror stage in which the human self (as a signifier) necessarily splits from the real self (the signified) in order to enter the domain of culture (sign/language) resonates with the photograph as a signifier marking the split between the signified and the symbolic. It is worth quoting the words of Lacan himself here:

What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects. Hence it comes about that the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which—if you will allow me to use the word, as I often do, in a fragmented form—I am photo-graphed. (Lacan, 1979, p.106)
Perhaps there is a clue here as to why photographs, particularly family photographs, can so readily become the objects through which we process identities, trying them on, trying ourselves on others, but never completing or fixing our selves; like make-believe and dress-ups. Annette Kuhn makes a pertinent observation about this kind of reflection, as in the image of Alyse, “thus can a simple photograph figure in, and its showing set the scene for the telling of, a family drama – each of whose protagonists might tell a different tale, or change their own story at every retelling” (Kuhn, 1991, p. 20).

Lacan’s ideas provide the concept of being a woman with a double dilemma. He argues that because language belongs to the law of the Father, or the symbolic order, the symbol of the phallus offers substitution for the self we lack. Woman’s physiological lack of a phallus forever excludes her from the fullness of participation, thereby trapping woman forever inside the pre-linguistic imaginary order as the other (Tong, 1989). Hélène Cixous takes particular exception to these assertions, and claims Lacan’s theory of the gendered self to be a fundamentally sexist construct of phallocentric language (Ragland-Sullivan, 1991; Tong, 1989). Hence, Cixous claims that woman must write the feminine into language (Cixous, 1991, p.224), in order to undermine the invasion of ‘the male symbolic order’. Through un (phallo) structured use of language; the creative; poetic; partial; fluid; female voice, might then be able to inscribe and invent woman. By writing from within the womb, rather than with the phallus, by expressing the unthinkable and the unthought, Cixous argues that woman can write herself out of the existence constructed by this dominant masculinity (Tong, 1989, p.224).

Visual imagery plays a key role at the mirror stage, where vision equals realisation and represents the phallic symbolic order41. The fundamental lack of the human self is premised on the concept of blindness or obscurity, because we cannot see our real selves, we must adopt as a substitute the symbolic order of language. Barthes suggests pictographic texts perform a much more varied and ambiguous role in the interplay of meaning than phonetic language (Barthes, 1993a). Therefore, I wish to argue that imagery can make an effective contribution to destabilising these hetero-masculine constructs of woman (and man) by facilitating the imagining and in/scribing of
unlimited variations of the gendered self. If, as I suggested in chapter four, the camera metaphorically symbolises the womb and photographic technology represents a hetero-masculinist desire to dominate reproduction, woman might rewrite herself by unsettling and disturbing the photographic offspring of particularly constraining forms of the male gaze.

Infinite stories, all simultaneously credible, not one able to claim sole legitimacy, can be told about the preceding and following photographs. My authorship (of the images and the reading of those images) constitutes a narrow sample of the potential meanings. The images described in this chapter reach across the borders between family photography, social documentary, promotional advertising and art. They move from the personal, private circle of family existence into the public domain of which homelessness is always a part. They remind us how commodified this social sphere has become.

As publicly circulated visual texts the images and their subjects are open to scrutiny and interrogation, and their meaning is readily reconfigured by text and location. They are both constrained and liberated by conventions and contraventions of spatial organisation; arrangements of bodies and objects; inclusions; exclusions; references within and beyond the frame. As previously suggested, many of these habits of organising and arranging visual space persist from artistic or painted representation. In the words of Barthes, “[p]hotography has been, and is still, tormented by the ghost of Painting” (Barthes, 1993b, p.30). The optical illusion shared by painting and photography, of three-dimensional space occurring in two-dimensional representation, resulted in the symbology, or the grammatology as Derrida (1998) might suggest, of established artistic tradition being deeply woven into photography’s ocularity. Catholicism’s Madonna is a powerful example of this intertenuxuality and connects the themes that merge across my photographs and the images of the Madonna discussed at the beginning of this chapter.
Figure 19

Dorothea Lange, *Mother and Children on the road at Tulelake Siskiyou County, California*, 1939.
Copyright © The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C
Mother and Child

Taken in 1995 this photograph was a product of the Looking you in the face project (figure 20). As chapter two describes this research attempted to redress what I saw as oversights and errors in the initial 1987 collection of photographs, Images of homelessness, in which lack of active awareness or promotion of gender issues presented as a main concern. This photograph, titled Mother and Child for the Pictured in the lucky country exhibition, is an example of my attempt to undo and re-examine my depiction of homeless young women. Also a popular image, it was published in Melbourne’s first edition of The Big Issue, a magazine dealing with issues of homelessness and sold on a profit-sharing basis by homeless people. It also appeared in a Canadian photography journal, Blackflash. Unlike the previous photograph, (figure 18) I exercised more copyright control. At its first public showing it was accompanied by a caption that read:

It is a myth that young women have children to increase their Social Security benefits.

There is an extremely high rate of poverty amongst young women who are sole parents, for some this results in homelessness.

At the time I agreed to add these words for the purpose of meeting the exhibition’s aims, which was to gain public support for the cause of homelessness. The words were included to clarify, modify and limit the range of potential readings because members of the advisory group felt that unqualified by text, the image might offend and possibly anger the anticipated middle-class viewing public. As a photographer and researcher with young women I was irritated by their assumptions.

The young mother in the image is intentionally challenging, with hand on hip she presents her baby frontally to the viewer caught in her stare. The picture is taken outside in a car park, indicated by the rear taillight of a car; the flat bitumen ground extends behind the mother and her baby. The shape of the post at the left of the image is repeated in the male figure walking away from the scene’s frontal plane, and by inference away from the young woman and her baby. His presence, which serves as a stage prop, a symbol of desertion, was accidental. When taking the photograph I was not consciously aware of him crossing the field of vision. Together with the vertical
poles extending to the rear of the picture, his body and its implied movement mark the picture’s vanishing point, located somewhere behind the mother’s confronting eyes.

Barthes describes two possible elements of a photograph that in co-existence establish for him a certain form of interest. The first of these he describes as the studium, a Latin word meaning, “application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment … but without special acuity” (Barthes, 1993b, p.26). Barthes identifies the studium as culturally determined, a structured pre-condition for engaging with the subject of the imagery. The second element nominated by Barthes is the punctum, this ‘breaks or punctuates’ the studium: “it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me,” while at the same time ‘punctuating’, interspersing the image with small, ‘sensitive points’ (Barthes, 1993b, p.26). “A photograph’s punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (Barthes, 1993b, p.27).

According to Barthes most photographs are devoid of a punctum, leaving them somewhat banal, average and ordinary in his eyes, images without passion, perhaps. The studium of both the photograph and of the spectator intersect in an attempt at reconciliation between the photograph and society (Barthes, 1993b, p.27). Recognition of the punctum, the significance and influence of which may or may not be shared between spectators, is essentially an individual response to the accidental, it not only sits outside the studium, or cultural grammar of the intended subject matter, it also disrupts and distracts from it, thereby rendering the studium irrelevant.

For me the punctum in this image is the smile on the baby’s face. While the man walking away into the distance may be accidental I cannot claim he was incidental to the selection of this photograph for public presentation. His form fixes the cultural connotations of the deserted sole mother, and as such is unable to operate in the manner of punctum. Nevertheless, these two points, the receding male figure and the smiling baby, are drawn into a triangle with the mother’s face, while her expression reinforces the intended studium and her circumstances as a young single mother.
A baby, only weeks old, eyes shut, head falling backwards indicating minimal bodily control, is passive (how could he\textsuperscript{32} be anything else) and yet he smiles. Despite the commonly held, even medically proven, belief/fact that a baby of this age cannot knowingly smile, I read the smile as somehow deliberate (how many mothers would not?). But if it is not, then it signifies contentment, or perhaps innocence; the baby is unaware of his mother’s economic and personal struggles. The mother assertively (some might feel aggressively) commands our attention to her child. In no sense is this a romanticised Madonna, nor does it speak of an idealised mother-child bond in the face of hardship. There is no fashionable arrangement of hair, makeup or clothing. While the mother holds her child against her body, she supports him with one arm, moving out of his way in order to present him to the camera. Her left arm balances her body and
expands the space she and her child occupy. This stance is also a cliché of the ‘working class’ mother; hands on hips, berating. Although in this instance, the woman does not berate her husband and/or her children (as she might in a Victorian cartoon) she berates us, the spectators, those who dare to look at herself and her child. Unable to address her viewers in real space and time, the question of her audience’s responsibility is left open.

The image speaks very little, if at all, of homelessness, but of the challenges of parenting alone in a less-than-hospitable socio-economy. Nothing of the represented surrounding space comforts this young woman; the only other person beside her baby is walking away. She stands in an open space with no comfortable place to rest. There is the possibility that she has access to the car. The male figure and the back corner of the car together are out of focus and share the same visual space on the perspectival axis, suggesting the young mother’s separation from, and thus lack of access to them. At the risk of mystifying this image, the young woman’s determined glare and stance, the wind blowing her hair, her self-assurance, the confident one-armed grip she has on her baby, conjure up inferences of a female warrior about to enter battle, as sole parenting is for many young women and their children with uncertain and unsafe accommodation. I was not able to locate this family after developing the photograph, so I do not know how she feels about this portrait. I cannot imagine it as a preferred family photo, but it does make a powerful social statement, one I believe she would have wanted to make.

Although arguably this representation belongs to the artistic tradition of Madonna iconography, it acquires its strength not from romantic or religious allusion, but in its defiance of the sociocultural positioning of women and their children, in its undoing of the idealisation of maternity. On the other hand, while the image is historically located by its stark public space, the machinery of the car and obstructive phallic poles, my own cultural assumptions of maternal behaviour are connected by an ocular trajectory with metaphors of divine motherhood and its associated modesty and self-effacement. Defiantly, this mother does not simply place her baby before herself, she intrudes into the sight path of the viewer to deliver her own visually scripted challenge, ensuring that the experience of the image is critically deflected onto the spectator. Like Walker Evans’ portrait of Allie May Burroughs (figure 21), “[s]he asks as many questions of us
as we of her: ‘who are you who will ... study these photographs?’” (Mitchell, 1994, p.295). Although this photograph cannot escape reference to the semiology of the Madonna, it also complies with the photographic desire to retain links with social realism. It seeks to convince the viewer of its authenticity by synthetically getting ‘them’ to look at ‘us’ in the eye. In this moment of exchange between viewer and viewed there is confusion over who occupies which position. The observing ‘we’ of the present is the imagined ‘them’ of the moment of taking the photograph, the photograph’s present.

Figure 21
Copyright © Aperture Foundation, New York.
Motherchild

Another photograph from the *Looking you in the face* collection also portrays a mother presenting her baby to the viewer (figure 22). The act of putting her baby forward defines her as self-sacrificing parent. However, she also has her back turned to the viewer. This is not a passive gesture; she is actively positioning her baby over her shoulder, making him look out at the photographer/viewer. This photograph has only been published once, without accompanying text, as one of five in a series that attempted to allow each image to be free from the specificity of a textual statement. Here, it is permitted no such luxury.

The poorly defined background of this image has the appearance of being flooded in light and makes little use of perspective. Apart from a singlet top hanging in the left corner and a slight grey blur, which might indicate a window-frame, and therefore the source of illumination, the viewer knows nothing of what lays behind and beyond the mother and child. Also, the photograph employs minimal references to material circumstance. All we have is the washing in the window and the mother's unbrushed hair. The white space circling the figures and signifying the painterly aesthetic is disrupted by the hanging garment which undermines the ethereal to ground the inhabitants in the earthly and domestic. We are left with nowhere to turn, except back to the baby's inquiring but undemanding gaze. This image expands its potential meanings through the viewer's submersion in the endless invisibility and whiteness of light.

Of the three images I discuss here, (figures 18, 20 & 22) this is the most minimalist; it bears no marks of desertion, poverty or homelessness. At first glance it could be a portrait of any mother and child, located in domestic space by virtue of the garment hanging to dry. But the question must then be asked, why was this photograph taken and published? Viewed as a social documentary image, perhaps the piece of washing can be read as a sign of domestic oppression and confinement. The baby looks into the camera lens, as if fascinated by it. It is doubtful such a small child could deliberately appeal for economic assistance, his needs being nurture and bodily comfort. His look is about curiosity. Clinging to his mother, he is protected by her body from the camera and the photographer before them.
Why is the mother's back turned? In western culture, not showing one's face carries connotations of shame, or resistance. Is she turning away because she does not wish to be photographed? Or is she showing us her baby as he appears over her shoulder? This is a view of her child that she cannot see. Perhaps she is using the photographic image as a mirror, as a reflection of the unseeable? Inverting the roles of protector and protected, the mother could be read as hiding behind her child. Rather than focusing on well-being, these questions centre on behaviour.

As suggested earlier, a psychoanalytic framework conceptualises the baby in its 'imaginary' phase as unable to distinguish between their mother's and their own identity. Elizabeth Grosz explains:
The child experiences its body as fragmented ... [forming] a syncretic unity with the mother, [it] cannot distinguish between itself and its environment. It has no awareness of its own corporeal boundaries. It is ubiquitous, with no separation between itself and ‘objects’ for it forms a ‘primal unity’ with its objects. It cannot recognise the absence of the mother. (Grosz, 1990, p.34)

Perhaps the image speaks of this collapsed identity. Rather than being protected by her separate body, this baby might be experiencing his mother’s body as the limits of his own body. If we view the image in this way, and choose to enter the representation through the perspective of the babe, there is no need to understand the subjects here as discreet or separable, i.e. mother ‘and’ child, but as one merged ‘motherchild’.

The past in the present

Whether in compliance or tension, these photographs of young women holding children are unable to operate outside of the iconography established by the Madonna of the Roman Catholic Church and its image-makers. Of the three I believe the first (figure 18) conforms most closely to the humbled trecento Madonna. Like the early Renaissance images referred to by Miles (1986) and Warner (1985), the ‘Madonna’ is metaphorically down at the level of commoner’s feet. The bodies of the ‘mother and child’ intertwine; the child looks out at their viewer/s, while the mother looks down to the right corner. Both figures are frontally presented. The face of the child is almost angelic, while also demanding attention. Above and behind their heads the painted wall, which surrounds the figures with decoration, shines as if lit; it could even be an aural light. Rather than breast feeding, the child sucks on a can of drink. This might be read as a detached breast, offering late twentieth century milk of the streets, a global food for the masses. The can might also be seen as a representation of the phallus, the Lacanian signifier and symbol of language. The soft-drink can introduces written code to the image. Centrally placed it dominates the entire picture as phallus and breast, an ambiguous object simultaneously symbolizing maternal nurture and the patriarchal dominance of a globally pervasive capitalist product. It is a superficial comfort, an unavoidable emptiness, an illusion of nourishment, an invasion and a violation. This image does little, if anything to challenge, much less unsettle the exercise of capitalist patriarchy in
the lives of women and children, in mothering. In its contemporary context this portrayal represents single parenthood. The male, the father, is absent, but ‘law of the Father’ continues to impose in the objects and arrangement of the visual text. As Linda Nochlin in *Women, Art and Power*, identifies “[t]he patriarchal discourse of power over women masks itself in the veil of the natural – indeed of the logical” (Nochlin, 1991, p.14). The appeal of this image to a Christian social services agency, as an institution of the paternalistic (welfare) state, resides in its sanctioning of, and insistence on the place of women and children in a patriarchal symbolic order.

Marginalised, unhomed, vulnerable, violatable and dependent on philanthropy, the Madonna here does not present a god-like child, nor is she attended by angels; she is backed up against a wall, pushed to the ground and made to avert her eyes. She and her child are, as patriarchy would have sole mothers, shamed and humiliated, dependent and submissive, innocent and therefore corruptible. There is no attempt to transgress an established gender or class order in this photograph; instead she is determined as an object of desire.

Perhaps this is too harsh a judgment of an image that was produced with the intention of helping homeless sole mothers. The direct link between the feminisation of poverty and female-headed sole parent families is well documented (see chapter two, Carlen, 1988; Mulherin, 1996). Welfare services are acutely aware of the need for support and assistance to these women and their children. Rossi (1990) observes that the presence of women and children in homeless shelters elicits emotive and concerned responses to homelessness, establishing the issue as urgent and real, contrasting it with the myth of skid row as an irresolvable, romanticised feature of urban life. There is a clear need to bring public attention and sympathy to the issues confronting single mothers and it makes considerable sense to use representations that draw on maternity, nurturance and self-sacrificing love for achieving public empathy. Having worked in social service organisations, I appreciate the necessity of Government and public support. Defying traditional values and social mores can readily bring simmering resistance to the boil. In a Christian capitalist country, the *Madonna of the Coke can* employs the archetype of the all-loving, all-sacrificing Virgin Mary, within a visual space imbued by signs of
high Renaissance art. Through these reassuring anchor points the maternal subject shifts between the treble icons of the Virgin Mary (all-sacrificing motherhood), Eve (the sexual temptress) and Mary Magdalene (the redeemed prostitute). In this photograph the subjecthood of the sole mother, as a woman outside the sanction and ‘protection’ of the patriarchal home and marriage is able to find redemption. She does not challenge the viewer; she is submissive, while her child, like the Christ child, is assertive and active. Thus within a sociocultural domain defined by hegemonic masculinist values, she is not construed as dangerous and deviant. And yet, at the same time, neither is woman necessarily entirely effaced or completely disempowered by the Madonna archetype. The trope of the Madonna exerts substantial influence. To be inveighed with an aura of enduring love, strength, wisdom, innocence and maternity affords woman with an almost irreproachable authority, although it bears recognition that this is the only throne in the house of God that attracts the awe of Christian men.

On the other hand, understood from within a feminist psychoanalytic framework the body of the Virgin Mary might be read as an uncontaminated womb and pre-linguistic imaginary realm, free from the dominations of the phallic symbolic order. Perhaps her liberation from the fixity of language enables her omnipotence, making it possible to out manoeuvre or even overwhelm phallocentric discourse. The ‘Madonnas’ of figures 20 and 22 move, although along different paths, towards unwriting persistent social expectations of maternity. In the first of these the Madonna adopts an assertive, almost aggressive stance, daring to pose the question of her observers’ responsibility. In the second the identity of the mother merges with her child’s, not in an act of self-sacrifice, but because in this moment we are able to see her experiencing herself and her child as one.

Between art and the social

The effort to reconcile, or find a nexus between modern art and social commitment resulted in Agee and Evans’s work being met by the, “unresolvable conflict between the shared gaze, representative of a communal social ideal, and the isolated vision demanded by the aesthetics of autonomy” (Olin, 1991, p.94). This disjunction between art and community, self and the everyday is identified as a feature and dilemma of
social documentary photography by those who believe its reconciliation is necessary. The problem of imbuing the life-less products of a technical apparatus that records using light, with the human qualities of emotion, intelligence and sensory experience has never ceased to confound photographers wanting their images to influence social attitudes and effect change. The echoing of artistic painterly motifs in photographic images has been employed as a key strategy towards this effort. Even though the function, form and role of art shifted from the Renaissance through the Enlightenment to modernity and modernism, photography had no compunctions about borrowing, mimicking and utilising the most powerful and effective signs and symbols. Although photography oscillated and deliberated between the aesthetic and the scientific, the idea of ‘high art’ was frequently employed by photographers to signify authority, and also somewhat paradoxically to deflect from the subjectivity and arbitrariness of their own practice. At the same time this affect of aesthetic elitism was closely linked with, and in many ways sustained by, artistic movements and their associations with signification at a mass level.

The ubiquity of the Madonna icon finds her influencing and occupying the bodies, hearts, minds and souls of wealthy, securely tenured women, as well as women experiencing extreme destitution and uncertainty. The script of the Virgin Mary transposes so effectively that in discussing homeless women seeking assistance at a New York shelter Golden claims, “Mary, in this culture seems to be the archetypal name for woman” (Golden, 1992, p.19). The adoption of Mary as pseudonym does not relieve the destitution of poor women; its representation affords relief to the viewer, who is redeemed (Olin, 1991).

While the ghost of the eternally patient Renaissance Madonna hovers in form and ideal within the codes and significations of the social documentary images discussed in this chapter, the Virgin’s translation is ever fraught. Photographs of destitute women and children shaded and highlighted with her image might be easier to look upon, appealing to the sensibilities of middle-class masculinist desires, but this is not evidence that the real bodies of those represented are touched by the Madonna’s presence. ‘We’ the viewers find ourselves positioned to love selflessly, to forgive without question, to
nurture and redeem as we are at the same time selflessly loved, forgiven, nurtured and redeemed from our alienated selves. The bodies of destitute women do not merge with the Virgin Mary in the imaginary spaces of the photograph, she is written there as the viewer’s other, to vicariously complete the fissured, fragile self of those who look upon her template.

The photograph as object acts as a mirror image, into and onto which cultural codes are written. The reader as author can disrupt imbedded structural and ideological strongholds by recognising and undoing the tightly woven iconographic suppositions of the photographic, while at the same time authoring our own readings and inscribing new or multiple meanings. The challenge presented by Hélène Cixous is to find a way to write ourselves out, from within the enmeshments of our past and present histories. Literal and visual constructs, such as the images discussed here, are the raw materials with which we must work in the present. And while the ideology and iconography of the Madonna has operated to position woman as the other of man, man too is defined as incomplete, for it is Mary’s perseverance, patient selflessness, wisdom and love which completes him. Perhaps it is not so much fear of a phallic lack that impels the child to enter culture, as Freud and Lacan claim, but fear of the inability to reproduce; fear of the lack of a womb. A woman, who can reproduce without a hu ‘man’ is a powerful symbol, some might even will her to the realms of the impossible and unthought. Consistent with her ever-present ambiguity, the domains the Madonna occupies are the natural world outside of the throne, rather than hearth and home. This offers a simultaneity and plurality of locations; spaces for women between and beyond the contaminating outer world of phallocentrism and the uncontaminated womb within.

Before proceeding it is worth briefly overviewing the chapters thus far. I began by exploring how the narrative associated with a particular family photograph links with my interest in producing and researching photographs of homeless women. Chapter two established the broad aims of the thesis, raising issues of how binaric themes such as in/visibility, sign and blindness; old and new; imaginary and real; female and male are employed by, and implicated in, the political and visual representation of homelessness. Chapter three described the three photographic projects that inspired this inquiry, and
examined methodological issues related to establishing a postmodern feminist theoretical position and the use of image-based research methods. Chapter four sought to trace photography’s prehistory. The discussion began by exploring how photography’s ocular structure; fixed-point linear perspective, erupted during the Renaissance and was transported through and beyond the Enlightenment by a combination of technical and artistic ambitions, and a governmental will to power. The chapter was also concerned with the development of the belief that the photographic image could represent the real more effectively than bodily experience, in particular the human eye. The discussion also considered the formation of the photographer as an ambiguously gendered subject.

This chapter (five) has explored meanings associated with the Madonna and how this iconic symbol has exercised power across five centuries, readily moving between representational genres, such as high art and social documentary photography. The discussion utilised ideas of intertextuality, and drew on psychoanalytic theory to analyse associations between self and other in twentieth century photographic portrayals of women and children defined as homeless. In the next three chapters, I pursue a more linear historical trajectory in order to retrace the emergence of socially concerned photography and the various ways that women have been represented as homeless by this tradition.
Endnotes

42 It is also highly likely that Lange had seen Consuelo Kanaga’s *Mother with Children*, 1922-24 produced for the New York American Christmas Fund. There are considerable similarities between Kanaga’s and Lange’s photographs, although it was Lange’s image that became iconic. Speculations as to why this was so would constitute a chapter in itself, however this was possibly in part due to the ‘Mother/Madonna’ of Lange’s image being frontally posed and looking out of the frame into the distance- towards the future. For a copy of this image see Rosenblum (1994), p. 178.

43 Another photograph of the same scene is dominated by the face and shoulders of this subject, presumably the woman’s partner, and father of her child, see Aperture (1982) Dorothea Lange, photographs of a lifetime. Oakland: Könemann, p.73.

44 Warner (1985) explains this was due to two reasons. Firstly, breastfeeding became more closely associated with the peasantry, and secondly purity became more aligned with modesty.

45 See for example Leonardo da Vinci’s *Virgin and Child with St Anne* 1508-10, ill. 11, 12. p. 360, Honour & Fleming, 1984. The bare feet of both Mary and Anne, almost embrace the rocky ground and form the focus of the lower frontal picture plane, unlike the majority of Raphael’s Madonnas, Mary and Jesus share eye contact.

46 Referred to elsewhere as Annie May Burroughs (see figure 21)

47 Although Barthes is referring to the press photograph, I have taken the liberty of extending this to include social documentary photography.

48 Baudrillard later developed this notion into a theory of simulacra, see Baudrillard (1988) “Simulacra and Simulations”.

49 This is not the first time a photograph of a destitute family has substituted the breast with this symbol of western capitalism. In 1939 Dorothea Lange photographed a mother and her two children on the road at Tule Lake, California, the baby in her arms is sucking on a teat attached to a coca-cola bottle, see figure 19.

50 The practice is now openly discussed. In the March 2002 edition of *In Style*, an Australian fashion magazine, Christine Hawkins, a drama school graduate is quoted stating, “I did the Salvation Army advertisement where I got beaten up. There were posters everywhere of me with a black eye” (Bertram, 2002, p. 81).

51 Gillian Rose (2001, p.2) draws attention to the fundamental problem with the notion that the visual is central to knowing the world, making the point that this does not account for those who are born blind.

52 I know the baby was male.

53 Again, as the photographer I am aware the baby was male.

54 Technically this would be described as over-exposed, a common criticism of my photographs.

55 I have had comments to this effect from people looking at the photograph.

56 This practice of homeless women being referred to, and referring to themselves as, “Mary” is discussed further in chapter eight.


58 Although the science of cloning is founded on this idea.
Chapter Six

Photofunctions: The art of photographic documentation and social awareness in the nineteenth century

Photographic documentation before documentary photography

In order to more fully comprehend how photographic portrayals produce particular meanings about woman’s experience of destitution, this chapter re/traces the emergence and early development of social documentary photography. The use of photographs to record the actual, and to depict everyday life and social issues, although evident during the second half of the nineteenth century, was not identified as a distinctive ‘documentary’ genre until after 1926 when the term was used by John Grierson, a Scottish film-maker and critic. ‘Documentary’ photography and ‘social documentary’ photography are often associated with North American photographic practices, particularly the work of Jacob Riis and the Farm Security Administration (FSA) project. Both of these collections produced numerous images of impoverished and destitute women. The image produced by Dorothea Lange, Migrant Mother (figure 5) when working for the FSA, is arguably the most famous photograph of a destitute ‘Madonna’ in the Western social documentary tradition. Even so, association between the social and the photographic can be readily traced to mid-Victorian Britain. Therefore, much of this chapter is devoted to exploring aspects, effects and influences of British photographic practices in representing the poor and disenfranchised and in shaping responses to their need.

During the nineteenth century as industrialisation continued to flourish, the need for an accessible, concentrated and willing workforce increased, resulting in the over population of cities such as London in Britain, and Chicago and New York in North America. Neither designed nor built to accommodate such large numbers of people, housing and feeding the growing populace soon became unmanageable. Systems and methods for governing the city environment and its population needed to be established.
The transition to modern capitalism required a critical campaign against the old inadequate metropolis and its inhabitants and the establishment of a sound case for a new city well equipped for its work force. The photographic camera was put to governmental uses by a diverse collection of institutions and individuals for equally diverse purposes. Interest in photography included Christian philanthropy, Western imperialism, image making, art production, historical documentation, reportage, workforce regulation, academic criticism and strategic social and economic reform.

John Tagg (1988) argues that the formation of the modern welfare state began at this time, amid the reshuffling of relations between the state, the corporate economy and the populace. According to Tagg, integral to this new socioeconomic order was a populace prepared to be regulated by, and dependent on, the state and its institutions. He explains that the success of this rested on the establishment of a self-regulating disciplinary order contained within a social democratic framework. This ‘modern’ strategy of power involving the institution of an apparently disinterested, disparate and benevolent collection of governmental institutions required a new regime of representation, in which Tagg argues photography played a key role. One aspect of this exercise of power was the notional democratisation of portraiture whereby every citizen could acquire a permanent copy of her or his own likeness (Tagg, 1988, pp.9-10). Peter Hamilton claims that photography’s success during the Victorian era was based in its ability to produce a unique visual identity for the new middle-class emerging throughout Europe, Britain and North America, for it afforded –

A means of defining, visually, the distinctions between the new social classes of the nineteenth century, a method of fixing the characteristics of each of the trades and professions which were then emerging. In an era which promoted professionalism in particular, the status which went with the new position was increasingly affirmed by the photographic portrait. (Hamilton & Hargreaves, 2001, p.10)

It is apparent the various uses to which photographic images were put, whether in pursuit of scientific knowledge, or artistic ideals, were closely linked to class. The middle classes were able to purchase artistic portraits, and impressive visual records of their property, while representations of the marginalised were subjected to systems of
measurement and categorisation designed to ascertain difference and often deviance, such as the ‘mug-shot’. Public images of the wealthy celebrated and affirmed their status, while those of the poor sought to reinforce and establish their ‘abnormality’ (Hamilton & Hargreaves, 2001, p.60). As an evidence-producing machine, the camera’s notionally objective eye was employed to record squalid and inhospitable living conditions and the unaccommodated human detritus of a transitional socioeconomic environment.

Julia Hirsch adopts a more optimistic stance in relation to the documentation of, “the squalid and disenfranchised”, suggesting that this collection is one of nineteenth century photography’s principal social contributions. Through photography, literature and art, Hirsch argues the poor were provided with a visual genealogy of their own past (Hirsch, 1981, p.44). Certainly, this vast visual archive accompanied by literature and other forms of documentation, provides opportunity for not only attempting to understand and reconstruct the experiences of the poor through their representation, but for interrogating the governmental and social regimes which produced new class divisions and forms of poverty.

Motivated by a range of desires, including the protection of the wealthy from the contamination of the ‘dangerous’ classes, the Christian faith in particular lent support to the amelioration of poverty. Practitioners of the church sought to achieve redemption for the poor (and thus their own redemption) through the strengthening of patriarchal values, punishment of vice and crime against God and the State, and the creation of moral, productive, employable human bodies. The already well-established association between the Church (particularly the Catholic church) and ‘high art’ iconography provided a context to draw upon the compassion of the noble and pious. Documentary imagery employed in charitable enterprise simultaneously alluded to a romantic and visually rich past, Christian ethics and mores, and the potential for science and its new technologies to bring the new society into an enlightened and virtuous future. The slum and its dwellers; the transformed peasants, immigrants, factory workers, criminals, prostitutes and vagrants would be ferreted out, exposed, sanitised, modernised, made productive, or expelled. Vision, or being able to see, became inimitable to both knowing
and controlling the immediate environment of the individual self, and the social and physical worlds in which people saw themselves as located. The camera both expanded and contracted these domains. Evidentiary photography zoomed-in on the microscopic minutiae of the natural world; illuminated that which was obscured in shadow; drew into focus and defined the individual self; brought panoramic landscapes and exotic cultures and peoples to the doorsteps of people who never travelled more than a few miles from their birthplace; placed the horror of war into domestic space; and exposed the people and environs of back alleys and laneways.

As desire grew amongst the middle classes to see what was too distant, too hidden by lack of light or access, the camera was established as a means of recording the authentic. This was mainly due to its ability to represent and verify what had hitherto only been possible through the interpretation of artists, writers and craftspeople. Sue Wells explains:

One reason why the veracity of the camera was readily accepted in the nineteenth century was that photographs appeared to confirm ideas about the world that had been the subject of other artistic and cultural forms. The camera reinforced journalistic and literary accounts of aspects of social life which had rarely been seen or experienced by middle-class people. (Wells, 2000, pp.77-78)

Although photography did not simply fulfill the desire to increase the field of visual possibility, it changed the way people saw:

Freed from the necessity of having to make narrow choices (as painters did) about what images were worth contemplating, because of the rapidity with which cameras recorded anything, photographers made seeing into a new kind of project: as if seeing itself, pursued with sufficient avidity and single-mindedness, could indeed reconcile the claims of truth and the need to find the world beautiful. (Sontag, 1973, p.87)

As the imperative increased for people to appraise and transform themselves, each other, familiar environments and those of the other, the camera played the roles of both "handmaiden" and protagonist. Foucault argues that the gaze of the classical era reversed from the public spectacle, where the individual’s participation in public life
marked the momentary formation of a “single great body” that viewed the sovereign, to a concentration on the capacity of a few, or even an individual, to be able to achieve the sovereign’s, “instantaneous view of a great multitude” (Foucault, 1991a, p.216). Over a span of one hundred years, from the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth centuries, the spectacle became the individual constituents of the crowd (Foucault, 1991a, p.218). The, “authoritative gaze didn’t reside in a particular person; rather, it was recognised as part of the system, a way of looking that could operate as a general principle of surveillance throughout the social body” (Danaher et al, 2000, p.54). This gaze was not simply directed against the population by others, it also became a way of producing and scrutinizing the self.

The control and transformation of the population into a productive and manageable workforce required new technologies of government. Foucault argues that the ‘docile body’ was produced through the application of a microphysics of power producing a certain form of subjectivity (Devine, 1999, p.250). The emergent Enlightenment sciences produced knowledge about the human mind, body, and soul, and the physical and natural worlds. These knowledges became entwined with governmental institutions such as mass education, psychology, the police force, and the factory (Danaher et al, 2000; Devine, 1999) to produce compliant bodies. The camera, able to affordably focus on, and capture the likeness of each person, became a primary means of impelling all constituents, of whatever class, to seek their own image, and in so doing discover and shape their own identity.

As the psychological sciences grew in popularity during the nineteenth century, modes of government shifted from a disciplinary power aimed at the body of the population to a form of bio-power focused at the mind. With this transition punishment of the condemned shifted from being directed at the body to the mind. The prison system, in particular, adopted the concept of Jeremy Bentham’s model of the panopticon⁶⁰, whereby in-mates were separated from each other while at the same time being aware they were under the potentially constant scrutiny of an obscured observer (Foucault, 1991a). The Rev. Clay, chaplain at Pentonville Prison, England, on which Tasmania’s
Port Arthur was based, illustrates the awareness at the time of the effectiveness of panopticism:

A few months in the solitary cell renders a prisoner strangely impressible. The chaplain can then make the brawny navvy cry like a child; he can work his feelings in almost any way he pleases; he can, so to speak, photograph his thoughts, wishes and opinions on his patient’s mind and fill his mouth with his own phrases and language. [my italics]

(Clay, Hobart museum, 2001)

This observation describes the criminal not as a self determining deviant, but as a human being who is not only unwell, ‘a patient’, but who can be cleansed of all impurities through isolation from other, notionally infected bodies. In this process of isolation (and observation) the mind becomes an unexposed photographic plate, onto which another human being can transpose ‘his thoughts, wishes and opinions’. For Rev. Clay photography was not simply a method of recording, but an intimate corporeal activity involving the grafting of a morally, intellectually and physically superior mind onto one considered (and proven by law) to be ‘inferior’.

In Discipline and Punish (1991a) Foucault argues that Jeremy Bentham’s concept of the panopticon informed the development of disciplinary technologies that depended on maximising visibility through an economy of observation that creates the illusion of constantly being watched (Foucault, 1991a, p.225). This net-like exercise produced a self-reflexive doublet of subject and object, effect and articulation (Batchen, 2001, p.21). Central to the operation and success of this form of power was faith in the belief that sight could reveal the truth of things. Thus what could be seen, and therefore what was seeable required definition. Photography emerged from the scientific endeavours of the enlightened, progressive middle classes, keen to hold the objects and specimens of their scrutiny across time for lingering observation. It was as if being able to hold and see at will the image of some thing or some one intimated a form of ownership over the actual subject or object. Paul Virilio (1994) suggests that this revolution in vision, driven by an obsession with light, and therefore with being able to see, and the concomitant production of various machines for enhancing human sight, has gone largely unexamined, resulting in, “the fusion – confusion of eye and camera lens, the
passage from vision to visualization, settl[ing] easily into accepted norms” (Virilio, 1994, p.13).

In rejecting the unseeable, positivist science was able to streamline and uncomplicate knowledge. Although, at the same time, there was a will to be able to see the minutest detail, even the invisible, such as moral intention and mental capacity. From the Middle Ages a, “progressive disintegration of a faith in perception”, resulted in the need to distort the perceivable world in order for humans to understand it (Virilio, 1994, p.16). Truth and reality, limited to what could be subjected to sight and measurement by the application of anamorphic technologies such as mathematics, written language and photography, has effectively and progressively structured and reformed human memory (Virilio, 1994). Distortion however is only a starting point, much of what could potentially be known using sight also needed to be invented.

In the nineteenth century the rapidly developing capitalist economy depended on an expanded field of possibilities, more and more objects and concepts had to be found. Within the social domain the camera became a means of detection, navigation and creation. Don Slater argues that photography as a tool of positivism was lauded for its ability to, “captur[e] form, texture, light, etc. as if they were the sole properties of the world and utterly sound in their reality” (Slater, 1997, p.99). Rather than a technology for revealing the truth, photography’s value lay in not only fixing truth in the visible, but in defining what could be seen. The criminal, the mendicant, the street urchin, the insane, were classified according to type and individually identified with the aid of photographic technology. The poor and their environs were not just photographed. In partnership with the ‘human sciences’ their images were subjected to a set of signifiers, against which their otherness was measured and standardised.

Nineteenth and twentieth century social reform efforts share some approaches to, and applications of, photography as a method of documentation able to effect social reform. However Slater (1997) argues these historical periods were concerned with distinctly separate representational motivations. The nineteenth century, he suggests, was concerned with establishing the capitalist economy and the new domination of nature
and humanity. As a technology of the production process, photography functioned as servant of positivism to fix knowledge of the object (and nature) in the terrain of the visual. With the need to affirm and cement the new social and economic order photography was concerned with being; with space, solidity, permanence and factness, with memorialising bodies out of time (Slater, 1997, p.101). Photography at this time was about light and its uses in catalyzing and impressing form on the surface (Virilio, 1994, pp. 19-20).

The twentieth century, on the other hand, as the age of consumption and commercial capitalism, was concerned with the fast absorption of goods, in which objects were not only commodities, but, “ideological motivators of a mass consumption system” (Slater, 1999, p.91). In the frantic pace of consumption, photography became more concerned with time. Rather than knowing the object, the photographic image as one link in a chain of events, skimmed across surfaces, signposting infinite possible directions in meaning. The fixed, identifiable and classifiable specimen of the Victorian era was set adrift. Emancipated from the microscope’s slide, it bounced between categories of knowing and was thus denied any enduring certainty. The visual became much less a way of knowing, and instead a way of signalling the real, of establishing the surface of things and their representations, rather than the objects they represented.

It is of some significance that approximately twenty-five years into the new century social documentary was named as a distinct photographic pursuit, as an idea and genre in its own right. Socially concerned photographers endeavoured to show the tragedy, suffering and endurance of those who were constituted as the human sacrifices of mass industrialisation and technologisation. Across the interplay between photography as provider of evidence of the real and photography as the magician of representation, socially concerned photography was defined, redefined and more recently subject to the same level of micro-scrutiny that it has itself exercised in the lives and domains of those who are identified as other.
The documentary imagination

According to popular accounts the word ‘documentary’ was not associated with photographic practice until 1926 when John Grierson used it to describe an alternative cinema to that of the Hollywood ‘dream factory’ in his critique of Robert Flaherty’s film *Moana* for a New York paper (Wells, 2000, p.74). The phrase Grierson used was “documentary value” (Winston, 1995, p.8). In 1928 in France, Florent Fels introduced the first ‘Salon Indépendant de la Photographie’ by proclaiming, “[a] good photograph is, above all, a good document” (Fels, 1989, p.26). However, the genealogy of the documentary genre is much more extended and complicated. Boleslaw Matuszewski, a Polish-born cinematographer, published an article in Paris in 1898 in which he claimed the potential of, “film as an instructional medium, documenting history, daily life, artistic performances, even medical procedures” (Winston, 1995, p.8).

Lady Elizabeth Eastlake’s article of 1857, arguing that photography was in no way an art, but a science, clearly asserts the medium’s documentary qualities while not actually use the word, ‘documentary’:

Photography is the purveyor of such knowledge to the world. She is the sworn witness of everything presented to her view. What are her unerring records in the service of mechanics, engineering, geology, and natural history, but the facts of the most sterling and stubborn kind? ... Her business is to give evidence of facts, as minutely and as impartially as ... only an unreasoning machine can give. (Eastlake, 1980, pp. 64-66)

Eastlake’s description, in which every photograph has ‘historical interest’ and portraits are ‘facial maps’, ascribes to photography the business of giving, ‘evidence of facts’ (Eastlake, 1980, p.66). If the definition of documentary can be accepted as, “affording evidence ... factual or realistic ... based on real events, places or circumstances and usu[ally] intended to record or inform” (Shorter Oxford Dictionary), Eastlake’s description of photography is of a documentary practice. And yet, as Batchen (1997) has pointed out regarding the developments preceding the advent of the fixed photographic image (see chapter five), despite a pre-existence of documentation as a quality of the photograph *inseparable* from its scientific and artistic capabilities, there
was a specific time and place when documentary photography erupted as an idea in and of itself.

Photographs in the nineteenth century spanned a broad image making field, and were most commonly considered to be faithful, because they were mechanical, depictions of the real, even if this meant also, curious, unusual or even highly theatrical and allegorical. Across art and science images included medical, historical and police records; travelogues of people, places, street scenes; catalogues of flora and fauna; portraiture and anthropological data. Many contemporary writers consider almost all nineteenth century photography to belong to the category of documentary (Wells, 2000, p.75). While others claim that the twentieth century has also been dominated by documentary photography (Clarke, 1997, p.145). Beaumont Newhall does not confine the definition to either century; instead he includes all photography as potentially documentary, associating it with context and purpose. Basing his supposition on the definition of a document as an, “original and official paper relied upon as basis, or proof, or support of anything else”, Newhall suggests that “any photograph can be considered a document if it is found to contain useful information about the specific subject under study” (Newhall, 1964, p. 235). A similar approach to definition is offered by Liz Wells, who suggests the Victorians were unaware of the type of photography they were doing, arguing, “some nineteenth century photographers had regarded their work as ‘documents’. But many were innocent of the fact that they were ‘documentary photographers’” (Wells, 2000, p.75). For example, Dorothea Lange, who in 1933 took her first ‘documentary’ photograph of men queuing in a breadline from the window of her San Francisco studio, stated that at the moment when she turned her camera from wealthy sitters to the poor in the street below, she had no name for the type of photograph she had just taken, nor did she have much of an idea about what she would do with the image (Davidov, 1998, pp. 229-231). Lange was to later reflect, “they call it ‘documentary’ now, and though it isn’t a good name, it sticks to it. I don’t like it, but I haven’t been able to come up with a substitute” (cited in Davidov, 1998, p.231).

Documentary photography’s genealogical map is cross-hatched by a network of discontinuous and disjointed traces prior to its official naming, and discursive
legitimation. This does not mean the particular documentary practice that erupted in the second quarter of the twentieth century in North America, Britain and Europe, as an explicit and distinct sociocultural and political behaviour preceded itself. This notion of social documentary, while germinating in photography’s early years, erupted at a particular time in history, constituted an identifiable constellation of behaviours and intentions, and was made credible through the discourse of social progress.

Some writers consider representation of multiple moments or incidents, (perhaps more appropriately described as ‘views within time’) as fundamental to the documentary project. Coleman for instance, describes documentary photography as a collection, or series of images, stating, “I can think of no documentary project that consists of a single image; it is in fact, arguable whether any single photograph can be identified with any certainty as ‘documentary’ ” (Coleman, 2000, p.37). Coleman also refers to the capacity of documentary projects to endure over extended periods of time as longitudinal studies. This conceptualisation of documentary photography as a series, or sequence of shots elicits the idea of narrative and film. This is not so surprising given that it was in the naming of a type of film that the genre was brought to realisation. Clarke describes documentary photography as at once intimate and public, with subject matter that ranges across, “the contentious and problematic as well as the emotional and harrowing ... poverty, social and political injustice, war, crime, deprivation, disaster, and suffering” (Clarke, 1997, p.145).

There is a shared agreement between authors that intention of, and for the image(s), rather than content defines documentary photographic practice. This is framed by a commitment to providing, “reliable information about the social and political context in which we exist” (Coleman, 2000, p.35). In 1951 Arthur Siegel wrote, “in photography, documentary is the term used to describe a specific attitude which sees, in the creative production and use of photographs, a language for giving a fuller understanding of man [sic] as a social animal” (Siegel, 1966, p.88). Siegel divided photographic history into three periods: 1839-1885, when, “the photographer tried to record the world in an objective way”; 1885-1918, when photographers were concerned with imposing their personalities over subject matter; and 1918 until ‘the present’ (1951), when a conscious
documentary attitude developed, which sought solutions by exploring, "beneath the surface chaos [in order to] to discover the relationships and significance of outer appearances" (Siegal, 1966, pp. 88-89). As an example of this documentary attitude Siegel quotes Lewis Hine, "I wanted to show the things that had to be corrected. I wanted to show the things that had to be appreciated" (Hine cited in Siegal, 1966, p.90).

This new approach to photography, Siegel suggests, was largely a response to the turbulence of the early twentieth century. The rapid increase in world-wide transportation and communications created out of the burgeoning capitalist economy combined with the emergence of the, "new dynamic psychologies", (related in the main to the work of Freud), and "gave man [sic] the ability to explore more deeply than ever before his [sic] inner needs, wishes and fears" (Siegal, 1966, p.89). It was a time also when, in the wake of the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the atom bomb, awareness of the power for the human race to annihilate itself hung over a stunned world.

In 1971 Walker Evans, in spite of his reputation as a documentary photographer, rejected this description of his work:

Documentary? That's a very sophisticated and misleading word. And not really clear. You have to have a sophisticated ear to receive that word. The term should be 
documentary style. An example of a document would be a police photograph of a murder scene. You see a document has use, whereas a work of art is useless. Therefore art is never a document, though it certainly can adopt that style. [my italics]

(Evans in Katz, 1981, p.364)

While Evans referred to 'documentary style', Lange spoke of, "another thing, a quality that the artist responds to" based in conception of the photograph, and essential to its success as a documentary image, claiming:

A documentary photograph is not a factual photograph per se. It is a photograph which carries the full meaning and significance of the episode or the circumstance or the situation that can only be revealed — because you can’t really capture it — by this other quality ... a quality that the artist responds to. [my italics]

(Lange cited in Davidov, 1998, p.233)
Lange refers to an aesthetic sensibility, an aspect of documentary photography that has never been completely exercised from its claims to represent the ‘truth’ of the real. The images produced out of the camera are caught in the dialectic interplay between the ideals of truth and beauty, art and science, and it is this uncertainty and tension that produces them as images worth considering. The perceptive refinement, sense of aesthetic and artistic judgement of the photographer is essential to successful documentary photography. Pierre MacOrlan described documentary photography as, “no more than a document of contemporary life captured at the right moment ... which the photographer, as an artist, sometimes searches for over lengthy periods of time” (MacOrlan, 1989, p. 28). Documentary has not only been shaped by a heightened sense of the visual, in 1928 MacOrlan (1989) associated documentary with literature and Coleman (2000), writing in the late twentieth century, recognised the role of narrative in documentary.

Pursuing a purist aesthetic pathway, fin de siècle movements at the turn of the nineteenth and during the early twentieth century, such as the International Society of Pictorial Photographers, the Linked Ring Brotherhood and the Photo-secessionists sought to redirect photographic practice away from already established styles. The Photo-secessionists rejected stylistic effects achieved by manipulating chemical and technical processes, asserting instead ‘straight’ photography, which supposedly allowed the subject to emerge in its own right. The camera and the developing process, rather than being used to achieve artistic effect, were to act as passive media through which the luminosity of the subject and the aesthetic inspiration of the photographer as artist would find expression. Clarke elaborates:

The photographer does not record, he [sic] creates, and the material world is, effectively, no more than the outward manifestation of a spiritual other waiting to be discovered. The photographer is a seer, with all that implies in relation to a romantic tradition based on the artist as inspired philosopher who transforms a dull literal reality into something new and ideal. (Clarke, 1998, p.170)
These moments cannot be overlooked for the influences they had on the later documentary movement, even if this was to provide a political counterpoint. Documentary, rather than just a ‘type’ of photography, was instead defined as an attitude, or style, a deliberate application by not simply a knowing, or aware photographer, but by one who was insightful, critically perceptive and visionary. Photography’s ability to reveal the truth no longer resided in the technology itself, but in the technician, in the moral and ethical selfhood of the person operating the machine.

The art and science of socially concerned photography

I am trying here to say something
About the despised, the defeated,
The alienated.
About death and disaster.
About the wounded, the crippled,
The helpless, the rootless,
The dislocated.
About duress and trouble.
About finality.
About the last ditch.

Dorothea Lange
(cited in Davidov, 1998, pp. 220-221)

The first known connection of the words ‘social’ and ‘photography’ occurred in Glasgow in 1858, and referred not to images per se, but to textual description. The piece was written under a pseudonym and titled, *Midnight Scenes and Social Photographs* (Kemp, 1990, p.121). Similarly, in 1861 the preface to Henry Mayhew’s fourth volume of *London Labour and the London Poor: Those that will not work* described the text itself as, “a photograph of life as spent by the lower classes of the Metropolis” (Mayhew, 1967, preface). Due to limitations in the printing process Mayhew’s volume is not illustrated with photographs as such. Richard Beard (1801-1885) was commissioned to produce daguerreotypes of ‘street types’ which were then copied into woodcuts for mass publication (Gernsheim, 1986, p.67). The publishers of the second edition of Adolphe Smith and John Thompson’s *Street Life in London* (1969, first published 1877) suggest, “in John Thompson’s hands the camera first showed its potential as a vehicle for social comment”. Smith and Thompson collaborated to
produce the text, ostensibly a much smaller ‘sequel’ to Mayhew’s four volumes (Gernsheim, 1986, p.67). Thompson, photographed ‘street’ people, while Smith, a journalist, wrote many of the articles that accompanied each image.

Andrew Tolsin argues that Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor* represents the emergence of the ‘sociological gaze’ during the mid-nineteenth century, between 1835 and 1870 (Tolsin, 1990, p.15). Mayhew made his subjects ‘socially visible’ not through the use of photography, but rather through faithfully transcribed interviews (Tolsin, 1990, p.114). Mayhew’s form of sociological inquiry, which Tolsin describes as ‘cultural sociology’ simultaneously subjectifies and objectifies the characters by representing them as deviant and ‘other’ individuals, while at the same time collectivizing and typifying them within a class (Tolsin, 1990, p.122). He also recognises that Mayhew constructs various forms of ‘social individuality’ through different discourses of the social, thus producing a complex sociological text (Tolsin, 1990, p.125).

Social documentary photography, according to Wolfgang Kemp, belongs to painting’s ‘picturesque’ genre and should be defined by its concern with the cause of the industrial worker in their environment; their living and working conditions, and with the activity of labour itself. The ‘picturesque’ movement established in painting during the eighteenth century⁴, privileged objects and environment over human subjects (Kemp, 1990, p. 120). Although Kemp states, “social documentary photography developed in the torturous passages and ramshackle structures of the old center of the city, which served as the first living quarters for the masses of workers pouring in from the country” (Kemp, 1990, p.121), he insists that Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor* and Thompson and Smith’s *Street Life in London* pre-date the ensuing photographic movement described as social documentary. Kemp sees these works as belonging to a, “precapitalistic tradition of imagery” that provides, “genre pictures of London’s Lumpenproletariat; the poor, the outcasts, and the metropolis’s marginal trades” (Kemp, 1990, pp. 120-122). Kemp is perhaps overly vested in establishing commonalities between the aesthetics of the documentary and picturesque traditions, and how this
subsequently reveals an exclusive relationship between object and subject in the capitalist economy.

While the beauty and appeal of decay, and the weathering of time and neglect certainly act as anti-theses of the capitalist product and object, it is also worth taking into account the selfhood of the social documentary photographer. From its earliest manifestations, altruism and ethical and moral conviction were required. Rather than defining social documentary on the basis of the aesthetic divide between capitalist and pre-capitalist imagery and ideology, it is worth considering also the identification of social documentary by its practitioners’ concern to influence change for marginalised individuals and groups at a social level.

In tension with Kemp’s denial of the social documentary value of *Street Life in London*, the preface to the second edition claims that Thompson’s photographs, in contrast to Mayhew’s derivative sketches, depict environment as a key factor in the subjects’ lives, thus marking a shift towards the melding of individual identity with work and social location.

Thompson composed his pictures with equal attention to surroundings and to central characters. The person became an intricate part of his [sic] milieu; even of his [sic] profession … *the individual was seen as worker in a particular London occupation*, a member of a certain strata of an unexpectedly diverse social class. [my italics] (Thompson & Smith, 1969, preface)

Like many others seeking to produce social evidence within cultural context, Smith and Thompson were not concerned with the privileged classes, or well-remunerated worker, but with those who, despite their labours, remained in poverty.

In the introduction to *Social-Documentary Photography in the USA* (1976) R.J. Doherty defines social documentary photography as work that, “deals with the social aspects of the times represented”, by realist photographers, that is, photographers who depict, “the seamy side of life” (Doherty, 1976, p.9). The images included in Doherty’s text deal with poverty of the employed, the unemployed, migrants, children, women, and the
dust-bowl farmers, aspects of livelihoods that it is doubtful the intended audience would have experienced. The, “social aspects of the times”, amount to the struggle of the poor to survive, and throughout the twentieth century there was little deviation from this theme in social documentary subject matter.

Clearly, social documentary photographic practice is not only about accurate depictions of the lives of the poor, marginalised and oppressed; their domestic and public labours; their living environments; their struggle to survive; the injustices they confront and the violence and violations they experience. Underwritten by an ethic of non-acceptance, and desire for socioeconomic and political change, social documentary operates discursively through sanctioned cultural practice in the stylistic prescriptions of the particular historical period. The photographer cannot avoid playing the role of mediator between conflicts of sociocultural acceptance in their images, and moral commitment to the individuals and groups that locate at the social fringe. While the term ‘documentary’ has the potential to describe all photographic images, particularly as they become historical artifacts, I prefer ‘socially concerned’ documentary to describe the specific genre that seeks to represent the homeless and their homelessness.

**Giving evidence to the facts**

In its first decade as a popular practice, photography was exploratory rather than reformatory. Photographers seemed driven to discover as many uses as possible for the new technology. William Henry Fox Talbot’s *Pencil of Nature* (1969 – first published 1884) demonstrated the flexibility, diversity and potential of the camera’s imagery. Fox Talbot (1880-1877) did include photographs of the workers at his home, Lacock Abbey, but these were pictorialist rather than social commentary (Buckland, 1974). Similarly, Robert Adamson (1821-1848), a photographer, and David Octavius Hill (1802-1870), a painter, produced calotype depictions of fisherfolk in Newhaven, Scotland, between 1843 and 1847. Their collaborative works are commonly classified as picturesque documentary, defined more by the combination of a desire to produce painterly images, technical constraint and availability of willing subjects (Lucie-Smith, 1975, p.16) than social conscience. According to Josef Maria Eder, Hill is the father of artistic photography. Eder goes so far as to suggest that Hill’s, “conception of the composition,
illumination, and treatment of the subject, analogous to the instructions which painters give to their models, is also quite the same as the viewpoint of modern artist photographers” (Eder, 1978, p.348). Although Charles Nègre (1820-1880), also a painter, made photographs of chimney sweeps and other street figures in France during the early 1850s his sympathies also primarily lay with the aesthetics of genre painting (Gernsheim, 1986, p.63). It is unsurprising that many of the early photographers were also painters, or, as in the case of Fox Talbot, aspiring gentleman draughtsmen seeking more proportionately and perspectivelly accurate pictures.

As photography was emerging the art world was in a state of flux, caught in the confusion of transition from the art of Romanticism to that of Victoriana (Lucie-Smith, 1975, p.16). Writing on mid-Victorian photography, Elizabeth Lindquist-cock quotes Gernsheim, saying, “photographers were urged to strive for loftier themes which would instruct, purify and ennoble and to compose pictures worthy to be considered in the same class as paintings” (Gernsheim cited in Lindquist-cock, 1978, p.90). In this endeavour much of early photography imitates, “the tiresome Madonnas, Nymphs, Venuses and Vulcans of academic painting” (Lindquist-cock 1978, p.90). Artists and scientists alike deliberated over the status of photography while ardently exploring its possibilities. In the turbulence of a shifting economy that required ideological and social transformations that privileged some and disadvantaged others, the Victorians recognised the potential for photography to influence attitudes to social problems (Buckland, 1974; Lindquist-cock, 1978).

In the Australian colonies, considered by many as foremost a place of truth, documentary photography, dealt with the realistic, rather than the romantic approach to life, and recorded the struggle in the everyday lives of ordinary people at home and at work (Cato, 1979, p.48). This acted as a counterpoint for those who aspired to produce photography as an artform. And yet, as is clear through the works of a number of Victorian photographers, the attitude that truth could be achieved through beauty meant the performative and artistic were not excluded from photographic images intended to present the actual. Photography’s pathway through the Victorian period resulted in early expressions of social concern being heavily sentimental and theatrical, appealing to the
population’s responsiveness to individual plight rather than depicting harsh realism (Lindquist-cock, 1978). This ethos contributed to the popularity of images of the child waif or street urchin as chimney sweeps, boot shines, match girls, and ‘street arabs’ and further emphasizes the admixture of truth and beauty; science and art which prevailed at the time.

Imag(in)ing the social

Henry Mayhew’s four volume, *London Labour and the London Poor*, was published in seventy-nine parts from December 1850 until 1862. It has been recognised as the point of emergence of the sociological gaze (Tolsin, 1990) and is the earliest known example of a nascent social documentary, or socially concerned, photographic practice. Mayhew’s reportage, which he claimed to be a scientific inquiry, depended for authenticity on the first hand accounts of its subjects, which included street performers, vagrants, rag pickers, street photographers and sweeps. These accounts were combined with statistical data detailing the demographics of the poor, such as age, sex, marital status, ethnicity, where they lived, mobility patterns, the institutions that assisted them, and crime rates. The fourth volume, titled *Those that will not work* is concerned with four categories of criminal – prostitutes, thieves, swindlers and beggars. Two distinct features stand out in my first impressions of this volume: the first is the categorisation of prostitutes as amongst ‘those that will not work’; and the second is the description of the volume in its entirety as, “a photograph of life as actually spent by the lower classes of the Metropolis” [my italics], (Mayhew, 1967, preface).

At the time when this volume was published in 1861, photography as a public practice was only twenty-two years old. As mentioned, many of the illustrations, included in this and the previous three volumes were printed from woodcuts made after Daguerreotypes. Although described as depictions of the ‘extremes of crime and violence’ seven of the sixteen illustrations in the fourth volume are exotic pictures of bare breasted women, (supposedly prostitutes from other countries and historical periods), four are of orderly prison scenes and the remaining five show men and women at social gatherings, ostensibly involved in the early parlour rituals of illicit sexual activity. Just under half, 237 of the 504 pages, are devoted to describing the crime of
prostitution and its practitioners. Mayhew and co-author Bracebridge Hemyng provide what they claim to be a ‘world history’ of prostitution before focusing on its incidence in London. As a contemporary reader, I find it difficult to annex the voices of feminism (couched as they are within the liberal democratic discourses of the western welfare state). It is also difficult to read this text aside from critiques that expose the expression and indulgence of Victorian male sexual fantasy in representations of the exotic naked and therefore sexually promiscuous female⁹⁷. As a ‘photograph’ able to throw light on the ‘mysterious and uncertain’ more has been captured in this study than Mayhew originally intended. This barely-hatched example of socially concerned documentary, as a piece of evidence, exposes the sexual fascinations and fantasies of the Victorian middle-class (male) alongside the degradations of women, children and men who were, for reasons of health, fortune and tradable skills denied access to bare necessities, let alone the comforts of economic security, in the industrializing metropolis. Mayhew’s documentation of the lives of the poor, homeless and destitute in the newly forming urban environment of the industrial revolution focused on the individual human subject within a social, and as Tolsin (1990) has argued, cultural context, conveying experiences of poverty through subjective and vernacular description.

Pornography, prostitution and sexualized images of children accompanied photography almost from its inception (Lucie-Smith, 1975, p.51). While the long tradition of painting and sculpture had established images of nude women, men and children as acceptable artistic practice, these depended on adherence to certain morally driven conventions. Scenes depicting actual nudity, sexual acts and vulnerable children, added a new scopophilic facet to imagery’s domain amid the prudery of the nineteenth century. While Lucie-Smith identifies photographs that portrayed, “wretched child prostitutes who swarmed in London and other great European cities” (1975, p. 51), he also draws attention to the emergence of a new form of voyeurism:

In addition to the voyeurism (the photographer’s and that of his client) which is the mainspring of erotic photography, we find ourselves confronted by a different type of voyeurism. The photographer … obsessed with the thought of recording people as they actually are, unposed and off-guard. (Lucie-Smith, 1975, p.52)
The combination of beliefs that ‘unposed and off-guard’ people reveal their true natures, that photographs provide evidence of the truth, and that truth is revealed through objective distance, encouraged a photographic practice dependent on a form of quasi-complicit; resistant, yet also compliant subject, which was to endure well into the twentieth century. The poor needed to be caught in the act of being poor. The homeless had to be exposed at least twice.

The written text in *Street Life in London*, produced sixteen years after Mayhew’s tome is subservient to the photographs. Each of the thirty-six images taken by Thompson, richly reproduced using the impressive Woodburytype® process, are accompanied by an essay written by either himself or Adolphe Smith, and sympathetically tell the subjects’ own stories. The ‘characters’ of Thompson’s images are firmly imbedded in their usual street locations, belying no doubt the length of time required in posing for the camera. The photographic images, unlike Mayhew’s woodcuts ground the person in their environment, using the realism of the photographic image to demonstrate the capacity of the camera as a tool of social activism. *Street Life in London* is thus distinguished from Mayhew’s ‘socio-scientific’ approach, and other works of the early to mid 1800s, such as Charles Dickens’ more romantic literary style (Thompson & Smith, 1969, publisher’s note). Despite these differences both can be described as seminal works due to their contribution to shifting middle-class attitudes towards the poor by illustrating poverty, albeit crudely, as a problem which reached beyond individual deviance and laziness. The contribution of this philanthropic project to the formation of the modern welfare state should not be overlooked. In both Mayhew, and Smith and Thompson’s texts we not only read of, we are entreated to see the disenfranchised who are ultimately dependent not just on the benevolence of those who are more privileged, but also on the charity of a paternalistic state.

John Thompson’s photograph *The “Crawlers”* published in 1877 is one of the first known photographic examples of a homeless woman produced for the purpose of social cause (figure 11). The image however does not depict a mother but a nursemaid. The text tells us that a younger ‘fellow crawler’ has left her child with an older acquaintance while going to work in a coffee shop. The commentary states that the old woman is
often cheated of her insufficient remuneration of a cup of tea and piece of bread for her eight hours of child-care.

The “Crawlers of St. Giles” are old women reduced to vice and poverty to that degree of wretchedness which destroys even the energy to beg. They have not the strength to struggle for bread, and prefer starvation to the activity which an ordinary mendicant must display … They beg from beggars … Stale bread, half-used tea-leaves, and on gala days the fly-blown bone of a joint, are their principle forms of diet.

(Thompson & Smith, 1969, p.116)

The term ‘crawler’ derives from the women’s slow mode of movement; crawling, caused by age, insufficient rest, poor diet, exposure to cold and the physical discomfort of sitting on the workhouse steps. Thompson and Smith’s description establishes sympathy for the subjects of the photograph; the infant and the old woman, and also other women in similar circumstances, by stressing their arrival at such desperate circumstances through little fault of their own (Thompson & Smith, 1969, p.118).

Throughout Street Life in London the point is made that first appearances do not tell the true story of their subjects, that for the majority the reasons behind ragged and often lethargic presentation is not due to bad faith and laziness. Smith describes ‘strict moralists’ as those who make judgments based on behaviour alone, “instead of taking into account … disposition and … surroundings” (Thompson & Smith, 1969, p.141). In some cases the argument is put that the characters’ circumstances result from a strong determination to remain independent of the constraints of state institutions, which are often presented as harsh and punitive. Establishing honesty and sobriety, Smith says of ‘Scotty’, “[she] is no criminal, nor is she even a drunkard. No amount of pressure on my behalf could persuade her to drink a single draught of beer with the dinner” (Thompson & Smith, 1969, p.119). In the description of the three women described as ‘Crawlers’, Smith insists in each case that the women are not only willing to work, but have clear plans for how they will responsibly spend their money to acquire employment.
She would ... rent a little room so as to have an address ... If she could only obtain a
decent set of clothes, she would seek employment at the army stores in Pimlico, where
she had worked in her more prosperous days. Here she could earn seven shillings a week.
An old woman whom she had met in a mission hall had offered to share her room, a back
kitchen, with her for eighteen pence a week. (Thompson & Smith, 1969, pp.118-120)

Rather than fixed in pre-capitalism, as Kemp suggests, Thompson and Smith’s text tells
the stories of those who are caught between the old and the new economy. *Street Life in
London* exposes the costs to individuals, who for reasons ranging from personal values
to the misfortune of circumstances beyond their control, are struggling to survive the
social and economic transition in an inhospitable urban environment. In *The
“Crawlers”* we see the teacup and spout-less teapot to which the text refers, the ‘hard
stone step’ and the door where the old woman reclines her head in the absence of a
place to lay down and sleep. Thompson’s ‘Crawler’ is a Madonna of the street, her head
is bowed, her eyes averted; she wraps the child in her own shawl, as he has no blankets
of his own. For barely any return, the old woman comforts the baby. By herself the
destitute woman may have elicited little sympathy, caring for a more helpless baby
increases her appeal, and establishes her as a figure deserving of sympathy*60*.

The work of Thomas Annan (1829-1887) is also often included as an example of early
social documentary photography. Between 1868 and 1877 Thomas Annan, a middle-
class proprietor of an established photographic studio, photographed the Glasgow slums
for the Glasgow City Improvement Trust (Kemp, 1990, p.124). Annan’s photographs,
taken in the picturesque tradition focused on the living environment and are often
devoid of human subjects. Where people are present, they are as if witnesses to, even
intruders of, the photographing of the scene. Rather than a feature of the image itself,
the figures often seem to act as scale measures to the oppressiveness of the buildings
and alleyways. Annan used dramatic effect to gain the attention of the public
(Lindquist-cock, 1978, p.95), and to, “convey a kind of sadness – the sadness that
people had to live in such appalling conditions” (Buckland, 1974, p.79).
By the time Annan achieved his commission, numerous studies and reports had already condemned the Glasgow slum. The buildings Annan photographed were already marked for demolition (Kemp, 1990, p.124), throwing into question any intention of using the images to influence public perception of the problems experienced by the people who lived there. No further justification was needed for tearing the buildings down and replacing them with more habitable housing. Annan’s documentary images supported the city renewal program, but they did not necessarily directly support the people who it displaced. The majority of slum tenants were unable to enjoy the improvements, due to the decreased occupation rates and higher rents resulting from the rebuilding (Kemp, 1990, pp.122-123).

Thompson’s photographs reveal the border zone of an epistemological shift towards the symbiosis of individual and environment, while Annan’s images make the leap to privileging the built environment over the person. Like Thompson’s, Annan’s work reveals a crossing over between artistic picture and photographic document, however, his environments exceed the human figures, with the effect that they often appear overwhelmed and threatened (figure 23)70. At the social and institutional level, Annan’s, “strikingly memorable views of alleyways, dramatically shadowed, and tenement cliffs fluttering with washing hung to dry” (Thomas, 1978, p.136) appear driven by a need to retain an historical record (Kemp, 1990), while at a more personal level they expose the creative efforts of an artist using a new medium. Annan’s images are at once historical records, artworks and important social documents.

While Thomas Annan brought an artistic aesthetic to his commission in Glasgow, in London Oscar Gustave Rejlander (1813-1875), a portrait painter, produced overtly sentimental genre photographs of street children, ostensibly for his own purposes, but also as studies for artists (Gernsheim, 1986, p.63). According to Lindquist-cock, Rejlander was torn between replicating old masters and his social conscience, although his conviction to prove he could produce a Sistine Madonna photographically exposes his artistic priorities.
Figure 23

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Rejlander, who died in poverty (Mathews, 1973, p.35), preferred overall to use the character of Dickens’ ragged street urchin, whom he portrayed in works titled *Homeless, Poor Jo, The Matchseller* and *The Crossing Sweeper* (Lindquist-cock, 1978, p.93). Interestingly most of his models were authentically homeless, as he acquired them from the local Boys’ Home near his London studio (Lucie-Smith, 1975, p.22). According to Lucie-Smith, Rejlander’s romantic compositions reveal, “Victorian evasiveness about childhood and poverty” (Lucie-Smith, 1975, p.22), which turned the human condition of suffering into theatrical performance. Rejlander’s *Poor Jo*, nevertheless is an icon of child homelessness, inspiring the compositions of many Victorian painters, even those as far away as Australia. This Victorian tendency toward performance can be seen also in Thomas Barnardo’s ‘before’ and ‘after’ photographs of the street children he took into his care.

From about 1870, Barnardo produced photographs of the residents of the East End Juvenile Mission, known as Dr Barnardo’s. Although a local photographer was commissioned to take the photographs, Barnardo and his wife often arranged these compositions. Many of the images were intended as visual records in order to trace the children on leaving the Mission, and to identify those who absconded, committed crimes, or falsely attempted to enter the home. But it was Barnardo’s use of photographs as propaganda that resulted in him being charged with producing and circulating ‘artistic fictions’. Exploiting Victorian sentimentality, Barnardo’s before and after photographs were designed to demonstrate his success with waifs, some of whom he apparently snatched from poverty-stricken parents, and out of back alleyways at night (Koven, 1997, p.7). These publicity photographs were sold in sets of one dozen for album collections, included in annual reports and posted throughout the streets (Thomas, 1978, p.144). The resulting success in acquiring funds for his charity attracted the ire of Barnardo’s contemporaries. A, “charismatic Anglo-Irish outsider”, Barnardo was gifted in attracting slum children and raising large sums of money (Koven, 1997, p.8). In 1877 Barnardo was accused of a, “potent and sensational mix of charges” (Koven, 1997, p.9). These included sexual misconduct with a prostitute, physical abuse and neglect of the children in his care, misappropriation of funds and false use of the title of Doctor. Interestingly, for an age so enamored with the allegorical and theatrical,
the only charge that stood was his use of fiction to depict and claim truth (Koven, 1997; Thomas, 1978).

The desire to draw clear distinctions between art and science, and thus between fiction and reality was clearly becoming more intense. Barnardo’s portraits of children, while conceding to the Victorian aesthetic, were not intended as artworks. Instead they oscillated between the conventions of art imagery at the time, and the potency of photography’s evidentiary qualities. As well as providing an immense visual archive of the street children of London’s East End during the 1870s, Barnardo’s documentary and publicity enterprise gave rise to the questioning of fair, just and decent representation of the poor and the level of truth required in advertising (Koven, 1997). According to Alan Thomas, “[w]hat the pictorialist tradition needed was not a reinforcement of its preoccupation with feeling but rather the corrective balance of truth attained through some form of realism” (Thomas, 1978, p.146). Perhaps it is this ‘corrective balance’ that is most evident in John Thompson’s photographs, produced as Barnardo’s publicity enterprise began its decline.

Located in the transition between the overtly exaggerated sentimentality of the romantic and the theatricalism of Victorian aestheticism, Thompson’s photographs might be interpreted as “dwelling on quaintness” (Goldberg, 1991, p.165). However, together with the passions of the pre-twentieth century era, technical constraints must be taken into consideration when critiquing Victorian ‘street’ photography. Exposure times were much lengthier, all compositions, including street scenes had to be staged and posed. Both Thompson and Annan had to deal with cumbersome photographic equipment. With the unavoidable imposition of the black-veiled heavy wooden camera on a tripod, the photographer needed a high level of skill in encouraging subjects to pose with any sense of naturalness in street scenes (Thomas, 1978, p.147). It is no wonder ‘reality’ came across as performance. The truth the camera told in these images, before the benefit of higher speed film and more portable camera equipment, could only ever be a carefully orchestrated interpretation. According to Westerbeck and Meyerowitz (1994) this suited the Victorian ethos, which did not highly prize spontaneity, instead preferring the observance of propriety rather than life itself. Although, as the response
to Barnardo’s endeavours revealed, tolerance for artistic interpretation was running thin. The photograph was not the only target of an ideology hungry for solid truths and steadfast reality; at this time the perceptions of the sensate individual were also under question (Crary, 1994). Truth was becoming ever more distanced from the human body and its senses to be imbedded in technical objectivity.

In the final years of the nineteenth century photography’s technical processes gained pace and the camera lens continued to exceed the capabilities of the human eye. Faith in both objectivity and technology contributed to the belief that the captured split second could not deceive. It was as if the temporal spaces of (human) reflection provided opportunity for deception. The camera in situ could more readily capture the human figure, and the poor were more easily located and positioned in the environments to which they were allocated. Dark and inhospitable areas of the city, often barely one hundred yards away from the domains of the middle-classes, were treated with as much fascination, curiosity and wariness as the jungles and deserts of far off countries (Thomas, 1978; Wells, 2000).

The continuing debate over the delineation between photography as science or art also contributed to a widening divide. By the early twentieth century, with the invention of faster film, photographers had less need to ‘pose’ their subjects, turning instead to the artistry of capturing the moment. This culminated in the documentary photography movement being identified as a ‘style’ that rejected artistic intervention in the photographic process. However, aestheticism had not shifted from the image, it had merely been removed from the camera and darkroom. Documentary photographers pursued a commitment, instead, to allowing the ‘natural’ aura of the subject and their own artistic and perceptive skills to come together into a single ideal moment of truth, through which beauty would be revealed.

**The darkness of light**

Just before the end of the nineteenth century another photographic innovation, the magnesium flash, extended the ability of the photographer to make visible the invisible. This event fulfilled Fox Talbot’s vision for, “the eye of the camera [to see] plainly
where the human eye would find nothing but darkness [so that] the secrets of the
darkened chamber [are] revealed by the testimony of the imprinted paper’’ (Fox Talbot,
1969, n.p.).33

Defying both time and light, or perhaps more precisely, darkness, flash photography
made it possible for Jacob Riis (1849-1914), an American immigrant, to invade the
poorly lit interiors, and sleeping haunts of New York’s Lower East Side inhabitants.
Riis’ photographs of street urchins, or ‘street arabs’ and the ‘Italian Rag-picker’
Madonna (figure 13) reveal connections with Romanticism and the influences of
Rejlander’s compositions (Thomas, 1978, p.150). Riis, a police-court reporter on the
New York Tribune and self-professed social reformer, took advantage of his access to
the slum environment. He used photographs to support his argument that to prevent
crime the city needed to ensure comfortable, safe and sanitary living conditions for all
of the populace. It is perhaps for this reason Graham Clarke suggests that the genre of
social documentary photography began with Riis’ work, stating, “it is the work of Jacob
Riis that is invariably taken to mark the beginning of the documentary tradition proper”
(Clarke, 1997, p.147). Although I reject Clarke’s claim, without doubt Riis’ pho-
documentary style and social reform zeal denotes yet another axis of photographic
social documentary practice. In Riis’ images the respect and concern for disadvantaged
subjects which existed in the folds of Victorian photographers’ sentimentality and
performance, and which shines through most strongly in the work of John Thompson, is
sacrificed by an invasive and aggressive self righteousness, which was perhaps first
evident in Barnardo’s ‘before’ and ‘after’ images. One reason for this might be Riis’
different treatment of truth. For Riis it was proof of the absence of beauty and grace,
which ensured facticity, rather than believing that truth resided in these qualities. Armed
with the magnesium flash, and often under the protection of the police, Riis treated his
subjects without show of empathy, often as if they were depraved, desperate and even
dangerous. He, “captured his photographs as if he were shooting game; [and] inscribed
objectivity into his images by refusing to allow his subjects to negotiate in any way the
manner in which they might be recorded” (Wells, 2000, p.146).
Despite varying levels of respect, sympathy and even empathy, a consistent feature of social documentary photography has been the treatment of the poor and the destitute as other (Wells, 2000, p.83). With earnest intent to provide the truth about a life of poverty to those who had no experience of it, photographers as social commentators and reformers approached ‘fact finding’ excursions as expeditions into new and strange territory. The images they produced often mimicked the compositions of anthropological photography showing bemused ‘natives’ in their environment (Thomas, 1978, p.136). Undoubtedly, voyeuristic thrill in the promise of seeing the hidden horrible was also in operation. Thomas’ explanation as to why Riis’ tenement images were so popular is itself revealing, he claims the photographs use, “the dramatic excitement of penetration ... the camera plunges the eye down tenement alley-ways, past lurking figures, and through the doorways of low drinking dives” (Thomas, 1978, p.150).

It needs to also be remembered that social documentary photographs were overwhelmingly taken by the middle and upper classes of the lower classes. The people of the real world that the socially concerned were so committed to viewing objectively and exactingly did not share in their privilege or status. The real world under the scrutiny of the gaze was that of the other. This begs the question of where truth and reality were assumed to locate. Was it at the ground level, amongst the poor, needy and destitute, and not in privilege and education? Is there some inverse justification here for relieving guilt by positing the world of the advantaged classes, as not real, as not truth; was this their disadvantage? Are the poor being offered assurances by wealthier counterparts that their lives are genuine and real, the site of truth, whereas relative comfort and economic security is merely chimera? Liz Wells comments:

We may argue that Victorian actuality photographs were regarded as ‘authentic’ precisely because they were images of the poor and the dispossessed; people whose lives had about them (to the middle-class spectator) an air of being simple, real and untrammeled by the overt complexity of middle-class existence. ‘Real’ here takes on a class inflection which it was not to lose in documentary work for many years. (Wells, 2000, p.78)
Elizabeth McCausland, writing in 1939 and referring to the work of the Farm Security Administration describes the representation of poverty and the poor as ‘nourishment’ for those more privileged:

Today we do not want emotion from art; we want a solid and substantial food on which to bite, something strong and hearty to get our teeth into, sustenance for the arduous struggle that existence is in eras of crisis. We want the truth … that truth we receive, visually from photographs recording the undeniable facts of life today, old wooden slums canting on their foundations, an isolated farmer’s shack, poor cotton fields, dirty city streets, the chronicles written on the faces of men and women and children.

(McCausland, 1996, p. 172)

Riis’ documentary compositions menace rather than nourish the guilty soul. Marking the transition from nineteenth to twentieth century social documentary practice, Riis’ work is a Gothic mix of the Victorian and the Romantic, evangelical self-righteousness and invasive, aggressive journalism which sought to establish that beauty could not easily survive in the New York tenements. And yet, despite its shortcomings, Riis’ documentary project was the first attempt in North America to use photography to address the social problems associated with impoverished living environments. He aspired to bring about reform as both a social documentarist (although not yet named as such) and journalist. Exuding a lack of sympathy and respect for the subjects of his representations, his work reveals a particular interpretation of what reality looked like. Unlike Mayhew, and Thompson and Smith, Riis deliberately minimised any opportunity for subjects to negotiate their own truth. For Riis the persuasiveness of the reality of his images depended on the denial of such agency. However, exposed also is the potential power and therefore danger that Riis saw in their dirty, gruff and often intoxicated bodies and faces (Stein, 1983; Wells, 2000). The turn of the nineteenth century in North American socially concerned photography saw this crude, stark and often aggressive subject replaced with hopeful but defeated figures, worn down by a hostile social and economic environment. Rather than victimisers, the disenfranchised became instead victims.
Before proceeding to discuss social documentary in the twentieth century, nineteenth century efforts to typify and classify the homeless, the poor, the mentally ill, the disabled and the criminal require brief consideration. These ‘initiatives’ were sustained in various ways and forms throughout the twentieth century in both visual and textual representations of marginalised people.

“Permanent clouds, passing storms and sunshine of the soul”

In 1855 Edward Bradley writing under the pseudonym of Cuthbert Bede, far from supporting the popular fascination with photographs of the criminal and deviant, complained about the pleasure people derived from viewing reproductions of police mug shots. He was referring to the *Illustrated Hue and Cry* published by the British Police Force and used to circulate images of known criminals. Bede speculated (because he had not seen a copy) that the contents of this paper could be likened to Madame Tussaud’s ‘Chamber of Horrors’: “I can imagine its illustrations to depict the same scowling features, the same hang-dog look, the same ruffianly brutality of countenance, the same sensual, hardened, callousness of demeanour, the same illiterate, animal, demoralized, rapscallion set of rascals” (Bede, 1981, p.82). Clearly Bede had a low regard for the ‘lawless’ and poor that were unfortunate enough to be captured by the camera and the law, describing them as England’s Blackguards. He believed their portraits should never be hung anywhere near the ‘worthy’ and instead should, “take a place by themselves, and that, the lowest” (Bede, 1981, p.82).

The trend for the police force to gather photographs of known criminals, according to Bede, began in Geneva late in 1852. Due to the inadequacies of verbal description the Department of Justice and Police were authorized to take photographic portraits, “of those persons who broke the laws by mendicancy in those cantons where they had no settlement” (Bede, 1981, p.81). Both France and England were quick to engage photography as a skilful detective. The photographic recording of criminals, in the form of the daguerreotype, can be dated from at least 1841. In 1843 the Brussels police took portraits of the people they arrested, and by 1848 the Birmingham police were doing likewise. However it was the ability to print on to paper using the negative-positive
process that resulted in the more widespread use of mug shots from the mid-1850s (Hamilton & Hargreaves, 2001, p.101).

That the police could no longer rely on their personal familiarity with criminals for identification suggests the nineteenth century industrial city contributed to the formation of anonymity as a feature of urban life (Pulz, 1995, p.27). Further, in just three years, between 1852 and 1855, police record keeping from Europe to Great Britain had not only been revolutionized, it had also become a source of public entertainment. On the other hand, despite the popularity of criminal photography, it took until the beginning of the twentieth century for the composition of these images to be standardised and described as mug shots clearly distinguishable from the portraiture made of other types and classes (Hamilton & Hargreaves, 2001, p.104).

Also in Britain during the year 1853, Dr. Hugh Welch Diamond (1809-c.1886), founding member of the Royal Photographic Society and resident superintendent of the female department of Surrey County Lunatic Asylum, began photographing his patients. Guided by the theories of physiognomy, which hypothesized that features on the surface of the body, particularly the face and head, could reveal inner character, Diamond believed that the camera’s objectivity allowed the photographer to capture, “in a moment the permanent cloud, or the passing storm or sunshine of the soul, [thus enabling] the Metaphysician to witness and trace out the connexion [sic] between the visible and the invisible” (cited in Marable, 1985, p.141). Diamond used photography as a therapeutic device, showing patients their portraits which, he claimed often resulted in them carefully examining their own likeness and finding pleasure in the exercise. He also used portraits taken at various intervals throughout treatment to show progress in recovery from severe attacks of mental illness (Buckland, 1974, p.75).

At the time Diamond was experimenting with his therapeutic photographic technique it is distinctly possibly that patients would not have even known what they looked like in a photographic image. A transcript from Mayhew (1967a) of an interview with a street photographer’s assistant describes the deception of customers into believing
photographs of completely different people were their own, suggesting this may have been the case”. Describing one of his ‘dodges’ a street photographer explained:

The fact is, people don’t know their own faces. Half of ’em have never looked in a glass half a dozen times in their life, and directly they see a pair of eyes and a nose, they fancy they are their own. (Mayhew, 1967a, pp. 208-209)

The fascination of mentally ill patients with their photographic portrait may have related more to the novelty of being shown a face and identifying it as their own. Diamond’s photographic practice may be documentary in the sense that it attempted to provide visible proof of inner mental and emotional states (Diamond also used the images to identify patients if they returned to the asylum). However his work, which preceded Freud, is more closely associated with the psychological, rather than the sociological sciences. These early, exploratory efforts had far reaching implications. The practice of using photographic images in psychological analysis was still being written about in the 1970s when Robert Akeret described, “how to interpret the hidden psychological meaning of personal photos” in his text, Photo-analysis (1973).

Photography’s representation of the real, which technologically depended on light refracting from the surface of the persons or objects depicted, complimented the Victorian fascination with the science not only of physiognomy, but also of phrenology; the study of contours of the skull in order to determine mental function (Wells, 2000, p.221). The popularity of these sciences was directly linked to the period’s almost obsessive desire for classification according to ‘type’ (Wells, 2000). This collective mindset of classification and categorisation can be associated with what Jonathan Crary describes as an epistemological shift which saw, firstly the study of subjective experience transferred to an empirical, quantitative plane, and secondly, the division and fragmentation of the physical subject into increasingly specific organic and mechanical systems (Crary, 1994, p.81). The development of these ideological and epistemological frameworks served not only a scientific desire for transparency, but also the requirements of the emerging economy, which depended on knowable, predictable and productive bodies (Crary, 1994; Lalvani, 1996; McQuire, 1998; Tagg, 1988).
The social and the psychological, like art and science were more often than not intertwined during this period. For example Cesare Lombroso, developed his ‘science of the criminal’ out of a, “concern to study humanity and its natural varieties” (Garland, 1994, p. 38). At the time of Lombroso’s discovery of the ‘criminal type’ during the 1870s, the identification of human character through typology and classification was driven by, “social policy interests rather than evolutionary processes” (Garland, 1994, p. 38). Phrenology and physiognomy’s segregation of the populace along a typographical continuum polarised by ‘ideal’ and ‘deviant’ man, was assisted and propelled by photography’s evidentiary properties, perpetuating a moralised hierarchical social ordering (Lalvani, 1996, p.449). The belief that photography provided an unmediated, mechanical pathway to capturing the ‘true essence’ of a subject’s character also played a key role in the work of Francis Eugene Galton, who in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century, invented Eugenics; the study of improving the human race through genetic control.

The ‘Blackguards Gallery’ comprised of criminal portraits published in the British Police Force’s Illustrated Hue and Cry, might be seen as the raw materials of Francis Galton’s efforts to formulate a criminal type almost thirty years later. In the late 1870s Galton, a British scientist and anthropologist, exposed eight separate images of ‘criminals’ onto the one photographic plate, with the intention of achieving an image of the criminal ‘type’. The assembly of the portraits, however was not left to random chance: “Galton made it clear that the process depended not only on the use of standardised portraits of the same scale and aspect, but also on intensive preliminary selection of physiognomical characteristics” (Poignant, 1992, p.60). Further, Galton grouped portraits according to criminal act, for example, violence, larceny without violence, vagrancy etc. (Pulz, 1995, p.29).

Galton’s composite portraits inspired Lombroso’s work in Italy researching the anatomical differences between criminals and the insane (Hamilton & Hargreaves, 2001, p. 101). Lombroso believed that phrenology and physiognomy could prove that the criminal was, “an atavistic being who reproduces in his person the ferocious instincts of primitive humanity and the inferior animals” (cited in Hamilton &
Hargreaves, 2001, p. 100). Using composite photographs of the skulls of criminals to demonstrate the anachronistic features of the criminal type, he proposed that he could prove guilt or innocence through reference to his criminal typology (Hamilton & Hargreaves, 2001, p. 101).

By classifying deviant types, and subsequently a whole class, the bourgeoisie were able to produce themselves as ‘respectable citizens’ (Sekula, 1992). Using the ‘ideal’ model of the ‘average man’ the middle classes could establish their difference from those who they deemed as deviant, dangerous and ultimately damned (Wells, 2000, p. 221). Photography provided the required proof for fixing these assumptions as truth; it, “came to establish and delimit the terrain of the other, to define both the generalized look – the typology – and the contingent instance of deviance and social pathology” (Sekula, 1993, p. 345).

Throughout the nineteenth century, as photography was becoming established it faced a broad ranging task list that spanned the ideals of beauty and truth: the artistic and the scientific. Despite the conflicts between these simultaneously polarized and interconnected fields of knowledge production, photography in each guise was assumed to capture the ‘true essence’ of human character. The realism of artistic photography lent itself to portraiture of the middle classes, while the realism of empiricist photography defined the criminal body (Lalvani, 1993, p. 452). As the nascent practice of social documentary photography entered the twentieth century, where it was to be identified and defined, the majority of its practitioners worked towards making truth beautiful by converting oppression, exclusion and disadvantage into a visual aesthetic, and at the same time producing those who were to be literally ‘seen’ as other. Rather than diminishing axes of disadvantage, the twentieth century produced an endlessly fracturing field of those subject to categorisation as marginalised. And just as the mid-Victorian middle classes thrilled and entertained themselves with portraits of the disenfranchised ‘deviant and dangerous’, so too in the late twentieth century the terrains of ‘otherness’ became sites of fantasy for the privileged.
The next chapter pursues the formation and meaning of the genre of socially concerned photography and its role in producing ‘otherness’ and ‘non-belonging’ in the decades that spanned the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The discussion is also concerned with how the photographer as a subject became a site of moral and ethical scrutiny. Further to these aims, I continue to explore some of the possible sociocultural effects and political intentions of the gendering of photographic representations of homelessness and poverty.
Endnotes

58 As described in chapter four, Charles Baudelaire (1965) and Lady Elizabeth Eastlake (1980) describe photography as art’s handmaiden.

59 In the late eighteenth century Jeremy Bentham designed an architectural model involving a centrally placed tower encircled by an outer building composed of individual rooms facing inwards. Each person, isolated in their room may be observed by just one person located in the tower. Each ‘inmate’ could neither see another, nor their observer. Although designed as a reformatory prison, Bentham saw its application for institutions of all kinds that accommodated and required the surveillance of large numbers of people, such as of factories, schools, hospitals, military barracks, etc. (Danaher et al, 2000, p.53; Fillingham, 1993, p.126).

60 The history of photography itself is no exception, this is revealed by the sifting of events, practices and ideas in its pre-history for evidence of the desire to photograph, if not specifically photographic practice, see Batchen (1997) Burning with Desire and Marien (1991) Towards a new pre-history of photography.

62 The Linked Ring Brotherhood was formed in 1892 in London. The Photo-Secession was founded in New York in 1902 by artist and portraitist Alfred Steiglitz. The International Society of Pictorial Photographers was founded in 1904 by James Craig Annan. Each of these groups were formed in protest at the photographic establishment of the time (Mathews, 1973).

63 In 1840 Richard Beard, a coal merchant and patent speculator, set out to make photographic portraiture a commercial success by accelerating the daguerreotype process with bromine. He opened a public studio in March 1841 on the roof of the Royal Polytechnic Institution in London, the first public studio of its type in Europe (Gernsheim, 1986, p. 33). The photographs for Mayhew were more than likely taken in Beard’s studio as the technology for street photography was unavailable at this time (Gernsheim, 1986, p. 67).

64 For example in the work of Rembrandt.

65 *Genre* art, generally considered to have developed during the seventeenth century depicts the ordinary and everyday.

66 Fox Talbot’s *Pencil of Nature* published between 1844 and 1846 used paper prints, however no doubt Mayhew’s reason for using the more cheaply reproducible woodcuts related to widening circulation. Many of the poor about whom the study was written were able to afford Mayhew’s serialised publications.

67 See for example Mirzoeff (1995) Bodyscape, art modernity and the ideal figure.

68 The Woodburytype, based on an intaglio printing process was introduced in 1864/5 by Walter Bentley Woodbury. An early mass printing process favoured for photographic reproduction, it produced high quality images with no screen or grain showing. For a more detailed description, see Baldwin (1991) p.85.

69 It is perhaps worth noting also that the publishers of the 1969 edition chose this image for the front cover.

70 The figures in this image are barely apparent, a ghost-like child can be discerned in the doorway, a head dares to peek out from an upper window, and a pin-sized carthorse and figure recede into the light beyond the alleyway.

71 See for example, the painting by Florence Fuller, Weary. 1888 “O little feet that such long years. Must wander through such hopes and fears” (Longfellow), in Hammond & Peers, (1992) Completing the picture, p.45.

72 Katie Smith, one of Barnado’s favourite ‘actors’ had been posed as a match girl, when, in fact she had never sold matches (Lindquist-cock, 1978, p.93). Another of the charges against Barnardo was that he tore the clothes of one sitter with a pen knife for a ‘before’ photograph (Koven, 1997, p.31).

73 This quote is taken from the 1969 edition of Fox Talbot’s *The Pencil of Nature* published in New York by Da Capro Press, there are no page numbers.

Mayhew relates this tale by a street photographer:

There was [a] lady that came in a hurry, and would stop if we were not more than a minute; so Jim ups with a specimen [photograph from the window], without looking at it, and it was the picture of a woman and her child. We went through the business of focusing the camera, and then gave her the portrait and took the 6d. When she saw it she cries out 'Bless me! There's a child: I haven't ne'er a child!' Jim looked at her, and then at the picture, as if comparing, and says he, 'It is certainly a wonderful likeness, miss, and one of the best we ever took. It's the way you sat; and what has occasioned it was a child passing through the yard.' She said she supposed it must be so, and took the portrait away highly delighted. (Mayhew, 1967a, pp. 208-209)

Amongst the images Akeret analyses are a school picture of Adolphe Hitler (standing the one in the middle of the top row with his arms crossed, looking straight ahead), and another of Charlie Whitman at age two. Charlie Whitman, Akeret explains grew up to shoot thirty-four people from the Texas Tower, after killing his mother and wife, (Akeret, 1973, p.175). The two-year-old Charlie stands between two rifles, holding one in each hand, his face is averted, and he seems to be crying. Akeret informs us that Charlie hated his dominating father.
Chapter Seven

(Attempted) Social transformations and visual interruptions: Substituting truth for reality

The photograph is not simply an effect of dominant power relations, or evidence of the optical unconscious, it is also a form of practical knowledge, an inscription of, and an intervention in, a socially divided world. (Roberts, 1998, p.4)

Reforming society photographically
In the previous chapter I explored Victorian social documentary practices, arguing that photography’s role in documenting social issues and problems not only depended on utilising the aesthetic conventions of the Victorian period, but also operated through, between and within a range of indistinct pictorial genres and visual functions. One effect of this interconnection with the dominant sense of beauty or artistic aesthetic was that images of the destitute performed not simply as evidence of abjection, but also as fascinating (if not appealing) pictures for the sensual and moral gratification of the emerging middle classes. Continuing this historical trajectory, this chapter traces socially concerned photography from the last decades of the nineteenth century until the beginning of the 1930s when the documentary realism that dominated until the end of the twentieth century emerged.

While still drawing attention to the influences of prevailing visual conventions, I am also interested in exploring the development in emphasis on the moral and ethical convictions of the photographer. Within this imperative some forms of social documentary came to represent, and were believed to facilitate an almost communion-like connection between people of different and unequal socioeconomic experience, thus providing a mechanism for allowing the privileged to believe that they were, or could be in some way emotionally allied with the marginalised. Although the meaning of ‘social concern’ varied across genres, individual photographic practices, and contexts, the photograph became the location where evidence of the photographer’s
moral integrity, most often expressed through accompanying written text, could be seen, and thus upheld or challenged. Needless to say, the measure of a photographer's compassion is shaped within its sociocultural, historical and political locations, by an ethos formed in dynamic, unceasing negotiations between aestheticism (beauty) and pragmatism (truth).

The regulation and middle-class ordering of the slum environment was enacted through a variety of seemingly benign practices that involved the use of visual imagery to establish its spaces as chaotic and dangerous. Even so, Jacob Riis' documentary approach is considered to belong to a separate order than that of the more respectful work of Lewis Hine, Dorothea Lange, Norah Smythe and other later twentieth century photographers. Riis has been criticized for his overly pragmatic, unempathic and aggressive photographic style, and on this basis his credibility as a photographer has come under question. If there is some foundation to these claims that Riis lacked sympathy for the people he portrayed, then an opportunity is presented through his images to more closely examine how women were represented by and through an unsympathetic eye. Therefore I consider his use of gender in representations of the New York tenements in order to explore how distinction and more particularly, non-distinction between masculinity and femininity were employed to discredit the slum as a living environment from whence productive citizens could emerge.

Edward Lucie-Smith proposes that well before the 1880s photographs of war established the authority of the photographer over that of the writer; “the camera became more eloquent than the pen” (Lucie-Smith, 1975, p.46). And while this enabled photography to confront the wealthy with ‘truths’ about social injustice, its currency depended on the moral passion (Lucie-Smith, 1975, p.45) and entrepreneurial skill of people who saw the camera as a tool of social reform. Emerging social scientists were prompt in combining visual, anecdotal and statistical methods of survey, and presenting compilations and combinations of these as evidence of the existence and dimensions of social problems.
Photography and sociology both entered the public domain at about the same time. Between 1830 and 1842, a time of intense photographic experimentation, Comte published the six volumes of *Cours de philosophie positive* (Turner, 1991, p.34), finishing his final volume in early 1839 as Daguerre’s method was publicised (Chaplin, 1994, p.198). With the emergence of social science came new understandings of how and why poverty occurs, and the means for its address. In mapping the terrains of the social, domestic and economic strata, patterns and structures of disadvantage were variously identified, imagined and created, and photographic images were used to cement numerical and textual evidence. Even so individual actions and circumstances continued to be seen by the vast majority of the population as the cause and thus solution to penury, and as such charity work was to have a lengthy history.

In North America, where it was commonly believed everyone had the opportunity to make their fortune, it took until the last decade of the nineteenth century for the links to be recognised between poverty, and social and physical environment. Only then was photography employed by social reformers to play a role in enlightening the electorate (Goldberg, 1991, p. 165). In Australia, where a similar ideology of individualism prevailed throughout the mid to late nineteenth century, recognition of the structural nature of poverty was even more tenuous. By the turn of the century, in both Britain and North America, the desire to correct social wrongs through the literal exposure of economic disadvantage was well underway. Photography’s establishment as a legitimate method of providing documentary evidence encouraged a range of organisations and individuals with varying interests to photographically record aspects of the urban housing environment. Sometimes this was for the purpose of historical record; at other times the images provided evidence of overcrowding and unsanitary conditions. These practices in turn lent weight to photography’s documentary authority.

Socially concerned protagonists such as Barnardo in London, and Riis in New York, employed photography to turn the, “detached morbid interest” (Longford, 1999, p.92) of the nineteenth century public into obligation. Based on the argument that it was insufficient to simply give donations (hand out alms) and sympathy to the poor, photographic images were employed to support the implementation of large-scale
reform programs. This often involved proposals to reallocate and redefine housing areas and public space (figures 24 & 25).

Rather than the initiative of concerned individuals, much photographic documentation of untenable living conditions coincided with urban reform programs, in the main commissioned by state, local government and church authorities. Additionally, these provided opportunity for the middle-classes to ensure an increase in their rental profits (Stange, 1992). As recognised in the previous chapter, the areas identified for demolition were most often inhabited by the poorest members of the urban population (Kemp, 1990) who were not always keen to leave their, albeit unsanitary and inadequate, homes. Doherty describes one of Jacob Riis' 'successes' as follows: "Mulberry Bend, long notorious as a den of thieves and all that was evil in a large metropolitan city, was torn down and a park was made. Schools were added and educational programs were opened" (Doherty, 1973, pp.6-7). I cannot help wondering where the lively population going about their daily business seen in figure 24 ended up when the space was reorganized into the wide empty vista portrayed in figure 25.

Although these early socially concerned photographers did not always consciously ascribe to artistic convention their images could not be produced or read outside the prevailing discourses that defined what could and should be seen, and how this was to be presented. Considerations of whether photography should be loyal to art or science in its representations of the real involved deliberations over the value of scientific as opposed to artistic truth. In his article, Paradoxes of Art, Science and Photography, (1892) Henry P. Robinson wrote:

No possible amount of scientific truth will make a picture. Something more is required. The truth that is wanted is artistic truth – quite a different thing. Artistic truth is a conventional representation that looks like truth when we have been educated to accepting it as a substitute for truth … Let us be generous and admit that science has its good points, but it is doing us a good deal of harm in the world. It is robbing us of our illusions … My business is not to make a feature of the truth of any part of photography. On the contrary I want to clear its character of the un-artistic virtue of being nothing but a truthful, inevitable, stupid purveyor of prosaic fact. (Robinson, 1966, pp. 82-86)
Figure 24

Figure 25
For Robinson paradox existed in how to make the photographic image portray a convincing truth without it being constrained by the dreariness of exact replication, in which bare, unmediated fact inevitably resulted in an unconvincing and unappealing image. In other words, a representation that the viewing public did not enjoy looking at, and therefore were reluctant to invest with truth-value because truth was presented without beauty. Thirty-odd years hence the photographers of the North American documentary movement were to echo Robinson’s assertion of the need for the ‘creative untruthfulness’ (see chapter six) of a photograph in order for it to have credibility. Although Robinson did not let go entirely of the notion of an essential, empirical truth, which could be captured by the camera, he recognised that its representation came in more than one guise, and within a continuum of art and science, he had no issue with promoting the subjective and aesthetic.

Documentary photographs, as image objects, achieve cultural and social value and therefore power through the predominating visual regime at the time of their production. However because they can only ever be read from the present, their meaning and currency is always contestable and influenced by the visual and temporal order out of which they are read. While, as Barthes (1993b) argues photographs are always artifacts of the past, they are also about the future (because they are taken with awareness that they will be seen in it). Even historical documentary photographs such as those taken by Annan and Atget to record that which is being lost, are concerned with the future because they attempt to insert and perpetuate the past into a time period that has not yet occurred. The photographs taken of unacceptable living conditions by social reformers and commentators were about imagined future change.

Tagg’s (1988) Foucauldian analysis suggests these were subsequently heavily implicated in the surveillance and disciplining of the spaces and populations they claimed to portray. In many of these early (and later) social documentary representations, the spaces of human habitation are subject to particular systems of arrangement that conflate visual appeal with habitation standards modeled on middle class ideals. Acceptability was determined by cleanliness and orderliness, evidenced by neatly arranged objects for use in daily life such as cooking, eating, washing and
sleeping. The definition and delineation of objects, people and the contained space surrounding them became requirements of the appropriate and adequate domestic environment. Poor families are often portrayed crowded into the one small room, where they apparently work, sleep, cook and eat (figure 26).

![Figure 26](image)


Photographic images displaying conditions to be other than compliant with Christian bourgeois standards, especially in regard to cleanliness – the weapon against disease and illness – served as evidence of the need to do something, to rectify the physical and moral order of the space, its objects and human inhabitants. Within this regime of the civilized modern ‘home’ and its ‘appropriate’ subjects and objects, the productive twentieth century citizen was defined.

Gillian Rose, (1997) referring to representations of London’s East End during the 1930s, suggests that through documentary photography these environments were also subjected to a regulating and gendered gaze that espoused the ordinariness of slum life.
Under the surveillance of a detached masculine observer the ‘chaotic, dark and dangerous’ world of the working classes was rendered manageable through the depiction of women and children going about daily life. According to Rose,

Through this representation, these women are made to signify the successful reproduction of the social itself, even in the slum; despite the appalling conditions under which they lived, these women coped. Documentary photographs produced their bodies as non-threatening figures; mothers caring for children, neighbours helping each other. Thus these are women produced as reproducers ... Their maternalised bodies guarantee social reproduction; the domesticated slum is thus feminised. The camera’s visual and spatial ordering of the slum is thus confirmed – indeed enabled – by the ordering of this particular femininity. (Rose, 1997, p.287)

Similarly, in earlier North American documentary work, a gaze desiring of order, maternal nurture and domesticity feminised the slum. Lewis Hine’s representation of ‘maternity amongst the poor’ – *A Madonna of the Tenements*, (1904) (figure 12), based on Raphael’s *Madonna della Sedia* (figure 14) (see chapter five) was inspired by the philosophy of John Dewey. Hine wanted to sunder art (and photography) from the esoteric, and supplant it in ethical practice. It was Hine’s desire to teach his students the art of social seeing (Davidov, 1998, p.237) in order to achieve a, “heightened sense of the world” (Hine cited in Aperture, 1977, p.121). As proposed in chapter five, Hine’s effort to present the, “beautiful and picturesque in the commonplace” (Davidov, 1998, p.237) illustrates the role played by the classical Renaissance aesthetic in photographic image making. Additionally, in his desire to inscribe virtues of maternity, moral purity and sacrifice, Hine imposed a feminising moral and visual order on the lived domains of the poor. For instance, *A Madonna of the Tenements*, 1904 (figure 12) is self-consciously performative. The characters – the mother in the place of the Virgin Mary, the child in her arms in the place of the Christ child, and the older child in the place of John the Baptist kneeling beneath and behind looking up at the holy pair, are arranged and portrayed with few props. Apart from a chair and wallpapered backdrop, adequate, but unkempt and dirty clothing, signifies their poverty and modesty. The humble surroundings of the group’s actual living environment are framed out, and thus must be imagined. Together with the Raphaelian reference this assists the viewer to locate the
trio in some other more spiritual and noble place. Unlike Raphael’s almost challenging Madonna, the Virgin of Hine’s portrayal looks down and away, signifying her self-consciousness and shame.

In contrast, Riis’ *Home of the Italian Rag-picker*, 1890 (figure 13) shows a mother with babe in arms, surrounded by a ‘home’ environment that defies all notions of the hospitable. The urge to remove this mother and child from their unhealthy ‘home’ and place them in a clean and comfortable domestic space would have been no doubt compelling to Riis’ moneyed, middle-class audience. It seems appalling that a woman would have to raise a child in such an environment. Hine appealed to the observer’s moral compassion and ability to see virtue in the poverty-stricken mother, while Riis, on the other hand incited horror at the danger of her ignorance:

Sometimes they ask me, What is all this about, with your ‘infant slaughter’ in the tenements? … Come with me … when those stony streets are like fiery furnaces, and see those mothers walking up and down the pavements with their little babes … Here is one of them, an Italian baby in its swaddling clothes … they wrap them around and around until you can almost stand them on either end, and they won’t bend, so tightly are they bound. It was only a year ago that the Italian missionary down there wrote to the city mission that he did not know what to do with these Italian children in the hot summer days, for ‘no one asked for them.’ They have now, thank God.

(Riis cited in Alland, 1993, n.p.)

Despite their polarised perceptions of the poor, and distance between their ethical approaches, both Hine and Riis inscribe and impose standards, qualities and expectations that reveal their own relationships with humanity. Hine promotes a deep respect for the people he portrays, while Riis communicates what might be interpreted as a mixture of disrespect, loathing and pity. But these judgments of Riis and Hine are shaped by ‘enlightened’ Westernised middle-class values. As the previous chapter suggests, Riis’ social documentary work produced a particular reality often dependent on invading police lodgings, illegal bars, sleeping haunts and other ‘dens’ in the middle of the night. In many images the subjects appear to have been woken, startled or at least put upon by Riis, his entourage and the penetrating, blinding (and frightening) magnesium flash. It is tempting to dismiss Riis’ validity as a socially concerned
documentary photographer, or even as a photographer at all, as has Sally Stein (1983), or to at least critique his practice, as have writers such as Rosler (1989) and Trachtenberg (1977) because his style and approach do not conform to a particular ethical code. Riis’ photographic portrayals are not intended to conform with more enlightened representational practices that depict the destitute as downtrodden but consenting, prepared to engage and co-operate with a privileged audience and resigned in their poverty. For these reasons I believe Riis’ portrayal of women, and particularly his use of distinction and non-distinction between genders deserves further consideration.

Figure 27

Slum ‘Scrubs’ and ‘Street Arabs’

Jacob Riis’ photographs of women do not present idealised versions of femininity, although at the same time not all of the women he portrays are beyond bourgeois Christian notions of redemption. To the middle-class gaze some of the women he ‘captures’ must have seemed dangerous and almost monstrous (figure 27). Riis also used photographs of unsupervised children to show their neglect and exposure to danger in the absence of maternal care. At other times women are seen balancing children on their hips amid the squalor of their dilapidated surroundings.

There is little sense of the order referred to by Gillian Rose (1997) in the 1930s portrayals of London’s East End slums, except when Riis presents the fruits of reform in later images of Industrial school and residential programs (figure 29). Virtue within the tenement environment seems to be a deeply buried treasure for Riis. Few of his representations generously describe individual character; in fact he seems overly eager to identify the scandalous and sinful. There are few domestic studies, although this could be due to the inappropriateness of a strange man and his entourage entering the privacy of domestic spaces, especially when women might be at home without male family members. A number of photographs show women labouring at home at piecework and women and children out of doors. There is no evidence that Riis subjected these private domains to his surprise ‘hit-and-run’ invasions, possibly indicating the domestic as a boundary for these forays, but no doubt this was also due to the limitations of his mandate as a police reporter. On the other hand, perhaps this absence betrays a lack of interest because these images were not sufficiently spectacular and did not further the case that the tenements were chaotic, disordered, ‘ungodly’ places where family life was threatened and undermined. In his writings Riis takes pains to describe the dimly lit, overcrowded and unhygienic conditions of tenement homes. With only Riis’ words, and limited visual depictions the reader is left to imagine the ‘horror’ inside tenement homes.
Figure 28

Jacob Riis, "I scrubs" Katie who keeps house in West Forty-ninth street.

Rose suggests that the portrayal of women as, “non-threatening figures”, in 1930s documentary photography (Rose, 1997, p.287) was used as a way of legitimising the camera’s influence in taming and ordering the slums for a modern, middle-class audience. Further, she argues that these portrayals of women’s enduring maternity acted as reassurance that social-life would reproduce, no matter how abject the conditions. Similarly, John Thompson and Adolph Smith’s Street Life in London (1877) images reassured the reader by presenting tame, non-threatening characters going about their crude, difficult daily lives. Jacob Riis’ depictions in this respect are of a different order. The highly disciplinary and judging surveillance of Riis’ camera seeks to destroy rather than sustain the tenement environment.
His intention is not to reassure his audience, but to horrify and shock them into action, to punish the spectators for their role in contributing to the slums. He not only used the camera, he also employed the characters in his photographs as weapons:

The story is dark enough, drawn from the plain public records, to send a chill to any heart. If it shall appear that the sufferings and the sins of the ‘other hall’ and the evil they breed, are but a just punishment upon the community that gave it no other choice, it will be because it is the truth. (Riis cited in Alland, 1993, p. 12)

Riis’ described New York’s east side slum areas as ‘homeless’; places without soul or a sense of social responsibility, rendering its inhabitants as destitute and soulless threats to the maintenance of social order. This contempt, (or was it fear) of the tenements and implicit wish for their eradication is exemplified in the claim – “The tenement is a destroyer of home and character, of the individuality that makes character tell.
A homeless city – a city without civic pride, without citizen virtue is a despoiler of children, a destroyer of the tomorrow” (Riis cited in Alland, 1993, p. 36). In this statement the tenement is identified as destructive parent, responsible for the ruination of children and thus the future. There is little doubt that Riis’ tenement is an aggressive, dangerous, masculine space.

In his photographs of the various ‘women’s lodging rooms’ in police stations throughout the East side, the quarters are shown to be unwelcoming and dirty, without beds, or bedding. Women sit around potbelly stoves, or gather in small groups, their backs and faces averted from the camera. There is a clear sense of the women’s discomfort at Riis’ intrusion and photographing of them. In some images makeshift clotheslines are strung across the room with washing hanging up to dry, but there is little generosity in Riis’ description of these women, who he describes as “female tramp-beggars” (Riis cited in Alland, 1993, p.70). Riis also identifies, “a peculiar variety” of these destitute women as ‘scrubs’, women who work one day per week in the homes of Jewish people on the Sabbath, the earnings being used to purchase two days worth of rum (Riis cited in Alland, 1993, p.70). For their effort Riis allows them the dubious honour of being, “one degree, perhaps above the average pauper” (Riis cited in Alland, 1993, p.70). Riis treats many of the women portrayed in the ‘dives’ and police station lodging rooms as largely undifferentiated from the men of the same haunts; as co-criminals and alcoholics, making the point in a number of places about the close proximity between women’s and men’s sleeping areas. When it comes to women who conform to a maternal, hard-labouring, or remorseful femininity, on the other hand he is more generous. Amid the crime and corruption of the soulless Hell on Earth (figure 30) (Alland, 1993, p.88) Riis uses the exploited, vulnerable girl/woman as a site of opportunity for redemption:

One night, when I went through one of the worst dives I ever knew, my camera caught and held this scene that I set before you. When I look upon this unhappy girl’s face, I think that the Grace of God can reach that “lost woman” in her sins; but what about the man who made profit on the slum that gave her up to the street?

(Riis cited in Alland, 1993, p.88)
Yet another caption reads, “A Handful of Methodist women made the Five Points decent” (in Alland, 1993, p.102). The houses of Five Points are described as damp and dark, “dens of death”, where, “rent is literally the ‘price of blood’ ” (in Alland, 1993, p.102). On the one hand the masculine, corrupt, ‘homeless’ space of the tenements in Riis’ narrative threatens to entirely erase the family and social organisation due to the absence of a nurturing and caring domestic home-site. On the other hand, the salvation of its inhabitants is activated through the diligence of a handful of good hard-working, pious women and (female) children. Gender distinctions operate strongly between children in Riis’ text. Female children are regularly represented as hard working, holding together the threads of domesticity and caring for younger siblings as their mothers toil, while boys are in the main posed (literally) as ‘Street Arabs’, pick pockets, and scavengers.
Against a stark, cold brick wall we can see a tiny girl (figure 28). The photograph is unusual in that it is evident Riis has engaged with this subject, who stands shyly and nervously, but earnestly, looking at her observer with the sadness and resignation of a grown woman. Centrally positioned, dwarfed by the wall and constrained between vertical wooden columns, 'Katie' clasps her hands together as tentatively as she looks out at the viewer, her body seems held together under a heavy dark coat, a woollen hat is curiously both protection against the cold, and a weight on top of her head. At the left edge of the frame part of a window can be seen, and on the right a door. Both of these exits lead back into the building from which Katie seems to have cautiously emerged, and back to where, it can be imagined, she will hurry as soon as the ordeal of being photographed is over. The image is titled, "I Scrubs" – Katie, Who Keeps House in West Forty-ninth Street. Riis' caption reads:

"What kind of work do you do?" I asked. "I scrubs" she replied promptly, and her look guaranteed that what she scrubbed came out clean. Katie was one of the little mothers whose work never ends. Very early the cross of her sex had been laid upon the little shoulders that bore it so stoutly. On the top floor of the tenement... she was keeping house for her older sister and two brothers, all of whom worked. Katie did the cleaning and the cooking of the plain kind. She scrubbed and swept and went to school as a matter of course and ran the house generally with an occasional lift from the neighbours, who were poorer than they. (Riis cited in Alland, 1993, p.142)

Riis uses the example of Katie to describe an uncompromisingly clean, self-sacrificing, unquestioning, eager to be schooled, diligent and resigned femininity. Katie is prepared to ungrudgingly bear the endless toil which was not only the, 'burden of her sex' but also a rare example of the potential for a hopeful future to be found within the tenement environment. Here, as Rose (1997) observed of the 1930s East End photographs, femininity is presented as salvation. Riis' entrepreneurialism should not be overlooked, if people with less means rewarded Katie's selfless labours with occasional assistance, surely those with so much more would as well.

Riis' portrayal of the boys of the tenements, on the other hand, is consistently less generous. He sees little hope for these children, who gravitate quickly to the life of the
‘Street Arab’ to become lawless and aggressive, recognising no authority, and laments, “[t]here is very little to hold the boy who has never known anything but life in the tenement … left alone to himself, he soon enough finds a place in the police books” (Riis cited in Alland, 1993, p.188). The only redemption for these ‘wild’, ‘unsupervised’ boys, seems to be a home with the Children’s Aid Society where they can be sheltered, clothed, educated, regulated, and nourished with food and religion, as opposed to being trained in the streets by undesirable and criminal men who rule over and exploit them as news boys. Riis provides a picture of the streets as a place where comfort is a warm grate, petty crime takes place every hour and death from exposure, hunger or violence is likely. The arms of the Children’s Aid Society or Five Points Mission, in contrast offer a ‘cure’ for paternal neglect and abuse:

It is one of the most touching sights in the world to see a score of babies, rescued from homes of brutality and desolation … saying their prayers in the nursery at bedtime. Too often their white night-gowns hide tortured little bodies and limbs cruelly bruised by inhuman hands. In the shelter of this fold they are safe, and a happier little group one may seek long and far in vain. (Alland, 1993, p.202)

Riis’ representation of the sexually promiscuous, criminal, dangerous woman corrupted by the slums, simultaneously disrupts and affirms the fictive maternal, self-effacing, self-sacrificing, hard-working and domesticated Victorian femininity. He contrasts a fallen, ‘masculinized’ woman with an ideal middle-class woman who is motherly, clean, virtuous and caring. His depiction of a corrupted, monstrous womanhood at the same time, unsettles and threatens the fiction of an emergent American middle-class woman. The women Riis constructs in his photographs of police stations, lodging houses and dives are peasant-like, uncivilised and unlawful; prostitutes, alcoholics and ‘scrubbers’. They are ‘non-domestic’, ‘non-nurturing’ women, and as such are akin with the men who will not, and cannot be tamed in the dangerous masculine locations of the slum streets and dives. Whether or not Riis was providing evidence of the actual is less my concern here than the way the casting of these women as non-women and aberrant was used to threaten middle-class audiences into participating in tenement reform, education and child welfare programs. At the same time, a hard working, caring, maternal and domestic womanhood was presented as the redemption of the slum through the
(working) bodies and (pure and loving) hearts of young girls and caring mothers. In the absence of this fictive femininity, child rescue institutions were available to provide appropriate parenting and education. And through these avenues the philanthropic audiences may have been able to imagine the rebuilding of the tenements and the obliteration of slum life.

**Different visions**

*Through the eyes of women*

During the years between 1914 and 1918 Norah Smyth worked with Sylvia Pankhurst in London’s East End. Smyth produced a considerable collection of photographs of women and children living in the slums, some of which appeared in the feminist publication, the *Women's Dreadnought* (Rosenblum, 1994, p.68; Williams, 1994, p.40). Val Williams observes that there were fundamental differences between the documentary photographs produced by women at this time, and those of male counterparts such as Frank Sutcliffe and Paul Martin, who used a ‘candid’ street photography approach that communicated an objective distance from their subjects. Their, “hybrid of press, candid and documentary”, became popular with publications like *Picture Post* and culminated in the formation of a dominant British style of documentary that involved, “a particular machismo” (Williams, 1994, p.25).

Describing Norah Smyth’s photography as, “an acute and personal testimony to being there” (1994, p. 41), Williams observes there was nothing “secret or candid” about the photographs taken by Smyth of the women and children she and Pankhurst worked amongst:

> The gazes which are returned to hers are complicit and mutually recognising ... [and as such] ... those who had been characterised as slum dwellers, presented as spectacle to an amazed public by the believers in the phantasmagoria, emerge as individual women and children. (Williams, 1994, p.46)

Smyth’s work focused on documenting the resilience of East End women and children; she depicted social reform, rather than espousing its philosophy through sensationalism. During the early twentieth century female documentary photographers chose in the
main not to depict the oppressions of poverty, preferring instead to record the ‘getting on with’ of daily life, and significant aspects of female domains and concerns; children, homes, gardens, men leaving for war and, their struggle to enter public life (Rosenblum, 1994, p.109).

Abstracted aspirations
Following the end of World War One a profound disillusionment resulted in the rejection for many artists of traditional values and practices (Gernsheim, 1986, p.86). In painting and photography this found expression through the production of anti-aesthetic images without figurative form. This presented particular challenges for photography due to its dependence on objects of the extant world. Dada artists such as Man Ray (1890-1976) and Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946) produced photographic images, which they named ‘rayographs’ and ‘photograms’ respectively (Gernsheim, 1986, p. 87). These were made without a camera, and in the words of Gernsheim, “aimed at the transmutation of the object into a non-representational light pattern in which merely the shape of the object was reproduced” (Gernsheim, 1986, p.87). Moholy-Nagy, a Bauhaus teacher of design explored possibilities for the use of photography, especially scientific applications such as x-ray photography, in the ‘pure’ arts. At this juncture it seems that art and photography established a new relationship, photographic methods were seen as the tools of art production in their own right, rather than as a means for replicating existing art forms. Artists were exploring the rejection of beauty, seeking to establish truth as art, whilst at the same time redefining what was real. In 1928 Alexander Rodchenko (1891-1956) argued, “[w]e are struggling not against painting, but against photography carried out according to the models of painting as if it were an etching, a drawing, a sepia or water-colour” (Rodchenko, 1995, p. 68). In 1940 Paul Outerbridge (1896-1958), a successful 1920s advertising photographer, proposed that the appreciation of photography depended on conceiving of it as a medium of expression distinct from other art forms, with unique capabilities. The camera, Outerbridge suggested, was nothing other than another tool of art, like the brush, paint and chisel, its only limitation being the person using it (Outerbridge, 1995, p.70).
Many modernist experiments in abstract photography involved either distortions of the camera’s fixed-point perspective, or were completely abstract, as in Man Ray’s Rayographs and Bruguière’s cut-paper light abstractions (Johnson, 1995, p.76). Moholy-Nagy observed that the full potential of the camera obscura and the fixed image was limited from the outset by an unquestioned loyalty to fixed-point perspective: “the sensitized surface was always subjected to the demands of a camera obscura adjusted to the traditional laws of perspective while the full possibilities of this combination were never sufficiently tested” (Moholy-Nagy, 1966, p.72). Following the collapse of the US economy in 1929, many of these creative exploratory routes came to an abrupt end in the zeal to reacquaint with the ‘real’ and social world; the everydayness of human struggle. As North America reconstructed its sense of patriotism and returned its gaze to human and social need these ‘art for art’s sake’ endeavours were viewed as extraneous to ‘real’ life.

One of the most striking features of the shift to political documentary in the 1930s was the fervor of reaction against 1920s modernism, which was upheld as narcissistic and unproductive, “the essence of the modern movement was that it created art which was centred on itself and not on anything outside it” (Spender cited in Williams, 1994, p.47). The ‘pure truth’ of modernism was rendered irrelevant to the experience of life as it was apparently lived and experienced. It was perhaps this sharp turn away from unchartered frontiers (as Maholy-Nagy observed of fixed-point perspective) that kept socially concerned photography firmly contained within a positivist outlook.

In 1889 Peter H. Emerson (1856-1936) argued that in the interests of evolutionary progress, “an indelible line of demarcation”, needed to be drawn between science and art, and photographers should then decide to which they belonged; “each must have his [sic] aim clearly stamped upon his [sic] mind, whether it be the advancement of science or the creation of works whose aim and end is to give aesthetic pleasure” (Emerson, 1966, p.60). By this Emerson meant that photographers should be attempting to either exactly record the details of the physical world – science – or to be selecting those details which will produce the greatest aesthetic effect – art. Although it may appear that the modernist photographers had taken up Emerson’s challenge, locating their
photography, and therefore photographic ideals, within the realm of pure abstraction, in many ways the efforts of these artists resulted in exposing this bifurcation as an extraneous debate. For these modernists, photography was expected to serve neither art nor science, instead leading and inspiring both. Rodchenko states:

Revolution in the photographic field consists in photographing in such a way that photography will have enough strength not just to rival painting, but also to point out to everyone a new and modern way of discovering the world of science, of technology, and of everyday life. (Rodchenko, 1995, p.68)

Although the social documentarists of the 1930s saw themselves engaged in a different project to that of the modernist photographers, they too believed their photographic practices constituted a new way of discovering the world.

The aspiration to establish photography as a method of abstraction was undermined by a range of factors, both aesthetic and pragmatic. On the one hand, traditional image making techniques were perhaps, after all more adept in the non-figurative dispersal of light and space on a two-dimensional plane. On the other hand, in North America photography was called upon to fulfill social obligations demanded by the combination of two economic catastrophes, the crash of the New York stock market and the drought in the central farmlands that created a dustbowl from Texas to Dakota (Longford, 1999, p.94). Despite the abstract inspirational and conceptual capacities of modernism’s innovative ocularity, its practitioners were unable to segregate photography from the social world. The anti-humanist gaze of modernist photography found itself re-focused on the social:

On Black Friday of October 1929, the bubble of easy living exploded, blowing America into a period of self-analysis and a search for a new set of values … The America of ‘amuse me’ became the America of ‘what does it mean’. (Siegel, 1966, p. 92)

The documentary tradition that grew out of North American photographers’ responses to these events had far-reaching influences, although perhaps none so stridently delineated from other photographic genres, or as enduring, as in North America itself.
New objectivities

The hardships created by worldwide economic downturn redirected public interest away from the irrelevancies of the avant-garde towards the ‘cold hard facts of life’. The ideals of the modernist art movement, which had supported the notion of the artist/photographer as an elite and privileged purveyor, explorer and sagacious interpreter of the world and its truths, were overridden by the moral and ethical obligations required of the photographer as social reformer. Elizabeth McCausland purporting the case for ‘straight’ photography suggested that the art of the late 1930s was a very different thing from that of the 1920s, which, along with many others she saw as abstract and unconnected to the real world. The purpose for photography (and the fine arts) in the 1930s according to McCausland was to expose the effects of poverty and ‘social horrors’ such as war, in order to acquaint the viewer with “the range and variety of human existence” (McCausland, 1996, p. 173). She defined the necessary characteristics of the documentary photographer required in the quest to achieve purity of representation:

First of all there is no room for exhibitionism or opportunism or exploitation in the equipment of the documentary photographer. His [sic] purpose must be clear and unified, and his [sic] mood simple and modest. Montage of his [sic] personality over his [sic] subject will only defeat the serious aims of documentary photography.

(McCausland, 1996, p.173)

McCausland in 1939 argued for a more real photography devoid of the ‘personality’ and vanity of the, ‘artistic, indulgent’ photographer, a photographic practice that would ‘widen the world we live in’ and make comfortable citizens aware of the ugliness and tragedy of the, “civilization in which we live and hope to function as creative workers” (McCausland, 1996, p.173). In many ways her words echo the documentary practice of Jacob Riis, suggesting that revelation was not to be found in the overlay of a classical aesthetic, but in its antithesis, in the ugliness of the truth achieved by a practical yet benevolent, objective, and transparent photography clearly segregated from the affected beauty of ‘high’ art.

In spite of these purist intentions, throughout the twentieth century socially concerned photography invariably involved staging scenes, cropping, retouching and enhancing
images"). Even in her insistence on representing, 'life whole and unretouched' McCausland recognised that, "by the imagination and intelligence [the photographer] possesses and uses, [s/he] controls the new esthetic, [sic] finds the significant truth and gives it significant form" (McCausland, 1996, p.171). Rather than an artform devoid of all affectation, McCausland in support of the straight photography movement was proposing another aesthetic, one that was about ridding images of pictorial Victorian sentimentality in order to achieve the impression of honesty and truth.

As recognised by Emerson, writing in 1889, in order for the truth in a work of art to be accepted, it must be modified to exclude unnecessary detail (Emerson, 1966, p.61). Such perceptions were supported by the belief that the task of the social (and psychological) scientist was not to add or enhance, but to strip bare, to remove the superficial in order to get to the basic truth of situations. This could be achieved, they believed, through supplanting the narcissistic 'self' in order to bring forth the noble and honest 'self'. Thus, somewhat paradoxically faith in photography's ability to transparently depict the truth became located in the moral integrity and emotional sensibility of the photographer. However, as a sensitive and self-deprecating observer/recorder the social photographer was permitted less freedom of expression than the sculptor or painter. This was due primarily to sustained belief in the photograph as evidence of 'what has been' and considerable political investment in this remaining so. Photography at this time was able to exercise substantial and pervasive power in the cause of social reform, and as such photographic text remained bound also by the moral expectations and tolerances of its audience/s. The depiction of life's distressing aspects did not unbind documentary photography from representing the presentable. As demonstrated, opinion of what is and is not appropriate varies greatly across photographic genres, and between photographers and the contexts in which their photographs are viewed. At the same time these apparently oppositional stances merge in and out of one another.

At this point I would like to 'loop backwards' to pick up some strands from the opening chapters regarding the intertwining of the meaning of light/visibility and truth/reality. My earlier discussion proposed that one of the ways homeless women have been
popularly defined is in terms of their invisibility. In order to further explore this suggestion, the final sections of this chapter examine the idea (or belief) that light and visibility are analogous with truth and reality, and how this has manifested in socially concerned photographic practices. To do this I feel it is necessary to briefly return to the work of Jacob Riis and early twentieth century social photographers such as Lewis Hine before continuing, in the chapters that follow, to trace the in/visible homeless woman into the present.

The lightness of social photography

Light, the measure of time, materializes itself through its opposite: shadow. Shadow is the darkness that signifies the existence elsewhere of light, darkness itself being no more than the absence of light. (Trachtenberg, 1978, p. 221)

The invention of the magnesium flash in the late nineteenth century meant that the camera could illuminate and thus penetrate darkness, capturing its hidden space and objects. A dangerous\(^8\) and somewhat unreliable method, the magnesium flash inspired Jacob Riis’, “hit-and-run-and-pay-if-you-must” technique (Stein, 1983, p. 13). Much of this captured evidence was then used by Riis in evangelical-style ‘magic lantern’ shows, where he preached to local authorities and members of the middle-classes and philanthropic societies about the unacceptable living conditions and resultant deviancy of the poor, many of whom were immigrants seeking new opportunities in America. Paula Rabinowitz, citing Foucault proposes that the desire at the end of the nineteenth century to ‘illuminate’ and see the poor was linked to the new forms of surveillance that had their beginnings in the Enlightenment (Rabinowitz, 1994, p.5). She suggests:

In the dual technologies of the cinema and psychoanalysis ... Visualising the poor presented glimpses into dark recesses akin to the symptoms of the unconscious structuring of dreams and hysteria. If the middle class possessed depth, the poor dwelled there. It was an/other place; and more than simply talk about it, it could be seen.

(Rabinowitz, 1994, p.5)
In his sermon-like discourse Riis repeatedly refers to the ‘sinners’ of the tenements as the result of landlord greed, appealing to the middle classes to take responsibility for the people their sub-standard, disease ridden, over-priced housing had produced. Further, he employed his evidentiary imagery to postulate the fantastic, and combined this with personal anecdote and moral narrative to develop and espouse his ideological position. And thus the privileged were entertained as they were simultaneously warned to save themselves from the deviant and criminal masses of their own creation (Stange, 1992, p.2).

Like Barnardo in Britain, Riis found that the late nineteenth century public were, in many cases, more receptive to lantern slide shows than photographs (Goldberg, 1991, p.167). There was not only a level of respectability in the lantern show’s magical experience of being ‘transported’ to other (exotic) places, (whether physically distant or local) by the creation of a sensory experience through the play of light, colour and sound, but confidence in the type of reality that was portrayed.

In its nascence members of the upper classes viewed the photographic image with suspicion. Vicki Goldberg observes, “depictions of the poor had always been coyly ‘improved’ because the reality was considered vulgar and repellent … [while] photography itself was considered slightly déclassé” (Goldberg, 1991, p.167). Lacking in the translucent colour and light of the oil painting, “the photograph counted only as an almost naturalistic representation … complete but for its stubborn opacity to light … one could not see through its proper subject” (McHoul, 1996, pp. 35-36). Unlike the lantern slide show, within the picture plane of the photographic image, technical and mechanical interference was evident, ‘spoiling’ the effect of the real*. In response to Riis’ emotive lantern slide show performances, people were known to cry, faint and talk to the screen (Goldberg, 1991, p.169). In the effort to address the requirement of authenticity Riis used methods and selected images wherein the subjects appear to have been caught in the act, while maintaining and asserting his separation and difference from the people he depicted. Sally Stein explains:
In much of Riis’s photography, physical distance was carefully maintained all the while that Riis used the photographs to claim an intimate knowledge of his subject matter. To stress his own singular authority, he likewise made little attempt to individuate the figure within the environment. (Stein, 1983, p. 14)

By 1890 when Riis produced his book, *How the other half lives*, the viewing public were prepared to accept the photograph as a factual visual document. Riis’ inclusion of stark ‘realistic’ photographic images contributed to sensationalising the circumstances and people portrayed while concomitantly boosting sales (Stein, 1983, p.14). It had taken nearly twenty years for newspapers such as *The Daily Graphic* to regularly use photographs to illustrate the news (Stein, 1983, p.12).

As previously mentioned, Jacob Riis is often considered to have launched the tradition of documentary. However, for a range of reasons, including oversight of British and European photography, and the belief that social documentary requires an underpinning ethos of respect for, and valuing of human subjects, in particular the marginalised, a number of writers (for example, Stein, 1983; Trachtenberg, 1977) reject this assumption. The work of Lewis Hine (1874-1940) on the other hand is popularly considered to exemplify the essential sensibilities of the documentary genre that was to emerge during the 1930s.

Hine’s childhood was interrupted by seven years of factory work, after which he trained as a teacher in Chicago and New York. In 1909 he delivered a paper to the National Conference of Charities and Correction titled *Social Photography*. Pronouncing his allegiance to using photography for the achievement of progressive social reform, Hine stated, “[t]he dictum, then, of the social worker is ‘Let there be light’; And in this campaign for light we have for our advance agent the light writer – the photograph” (Hine, 1980, p.112). While Riis used the ‘light’ of the camera as an invasive penetrative weapon against the poor, Hine fostered and valued an empathic approach in which light rendered his subjects with a hallowed, rather than damning glow (Trachtenberg, 1977). This has no doubt contributed to his work being lauded as a celebration of the tenacity and strength of people confronting poverty and exploitation.
In Hine’s images and those of his predecessors – the members of the ‘straight’
photography school – camera and developing process are supplanted in an attempt to
transcend machinery and chemistry as the locations of artistic production. The camera is
treated as a medium through which the artistic superiority of the photographer and the
essential aura of the subject fuse to create technically uncontaminated moments of
reality, as if the magic of the lantern slide show is now transplanted into the photograph
itself.

As visual objects, the photographs of the early twentieth century secessionists such as
Paul Strand (1890-1941) (one of Hine’s students) and Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946)
claimed a transparent link with the real, a direct transference of light to image facilitated
by an insightful and inspired human mediator of truth. The photo-secessionists shared
aspirations with the impressionist painters. According to Trachtenberg, “[i]ronically, the
secessionist photographers espoused a style that was scarcely unique to photography:
their works expressed the same concerns as contemporary impressionist painters,
emphasizing the mood of a spontaneous moment through atmosphere and light”
(Trachtenberg, 1980, p.116). When the subject was impoverished humanity, the
resultant images were intended to expose a subject stripped bare of pretension by their
abject circumstances. An inherent message was that truth could only be achieved by the
shedding of material comfort; the closer one was to destitution, the more honest their
image became. The photographer who achieved convincing and (more importantly)
dignified imprints of human experience was able to bask in the aura of their own
production. It was during this period, as the requirement for transparency shifted from
the photograph to the photographer that, “the projects of state and capitalist regulation,
reportage and fiction, documentary photography and feminism become curiously
interwoven; each mode overseeing itself, its objects, and its others” (Rabinowitz, 1994,
p.59). Within this conflation of the real and the imaginary, in the crossing-over of ways
of seeing and representing the world and its problems; in these tensions between truth
and beauty, some photographers approached socially concerned photography as the
making of ‘human’ documents.
Human documents

The Evidence
Evidence of Life:
Snapshots
Hundreds of split-seconds
When the eyes glazed over,
The hair stopped its growing,
The nails froze in fingertips,
The blood hung suspended …

Evidence of life:
a split-second’s death
to live forever
in something called
a print. (Erica Jong, 1991)

One month before his death in 1940, Lewis Hine, reflecting on his collection of photographic works observed “[e]ver – the Human Document to keep the present and future in touch with the past” (Hine cited in Trachtenberg, 1977, p.137). Although Hine described his work documenting child labour, the living and working conditions of immigrants, and the toils of poverty, as ‘social photography’ he described the photographs themselves as ‘human documents’ able to connect across time, between what has been, what is and what might be. Referring to a Farm Security Administration photograph, McCausland describes the image as, “a human and social document”, from which can be read social and economic errors (McCausland, 1996, p.171).

William Stott (1973) argues that human documents use strong sentiments to elicit emotional responses, stating, “a document, when human, is the opposite of the official kind; it is not objective, but thoroughly personal ... even when temperate a human document carries and communicates feeling, the raw material of drama” (Stott, 1973, p.7). Stott further proposes that such a document offers a, “glimpse ... of an inner existence, a private self” with which the reader/viewer necessarily identifies (Stott, 1973, pp.7-8). In the drama of desiring the other, emotion and subjectivity are privileged over intellect and objectivity as the means for delivering truth. Stott observes, “the practitioners of the documentary genre in the thirties realised, if dimly, the same thing: emotion counted more than fact” (Stott 1973, pp.8-9). Nevertheless it is the subjective viewed objectively that catalyses the power of these kinds of images.
It would seem that although the visual aesthetic may have shifted from the performative and interpretive to an apparently more transparent, direct and by implication, more honest method of portrayal, the substance of Victorian sentimentality – strong emotional reaction and moral indignation – remained intrinsic to motivating public response to social issues. At the same time, the stripping away of obvious artifice perceptually reduced the distance between the viewer and the viewed. The viewer, in seeing more of the subject could know more about their subject, even though images were carefully cropped and framed to exclude the ‘unnecessary and distracting’ paraphernalia that formed the background to their context.

During the late 1930s the term ‘documentary’ became firmly associated with specific forms of photographic practice and was considered to be neither art nor science alone, but an honorable alliance of both. The desire to see evidence of the hardship of social existence was tied to the belief that the truth was this harshness, to be found on the surface of things and people:

Photography looks now at the external world with new eyes, the eyes of scientific, uncompromising honesty ... The external world is these facts of decay and change, of social retrogression and injustice ... The external world is the world of human beings; and whether we see their faces or the works of their hands and the consequences, tragic or otherwise, of their social institutions, we look at the world with a new orientation, more concerned with what is outside than with the inner ebb and flow of consciousness.

(McCausland, 1996, p. 172)

Despite McCausland’s expressions of impatience with the artistic, she maintained that the character and perception of the photographer was fundamental to the procurement of accurate and honest representations. Furthermore the documentary ‘attitude’ adopted by many photographers and critics of this period, rested on the photographer’s ability to observe what lay beneath the surface without its disruption (Siegal, 1951). The task of the socially concerned photographer was to provide evidence of the (albeit hidden) human condition through depiction of the body’s surface, and in this respect the legacy to the Victorian ‘sciences’ of physiognomy, phrenology and their culmination in eugenics, is evident. The surface of the human body became simultaneously a map of the eruption of psyche and emotion and an imprint of the social territorialisation of the
individuated body, of which the visual documentarist became a cartographer. Typifications of gender, class, race, age and health (amongst other categories) continued to provide templates for the expression and representation of human experience within particular social locations. Like a skin print, the ‘human’ documentary image was taken directly from the bodies of the people portrayed. Empirical as a fingerprint; tangible evidence of having been, these transcripts formed of the extremities of human experience were designed to elicit sentimental responses through the securing of emotional connection, bonding the viewer to the ‘truth’ in and of the portrayed. Nevertheless, rather than evoking a balanced, informed response these sentimentally charged visual documents create an, “unformed, directionless, self-indulgent” reaction (Stott, 1973, p.17).

With the acceptance of a multitude of uses for, and forms of photography, the question of what photography was became less of a concern. The ethics of social responsibility demanded a more intimate understanding of the integrity of the photographer, their subjects and the relationship between them. The documentary photographer was now expected to not simply record an event or situation, but to communicate the feeling of the moment (Longford, 1999, p.106). As such photographers of the documentary ‘genre’, ‘mood’, or ‘attitude’ were increasingly concerned with what it meant to be poor and/or destitute, either as an individual person, or as a family.

It has been argued that the increase in female social documentary photographers during the mid 1900s contributed to a feminisation of portrayals of the poor (Goldberg, 1993; Rabinowitz, 1994; Rose, 1997). And it is no doubt these less polarising representations had considerable influence on wider documentary practices of the period. As human documents these photographic images were concerned with portraying the intimate and personal experience of material and social disadvantage, while highlighting the integrity, resourcefulness and pride of the people depicted. At the same time this did not mean that the experience of poverty was necessarily individualized to the point of losing meaning, or that it was presented as crudely as Riis’ turn of the century exposés. Particular codes and meanings signifying poverty and disadvantage visually defined, interpreted and made palatable the circumstances and experiences of those who might
be identified as redeemable. Amongst these visual tropes particular (fictional) feminine subjectivities became emblematic of a destitution that could be overcome by a formula that included the rationality of the social sciences, the compassion of social responsibility, and the exercise of educated, middle-class ideologies. Thus, it seems appropriate to conclude this chapter, and approach the next with the words of Steve Platt, “just as the homeless are always with us, so too, it seems are our preferred ways of seeing them” (Platt, 1999, p.114).
Endnote

77 For example between 1899 and 1927 Eugène Atget (1857-1927) set about the self-motivated, self-funded task of documenting Paris before it was demolished and rebuilt. And, as the previous chapter discusses, Thomas Annan was commissioned by the Glasgow City Improvement Trust to document Glasgow slums prior to demolition. See also Rose (1997) "Engendering the Slum".

78 Riis avidly rejected such notions in his avarice for factual evidence; see Alland (1993) Jacob A. Riis, Photographer and Citizen.

79 Between 1899-1927 Eugène Atget (1857-1927) took on the immense project of recording as many facets of Paris as he possibly could. He is most famous for his street scenes, see Gernsheim, (1986), p 69.

80 Because of the limitations of the single, fixed viewpoint of the photographic image it is possible this was at times a misrepresentation, as the entire family needed to gather in one room, around one table, or on the one bed, to fit into the picture.


82 I am using an example from Alexander Alland's reproductions of Riis' work in Jacob Riis, Photographer and Citizen (1993). It is possible that Alland cropped the image (as he has done with others).

83 Dadaism was an art movement closely connected with Surrealism that dominated the period between the first and second world wars. Officially launched in Zurich during 1916, it was supported by artists and writers who opposed participation in the war. The 'manifesto' of Dadaism was anarchism, nihilism and disruption. The name 'Dada' means nothing. A cult of 'non-art' Dadaists rejected established aesthetic values, using objects and methods hitherto seen as antithetical to the making of art such as torn up pieces of paper, railway tickets and cigarette butts. Some of its most well known practitioners are Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), Max Ernst (1891-1976), Laszlo Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946) and Man Ray (1890-1976).


85 The magnesium flash powder, which Riis set alight in a frying pan, because it was more ‘homely’, was quite explosive. On one occasion, he nearly blinded himself, and on another set a tenement on fire. Riis had to put the fire out himself because the other people in the room were temporarily blinded (Alland, 1974, p.28).

86 It is worth noting the association between the lantern slide and the ‘amusement park’ camera obscura. In both instances the viewer is ensconced in darkness and ‘exposed’ to flickering light patterns that display the outside world.

Chapter Eight

Homeless Woman in the lucky country: The betrayal of portrayal

Betrayal n. the act of betraying; a treacherous or disloyal act; a disclosure.

Portrayal n. the action or product of portraying; delineation, picturing; a picture, a portrait. (The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary)

Portraying betrayal

This chapter traces twentieth century Australian photographic representations of homeless women. I continue to draw on examples from a range of genres, particularly traditional social documentary and photojournalism, as these are visible and accessible in ordinary daily life. Beginning with a reflection on a newspaper portrayal of young girls of part Aboriginal descent, I then turn to other socially concerned images in Australia, as photography became a popular method of image making, but not necessarily of social reform. The meaning of ‘homeless woman’ as a representation remains a central consideration in my endeavour to arrive at some understanding of how this discursive production has been socially re/produced and employed. The discussion retains its awareness that photographic practices exploit contradiction and ambiguity, which is facilitated by the dynamic tension created in the uncertain, contested relationship between beauty and truth: science and art.

Australian photography has a history of not only blurring the divide between the real and the fictional, and the artistic and the scientific, but also of maintaining fluidity within categories of documentary. On a global scale this has manifested as a trend consistent with the postmodern rejection of teleological categorisation that is seen to fix false boundaries. This does not explain, however the resistance to definitive classification that has prevailed across one hundred and sixty years of Australian
photographic practice. Undoubtedly, as various writers claim, factors such as lack of financial support and uncertainty over national identity have contributed to the difficulty of establishing a clearly discernable Australian tradition of social documentary photography confluent with the British and North American traditions. Although I am not suggesting it is necessarily problematic, these explanations do not address the apparent dearth of collective will between Australian photographers, the Australian government and the Australian population to assert a specifically delineated, coherent and critical visual discourse of their social environments. Despite this lack of consensus over what constitutes social documentary photography, Australian photographers have consistently produced images aimed at addressing social issues and injustices that locate within the, “realism of the everyday” (Roberts, 1998). Additionally, these efforts have endured even though the concept of social documentary continues to be under question as an effective contemporary political activity (see Batchen, 1999, pp. 33-36).

This thesis has argued that socially concerned photographs span the real and the fictional, while certainty about the origins of the ideas that produce them is always contestable. As message laden material objects they participate in the real, and at the same time generate truth/power effects. These images are constellations of idea and actuality, human skill and mechanical and electrical technology, science and art. They are situated within and driven by complex sociocultural and political circumstances. As such their potential, and their effect is simultaneously productive and oppressive/positive and negative. “The photograph is not simply an effect of dominant power relations, or evidence of the optical unconscious, it is also a form of practical knowledge, an inscription of, and an intervention in, a socially divided world” (Roberts, 1998, p.4). Furthermore, returning to an earlier quote, Foucault asserted the need to practice a, “hyper- and pessimistic activism”, because although not everything is bad, “everything is dangerous” (Foucault, 1991b, p.343). Thus this chapter continues to critically explore social documentary photographic practice aware that alongside good will and intent lay unavoidable acts of betrayal.
"Homes are sought for these children"

Fore note:

I am aware of the problems inherent in assuming I have any right to comment on the subjects of this picture. As a 'white' Australian, I readily accept that any authority I might appear to assume in speaking about, or on behalf of, the Indigenous children represented, or of the experience of Aborigines in general is both problematised and destabilised by the viewpoint that ownership of a photographic image resides in the subject. In this regard I feel it necessary to stress that I make no assumptions to speak on behalf of Indigenous women, or members of the Stolen Generation, rather my concern here is to provide an interpretation of the image from the position in which I am unavoidably located, with every intention that my words not contribute to further objectification, demeaning treatment, or oppression of those who are directly and indirectly represented. I also acknowledge that there is no assurance this will not be the case. In anticipation of the possibility of this occurring, I sincerely apologise. However, as the philosophy of anti-racist practice stresses, to do or say nothing is an equal crime, because to succeed a tyrannical regime only requires silence, and thus complicity, from (would be) opponents.

Six young girls all standing, in white dresses, high domed infant foreheads, they must be no older than four or five years (figure 31). Four of these girl children, positioned in pairs at either end of the image, look warily out at their observer/s. Mid-picture two girls stand one in front of the other; the face of the child at the back is half obscured. Both look down at the ball the front girl has gripped in her left arm. All six children seem to have been given a toy to hold for the photographic event, one has a stuffed rabbit, another a doll, two also appear to have a bag containing something, possibly lollies. The image is too unclear to discern with certainty. Not one face bears a smile. The headline boldly states, "Homes Are Sought For These Children". Beneath the picture, the partially visible newspaper text reads, "GROUP OF TINY HALF-CASTE AND QUADROON CHILDREN at the Darwin [half] caste home. The Minister for the Interior (Mr Perkins) recently appealed to charitable organisations in Melbourne and Sydney to find homes for the children and rescue them from becoming outcasts" (Bird, 1998, front cover). Under the typeset are handwritten words, "I like the little girl in centre of group, but if taken by anyone else, any of the others would do, as long as they are strong]"90 (Bird, 1998, p.1). There is a cross drawn in ink on the dress of the child to which this note refers.
the stolen children
their stories

Including extracts from the Report of the National Inquiry into the separation
of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families
EDITED BY CARMEL BIRD

Homes Are Sought For These Children

GROUP OF TINY HALF-CASTE AND QUADROON CHILDREN at the Darwi
caste home. The Minister for the Interior (Mr. Perkins) recently appealed
to charitable organisations in Melbourne and Sydney to find homes for the children an
to rescue them from impending disaster.

Figure 31

“Homes Are Sought For These Children”
Front cover of an edited volume of Stolen Generation stories by Carmel Bird.
Copyright 1998 © Carmel Bird.
The particular version of the image I am looking at is what Walter Benjamin (Benjamin, 1970), Charles Baudelaire (Baudelaire, 1965) and my sixth form\textsuperscript{01} art teacher might have described as a mechanical, or photographic reproduction. A \textit{valueless} copy of the original distributed through mass circulation for commercial gain and amounting to nothing more than a false object, with no possibility of an ‘aura’ of its own (Benjamin, 1970). This book cover illustration is likely to be at least the fifth reproduction in a chain of transpositions which can be traced from \textit{original} negative to newspaper illustration, to the place where I am viewing it now as the cover illustration of an edited collection of stories and excerpts from \textit{Bringing Them Home, The Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families} (1997)\textsuperscript{02}.

Between myself as the writer/reader and yourself as the reader/writer we share in a convolution of viewing, reading and writing about a reproduction of a representation of a moment in the lives of six young girls, a split second that enabled (amongst other deficit labels) their definition and advertisement as homeless. The girl marked with a cross is the fairest looking, she not only has the lightest skin, her hair also seems blonde-streaked and slightly wavy. A lock curls onto her forehead drawing connections with the girl in the nursery rhyme, who ‘had a little curl, right in the middle of her forehead’. Carmel Bird reflects, “this beautiful child is carelessly and so distinctly marked with a cross at the centre of her being, as if to signify the ruthless severing of the umbilicus that connects her to her mother and her race” (Bird, 1998, p.1). With these words the image takes on yet another dimension and becomes emblematic of the ‘systemic genocide’ practiced in the implementation of Australia’s assimilation policies (Bird, 1998, p.1).

The limited information provided in the publisher’s acknowledgements reveals the image is housed in the Australian Archives under the subject and category: “Between Two Worlds: The Commonwealth Government and the removal of Aboriginal Children of part descent in the Northern Territory” (Bird, 1998, publisher’s note). In this text the children are redefined as, ‘of part descent’, a contemporary, more politically correct
term, arguably less racist, and as such less demeaning and insulting than ‘half-caste’ or ‘quadroon’, but still not rid of the will to establish racial difference based on biology.

To which category does this photographed and re-photographed photographic image taken some time in the 1930s in Darwin, Australia, belong? It could lie anywhere on the continuum between photojournalism, and social documentary. It could also be a newspaper illustration, a mass-media version of a snapshot, or perhaps an example of Barnardo-inspired publicity: a catalogue image displaying available homeless children. More pertinent, perhaps than the classification of this image are the different meanings that operated about photographic documents between the mid-1930s and the late 1990s when it was used as a political statement on a book cover. There are significant grounds for doubting whether this visual object should even continue to be considered a photograph. Viewing this reproduction – a piece of light and pigment affected paper archived in an Australian Government library – from within the ideological, political, cultural and moral locations of the twenty-first century, there seems little doubt that it has functioned across a span of seventy or more years as variously a social, human, evidentiary and informational document. As such, in each guise credibility is dependant on the viewer/reader accepting what they see as evidence of particular social, cultural and political circumstance and human need. My response as a viewer self-righteously positioned in sympathy with members of the Stolen Generation, is to assume that much is revealed here about 1930s Anglo-European Australian social and cultural attitudes towards Aborigines. I anticipate and therefore read: racism, paternalism, xenophobia, colonial imperialism, inhumanity and misguided philanthropic intentions.

Looking at the book-cover picture propped up to the left of my computer screen I am simultaneously reminded of portrayals of emancipated slave children9, cupids in Renaissance and Romantic artwork, and the allegorical child subjects of Julia Margaret Cameron’s pictorialist Victorian photographs. Any romantic wistfulness, however is halted by the hesitant wariness and slightly fearful but challenging curiosity of the four girls who look out at their observers, and instead associations shift to the faces of those depicted in colonial anthropological photographs64. The assembly of small girls, clothed in loose white dresses also evokes other memories of newspaper and flickering black
and white documentary film images showing Jewish war orphans; children with nothing to smile about. In spite of the text telling the reader it is the children who require assistance, it is as if together the young girls are saying, “Who are you? What do you want?”. I wonder whether the photographer encouraged them to adopt unsmiling poses, or whether their joylessness reflects their grief, or their first experience of being photographed.

This 1930s newspaper image labels each of the six girls as homeless, in need of “rescue from becoming outcasts”, threatened with exclusion because of their partial Aboriginality. The fin de siècle book cover illustration confirms the 1930s forecast – the girls became outcasts, they were socially excluded. Perhaps this was not the worst of their experience, they were made race-less, family-less – they were ‘stolen children’ robbed of community and place by the regime that produced their image. According to the news story of then, they were to be damned and saved by the portion – the half, or the three-quarters, that was not Aboriginal. Taken from their mothers, and thus families and communities, each child was then to be permitted partial access to the culture of ‘white’ Australia, and thus notionally rescued by its benevolence. Viewing this image/text object now, having read and heard the testimonies of women with similar histories to the girls in the photograph, we know the gateway into Anglo-European Australian society via white families led to a path far different from that promised, or even imagined by the ‘Protectors’ of Aborigines.

**Girls before boys?**

Female rather than male children were selected for public display even though the newspaper alludes to both genders; “tiny half-caste and quadroon children” [my italics]. A possible explanation is that girl children are more appealing and less threatening, another is that they had greater currency as domestic labour. The person who marked the central child with a cross seemed less concerned with which girl she was sent, as long as they were ‘strong’, suggesting that whomever was chosen would be destined for physical work. A clue possibly lies in Humphrey McQueen’s claim that the reluctance of ‘white’ Australian families to take in ‘black’ children was overcome by placing girls in domestic service (McQueen, 2002, p.7).
Already dressed in the clothing and hairstyles of non-Indigenous children, holding Anglo-European children’s toys, these ‘tiny girls’ are displayed as already partially assimilated. The blackness of their bodies is obscured by the white dresses, and also by the technical in/efficiencies of the photographic and printing process. In their imagined future as women, “rescued from becoming outcasts” these girls’ bodies carry the potential to breed children whiter than themselves, provided they couple with ‘white’ men.

This photograph uses the faces and bodies of female children to signify vulnerability, need, potential and hope. The image and its messages expose the neo-Darwinist state paternalism that was mobilised in the early twentieth century through a confluence of patriarchal, colonial and maternal desires. Emotive appeals are directed at both the personal and collective levels, tapping into readers’ notions of parental and national responsibility. The far more insidious desire of masculine sexual power found legitimacy in the highly promoted belief that the bodies of part-Indigenous women could be used to breed out the Aboriginal race. The use of this image in both historical locations supports the argument that documentary photographs which portray women and children as innocent, and at the same time physically and emotionally strong victims, are most likely to arouse middle-class sympathies (Eisinger, 1995, p.88).

The black-and-white newsprint format starkly signifies this image as actual, telling us that the children are real, the moment happened. As with all photographs, the depicted event has always already passed. As a contemporary book cover illustration, age – the passing of time – is signified by the newsprint’s fuzzy texture. Blackness obscures facial details, parts of the girls’ bodies, and the background, while contrasting with the white dresses and lightness of the toys they have been given to hold and the highlights in their hair. Although the text tells us the children are from the, ‘Darwin half-caste home’, visually the group exists in no place, they have no definable environment either encircling and protecting, or claiming them. The face of the girl half hidden at the far back blends with the indefinite background, and contrasts against the fairness of the child marked with a cross. The impression is created that she is the darkest of the six. It
is as if the girls are caught in limbo, and must either be drawn further into the place of the viewer, or recede into some dark and threatening no-place (the place of outcasts, Aborigines).

The distraction of the two middle girls, their absorption with their gifts creates movement and tension. Disengagement from the observer's gaze assures the viewer of the authenticity, and thus the seriousness of this moment, fixing the event in the real. It might be imagined there is some comfort in the knowledge that the 1930s function of this image would not be tolerated by contemporary society, this being one of the possible intentions behind its usage by the publishers of Bird's text. What this image portrays now is popularly considered inappropriate and unacceptable. An informed, politically correct contemporary audience participates in its viewing, because we can at the same time reject what it represents. The image is invalidated as its meaning is validated. One only has to pick up a weekend newspaper, particularly the tabloids, however to see that contemporary media perpetuates this legitimised hypocrisy, in which we are safely able to renounce as rapidly as we confirm. The desire to photographically document and look upon distressing human circumstances has seen little diminishment. 'Human' documents in the mass media do not represent everyday trauma, but rather events that are unusual or abnormal. This allows the reader to be emotionally responsive and at the same time reassured that it is not likely to be a circumstance they will experience. Self and otherness are simultaneously re/confirmed while the reader is able to face a horror that is likely to be worse than anything they might have to confront (Stott, 1973, p.17).

The relationship between viewers' and the represented subjects' life experiences in the news media and much social documentary photography is crystallised by a variety of visual signifiers. Graininess and black-and-whiteness function to inscribe authenticity and sincerity, creating an illusion of closeness between the observed and the observers, the otherness of the subjects is established by the realism of the medium, in this case, the newsprint (Pollack, 1990, p. 204).
This image, reproduced as a book cover is itself signified, as are the newsprint texture, and the black and white tones. The reality this message relies upon is already a representation of reality, a construction (Pollack, 1990). On the day in the 1930s when we are told this image was first produced, (recognising that we do not know the exact time it was taken or published) it had the overt purpose of eliciting public sympathy for children experiencing the scripted misfortune of being without family, and of mixed race. But the impression put forward is ever more insidious, for the message imbedded in the written text is that these children would not be accepted, in fact had been rejected, by their Aboriginal parents. Thus the other is deliberately constructed and positioned foremost as morally inferior. The imagined reader, as an Anglo-European Australian, is able to save these children not only by providing them with ‘white’ homes and lives, but also by rescuing them from their Indigenous family’s alleged rejection; a circumstance as potentially fictional as it is real in relation to their non-Aboriginal parentage.

Aborigines were far from passive over the removal of their children. Even the documentation of the Aboriginal Protection Board who advocated for, and enacted the removal of children from Aboriginal families described the resistance to this State-driven systemic child abuse. Thomas Garvin of the Aboriginal Protection Board, arguing for greater legislative power to remove children wrote on the 9th of June, 1912 – “there will be great heart-burning and opposition to the separation of children from their parents, who will not give them up unless compelled by law to do so” (Garvin cited in Goodall, 1996, p.127). Goodall further observes that the first Aboriginal political organisation to cover a wide area in New South Wales, the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA) considered its first imperative was to, “try to help the children who had been taken from their families” (Goodall, 1996, p. 151). One of the AAPAs most active campaigners, Elizabeth Hatton wrote of the distress of the parents of young girls who had been ‘apprenticed’ into domestic service:

Day after day, letters come from the people, pleading for their children, asking me to find their girls, long lost to them – in service somewhere in the State – taken away in some cases seven years ago and no word or line from them.

(Hatton cited in Goodall, 1996, p. 153)
It is reasonable to assume these six young girls were forcibly removed from their mothers and communities, and would join those described above, streamed into a system and culture with little or no respect for their Aboriginal culture and heritage.

The principally antithetical use of *Homes are sought for these children* as a book cover seventy years after its publication in a newspaper signifies past and current racism. In the third millennium the picture moves somewhat ambiguously between the (generous) position of representing the tragedy of misguided good-will to confronting the viewer with the heartlessness of white suprematism. At the same time, in the 1930s and in the present, in both usages of the image the bodies and faces of non-white, homeless, family-less ‘stolen’ girl children are employed to assert moral and social indignation and obligation. The portrayal of unhappy, ‘half-caste’ girl/children/babies condemned to social exclusion without the intervention of a suitable (white) home appeals to protective and maternal desires, whether the year of its viewing is 1930 or 2002. The everyday context in which this representation exists produces a sign that cannot escape portraying the ‘systemic genocide’ committed by the Anglo-European Australian government, its institutions and its non-Aboriginal population. My protective emotions, reticent even at this point to accuse individuals, become anger at, and loathing for not only the then Australian Government, but also the Government of now (the one that won’t say sorry). The second child from the right catches my gaze; foremost on the picture plane with inclined head she appears to be staring directly out at me. Wide-eyed, questioning, she seems to be appealing for reassurance of some kind, and it is directly to her that I want to apologise, gravely, deeply and regretfully. Thus these white-frocked angelic girl children become for me symbolic of the Indigenous people’s experience of dispossession and colonisation, an extreme form of homelessness not often represented in ‘traditional’ social documentary photographs.

**The now of then: new and old concerns**

Looking at this book cover illustration presented as evidence of the participation of non-Indigenous Australians in the implementation of assimilation policies, it is difficult to believe the newspaper photographer was driven by social concern. As previously discussed socially concerned photography is about raising issues of social injustice and
drawing attention to the need for action, and to be fair, this image and its message do imply responsibility; there is a call for action from the reader, social change is being sought. *Homes sought for these children* viewed from the perspective of 1930s Australia may be read as underwritten by intentions to put right the wrongs imposed on these children’s family-lessness, homelessness and social and cultural rejection. And yet, looking back from the present (the only location it is ever possible to view from) it is difficult for me to see the image as anything other than testimony of a continuum of racist naivety and genocide. As Derrida (1978) insists, the text cannot be extracted from either the context in which it is read or out of which it derives, at the same time these sites are never stable. Because the original photograph was reproduced in a newspaper, it is possible the photographer had little say about the accompanying written text. While the question of who might be responsible for this image might still be asked, it is entirely unreasonable that this be located with any particular individual. The collusion has a large membership and wide parameters, everyone who looks at the image is implicated in some way.

Lucie-Smith argues that the ‘true’ power of photography lies in the camera’s ability to, “simply halt the flow of time at a chosen moment”, and thereby afford the image with emblematic significance (Lucie-Smith, 1975, p.65). The transportation of this image across seventy years requires faith in this time-arresting quality. As a viewer, and potential reader of Carmel Bird’s book, I need to be convinced that *the* moment I see before me, the day that *this* picture appeared in the newspaper and the appeal made by the Minister of the Interior for *homes* for these children and others like them, really did happen. From the temporal location of *now*, confidence in the image’s authenticity enables me to experience and express anger, indignation, regret and sorrow. At the same time I am allowed a safe distance from any direct association with the crimes that were committed. I can choose not to open the book and read its contents. And this I am tempted to do, recalling the pain of reading similar accounts of human suffering.

*Homes are sought for these children*, as the cover image of Carmel Bird’s publication (1998) not only refers to racism, it simultaneously operates as an *old* and *new* representation of children’s homelessness. Although it does not comply with
stereotypical images of out-of-work men lining up for soup and sandwiches, it reveals the welfare system established in Australia for accommodating children either without families, or more commonly from neglectful or poverty-stricken homes. In keeping with practices throughout the modern world, Australia’s responses to child destitution included the provision of large-scale institutional homes and foster care or ‘boarding-out’ for unaccommodated babies and infants (Dickey, 1980, p.59). Boarding-out or ‘baby-farming’ (James 1969, p.195; Jaggs, 1986, p.73) was a common, and often preferred response to the sizeable, unmanageable population of destitute children. Although, contemporary notions of ‘child welfare’ were far from the concerns of the Victorians who acted primarily to protect the interests of the middle-classes:

They had no intention of protecting children from ill-treatment or setting up a public child-rearing system. Their aim was to prevent the proliferation of a class of criminal slum-dwellers similar to those which had plagued other advanced urban countries … Like their counterparts in those countries, they were motivated by fear of the dangers which idle and disaffected lower classes posed for society, as much, if not more, than compassion for the young concerned. (Jaggs 1986, p.2)

Robert van Krieken, on the other hand argues that these institutional responses to child welfare were driven not only by middle-class ideals, but also by divisions within the colonial working classes themselves, between those who were considered ‘respectable’ and the ‘non-respectable’ (van Krieken, 1991, p.24). Despite the real effects and motivations of Australian policy makers, even during the depression years between the first and second world wars, the nature of an Australian national identity required the illusion of generosity and inclusivity and certainly not heartlessness. At the end of the second millennium, as a re-presented visual document introducing a volume of stolen generation stories, the image Homes are sought for these children confronts us with the past in the present, simultaneously distinguishing between two historical periods and establishing their similarities. The Australian government still provides care for ‘unwanted’ and neglected children through the foster-care system, a system still wanting in many respects, despite principles of culturally appropriate placement.
The currency of this image occurs in the tensions between and within the sociocultural and the political, in some imaginary place distinct from the physical location where the image was taken, and enacted by people who were not present. The human drama that presides with this image manifests in these equivocations between fact and fiction, between available evidence and knowledge, and imagined and real contexts. If this photograph can be described as a human document, it remains uncertain whether the *humanness* of the drama is contained within the 1930s press photo, or in the graphic design of the late 1990s, or in both.

The written text and the social climate through which the image/object is read allow only certain interpretations, and silence others. As there appears to be little if any connection between the photographer and the children, it is the image of young girls that must express and thus represent the betrayals and abuses to which they have been subjected.\(^9\) Looking again at the image, I want to believe that no amount of technical interference, or recontextualisation can belie the apprehension and mistrust these girl-children express as they gaze out at the photographer/observer. On the book cover their image sits beneath the title, which tells us that these children were ‘stolen children’ and that this text contains ‘their stories’. Thus the Australian government and those complicit with its policies become child abductors. The child second from the right holding the toy rabbit, and the two girls on the far left deliver this accusation with their furrowed gazes. As much as one might will it, however there is no possibility of the last say remaining here with these tiny subjects, they are messengers only of these possible discursive constructs.

Trying to fix on what this visual document is, establishing who owns the image/text, becomes as elusive as stabilising its meaning, its intention and even its producers. Even so I have no trouble accepting the image as a document relating to some level of fact. As Barthes believed about the *Winter Garden* photograph of his mother, I have faith that each of these girls stood in front of a camera about seventy years ago, leaving behind “something like an essence of the photograph[ic]” moment (Barthes, 1993b, p.72). It is highly probable some of the women are no longer alive, and those that are will be close to eighty years old. Perhaps they were able to tell their stories in the Stolen
Generation testimonies. Through this desire for the representation to speak the narrative that constructs it, looking at this reproduction of a reproduction becomes simultaneously an act of authorship and listening. And in that convergence I become a willing participant in the political narrative of Carmel Bird’s text.

Australia and social documentary photography

Colonial Images

At the time the above photograph was first published, the ‘great tradition’ of North American documentary photography, which grew out of Government funded projects such as Roosevelt’s New Deal project, was in its infancy. Furthermore, as suggested earlier, Australia did not develop a documentary tradition that mirrored the late nineteenth and particularly early twentieth century reformist zeal of North American, British and European photographers (Batchen 2001; Crombie, 1990; Willis, 1988). This was most likely due to a combination of factors, including Australia’s brief history as an Anglo-European civilisation, the function of Australia’s colonisation, the resultant prevailing ethos, and the Australian Government’s (and population’s) suspicion of American culture. Geoffrey Batchen, adopting a Foucauldian approach, proposes that in order for photography as a material activity to emerge, it firstly needed to be made possible and permissible through the discursive eruption of the idea of photography (Batchen, 2001, p.16). Thus, Australia’s lack of identification with a localised documentary tradition might be partially accounted for by a reluctance to conceptualise and express the notion of an ‘Australian’ social documentary genre distinguishable from, but not necessarily outside of British, European or North American practices. There may also have been insufficient collective willingness to share in the idea of a visual critique of Australian society; and for that matter it was unlikely to have been seen as a means of advancing political cause, or policy. Photography in the colonies had other tasks to complete.

Australia was colonised in the last decades of the eighteenth century by a population comprised largely of Britain’s overflowing penal and charitable systems, the majority of whom were poor and destitute (Hollingworth, 1973). As the British economy shifted from rural feudalism to industrial capitalism the very distant shores of Australia seemed
a ready solution to the urban overcrowding and poverty, which were compounded by the effects of a rigid class system. Additionally, the colonies were seen as a feasible, if also drastic, solution to Britain’s increasing problem with orphaned, destitute and delinquent children. This was in spite of three-quarters of the colony’s women and children being supported by the government at the commencement of the nineteenth century (van Krieken, 1991, p.49).

A new life in Australia was promoted as offering opportunities to hardy and willing workers. An effect of this notion of opportunity for all was the covert translation of the utilitarianism and lack of fairness from the British system into the structure of Australia’s economy. This went relatively unrecognised well into the twentieth century (Hollingworth, 1973, p.48). While Britain had an established (albeit harsh) system for providing poor relief through the Elizabethan Poor Laws, “in Australia there was no right to charity, however much it was expounded through evangelical Christian conscience” (Maunders, 1984, p.19).

Despite widespread poverty amongst the relocated British lower classes, by the mid-1800s, parts of the colony were prospering. According to Jack Cato, Melbourne and photography were born in the same year and, “both grew up in a spirit of abounding optimism”, fuelled by the fortunes of the Victorian goldfields (Cato, 1979, p. 20). Geoffrey Batchen, on the other hand moves Australia’s photographic timeline back by almost fifty years, proposing that the year of Australia’s first settlement, 1788, also marks the beginning of the period when Europe and Britain were fervently expressing the desire to photograph. Thus “one might say that Australia is one of the few national entities that has been from its outset framed by a photo-scopic episteme” (Batchen, 2001, p.29). Lending support to this view of Terra Australis, Peter Hamilton observes, “there is a neat temporal coincidence in the invention of photography and the formation of the [London-based] Aboriginal Protection Society … occurring within two years of each other” (Hamilton, 2001, p. 86). Even so this shared infancy did not constitute a specifically critical eye amongst the colonisers, or their observers who participated in the formation of the idea of the Empire by using the camera to explore, survey and map the terrain of the new colonies (Hamilton, 2001; Willis, 1988).
It is of little surprise that the Australian State and Federal Governments, in their reluctance to project a critical national self-image, or to build an archive of evidence that might have contradicted the optimistic outlook projected onto the antipodean colonies, saw little need to fund documentary projects designed to elicit the constituents’ support for housing reform programs, as had the more identity-secure North Americans, British and Europeans. At the time of photography’s rise to prominence as a social documentary device many of Australia’s urban and industrial environments were being built, not rebuilt. When the colonial governments did commission photographers, it was generally to document the spread of white civilisation across the continent. Such projects were treated as record keeping exercises, rather than to produce publicity material for furthering social causes (Willis, 1988, p.182). At the end of the nineteenth century some city councils did hire photographers to compile visual records, when hastily constructed temporary buildings were being replaced. However, the focus remained very much on the advance of the constructed environment (Willis, 1988, p.182).

It was surely not only lack of government support that directed photographers away from portraying social issues. There must have also existed collusion between government and the newly arrived populace in which it was understood that the site of reform was not the urban environment, but the Indigenous people and the land they occupied. Anthropological recording of Aboriginal people constituted Australia’s largest documentary archive at this time (Willis, 1993), and much of this grew out of concern that the spread of Empire had deleterious effects. During the 1830s and 1840s learned societies, such as the Aboriginal Protection Society were established in London to ensure that the ‘aboriginal races’ were photographically recorded, out of fear that the ‘onslaught of civilisation’ may bring about their extinction (Hamilton, 2001, p. 87).

The colonists appear to have been at pains to disseminate the message that they were establishing a place better than either they, or the existing population of Australia had known before. In 1858 Australia produced its first promotional photographic album depicting the goldfields, Melbourne’s new public buildings and portraits of Aborigines
(Willis, 1988, p.13). In 1883 Richard Twopeny reported, “[w]ith regard to their public institutions, the colonists are like children with a new toy – delighted with it themselves, and not contented until everybody they meet has declared it to be delightful” (Twopeny, 1973, p. 5). The desire to project optimism is further illustrated in Twopeny’s outright denial of the existence of poverty in Melbourne:

You can see that bread-and butter never enters the cares of these people; it is only the cake which is sometimes endangered, or has not sufficient plums in it ... Again the distribution of wealth is far more equal. To begin with, there is no poor class in the colonies. (Twopeny cited in Maunders, 1984, p.19)

In spite of Twopeny’s rose-coloured interpretation of Melbourne’s economic circumstances throughout the mid 1800s official reports described the visibility of vagrant children and youth in the streets, “wandering around in a state of ‘nomadic wilderness’ ” (van Krieken, 1991, pp.64-65). By 1872 three thousand young people in Victoria alone were accommodated in Industrial Schools established under the Victorian Neglected and Criminal Children Act of 1864 (Maunders, 1984, p.20). This hardly supports Twopeny’s claims.

In his *Story of the Camera in Australia* (1979), Jack Cato points out that although the spaces convicts occupied (the prisons) and the objects of their incarceration (manacles and leg irons) were photographed, the convicts were not. Somewhat ironically, he proposes that, at the time, images of this type would have represented, “a crime against good taste and people’s sense of justice” (Cato, 1975, p. 48). This rationale suggests that this decision to look elsewhere was grounded not only in moral conviction, but also in the idea of what constituted beauty and truth. However, it is not so much the distinction between these epistemological traditions that is significant, but the relationship between the two. In order for truth to be recognised, and publicly circulated it needs to be appealing. Although during the 1870s photographs were used in New South Wales to identify criminals (Willis, 1988, p.20), by and large Australia was intended to represent the solution to Britain’s social problems, not to be a further liability. The imagination of the motherland and her offspring appeared to have little tolerance for the truth of human suffering in the colonies. Paul Fox suggests there has
always been a disjuncture between European photography and the images produced by the camera, ‘at the periphery of the empire’. He further claims:

As a piece of technology, the camera in colonial circumstances complemented the other instruments of location, such as the surveyor’s theodolite and was often part of the mechanical taming of nature ... in the colonial world, photography played a different role to painting for it always carried the other within its gaze. (Fox, 1997, p.15)

The colonial photographer had an existing other in the Indigenous population, and it might be argued, to a larger extent in the untamed environment. The use of the camera as a method of social critique, with poor and destitute members of the colonising population as its subjects, would have represented an inversion in the relationship between the indigenous and the foreign, locating the other amongst the colonisers themselves.

**The social boundaries of Nation**

In the early twentieth century, following World War One, the majority of white Australians behaved with suspicion towards the rest of the world, seeing it as, “full of threats” (Peel, 1997, p.53), an attitude which prevailed into the 1930s. Mark Peel explains:

> Authorities sought to close the country against contagions: modern art and literature, ‘unAustralian political ideas’, ‘Negro’ music, even comics ... ‘Loyalty’ became the defence against a fearful tomorrow. Nationalism no longer argued that Australia should change, or accommodate dissenting opinions. It was a grim celebration, a way of holding the line against anybody who questioned what all Australians were supposed to share.
> (Peel, 1997, pp.53-55)

This ethos seems to have prevailed until the 1940s when, according to Willis the, “ad hoc use of photography by colonial authorities and state governments changed dramatically” (Willis, 1988, p.182). With the power and authority of the Australian Federated Governments well established, and the rising need for Australia to promote its role in the Second World War, photography’s potential in the mass media was finally recognised.
During this time Australian photographers, rather than being primarily concerned with sociological analysis used the camera to explore personal viewpoints of historical moments, or the intimacy of everyday life (Kirker, 1995, p.12). Although North American documentary photography heavily influenced Max Dupain and David Moore, who were (and still are) considered to be Australia’s foremost documentary photographers (Kirker, 1995, p.12), neither seemed politically motivated by the need for social critique or reform. Dupain and Moore elected instead for the less radical and more subjective aims of, “incit[ing] thought and ... cultivat[ing] a sympathetic understanding of men and women and the life they create and live” (Dupain cited in Kirker, 1995, p.12).

Even though he was enthusiastic about Grierson’s documentary philosophies (see chapter six), Dupain is reported as having little interest in, “people and their social situation” (Willis, 1988, p.193). Despite these claims of a lack of social conscience amongst many photographers, in 1946 Geoffrey Powell published an article in the new photographic journal, Contemporary Photography, titled “Photography – A Social Weapon”. He passionately wrote of the need for the Australian popular press to include photographs depicting the circumstances of people living in poverty, housing shortages and worker’s conditions (Willis, 1988, p. 193). However it seems the medium of journalism acted against his ideals. Although the journal did publish the work of photographers such as Powell, Moore and Poignant portraying slum children, cramped housing conditions, and the public face of alcoholism, the thrust of the editor, Laurence le Guay was towards reforming the subject matter of photography, rather than social and political critique. Before long arty fashion shots overrode the portrayal of social issues (Willis, 1988, p.193).

Although the documentary aesthetic had influences on Australian photographers they remained less inclined to define and categorise their work within the parameters marked out by the social documentary of the Northern hemisphere. Ingeborg Tyssen comments on Australian photographers:
For the most part, within the group of photographers who could have been said to have emerged from documentary photographic practice, there was little cohesion in their view or practice of photography. All too aware of the subjective nature of photography, few subscribed to the theory that photography could ‘tell it like it is’. The criteria for defining documentary photography is unclear and seems to be based solely on its appearance or formal structure, without any reference to content or context. (Tyssen, 2000, p. 60)

In the absence of government and corporate sponsorship, Australian photographers who did ascribe to the humanist philosophies of social documentary sought opportunities to publish their work, and earn a living through photojournalism, often seeking out overseas photo-pictorial magazines such as Picture Post and Life (Willis, 1988, p.213). One such photographer was Alex Poignant (1906-1986), who during the 1930s wanted to represent, ‘the essence of Australia’, through depictions of the people, flora and fauna of the outback.

Informed by deep respect for his subjects Poignant produced a large collection of photographs of Aborigines. These are often seen as an attempt to express and document “the purity or the lost innocence of a pioneer era” (Newton, 1988, p.122). His 1942 photograph of a mother and child, titled Aboriginal girl and new born baby constitutes yet another contribution to ‘Madonna’ iconography (figure 32).

The young woman, apparently in modesty, looks away from her observer while she breast-feeds her child. Rather than expressing the usual solemnity of a nursing mother, she smiles, the sun highlighting her face and right shoulder. According to Anglo-European dress standards, her attire suggests poverty and her hair is unkempt, although this does not seem to be the image’s intended message. The mood of the picture is warmth and contentment. It is difficult, however to move past notions of the noble savage. It may be an expression of the close relationship between Aboriginal people and the land, using the iconic symbol of the nurturing female body to express the endurance of their culture. Or, the image could be metaphoric of the ‘lost innocence’ of Aborigines, or perhaps a celebration of their dignity and beauty. The identification of the mother as a girl, rather than woman, reveals shades of Poignant’s morality; he depicts a child with a child.
Figure 32
Alex Poignant, *Aboriginal girl and new born baby*, 1942.
Copyright 1988 © Australian National Gallery, Canberra, Australia.

The ambiguity in the meaning of this portrayal raises questions of whether this was an attempt to represent the young age of Aboriginal mothers, or perhaps to describe her status as unmarried. It is also uncertain whether the young woman consented to the taking of the photograph. While the close cropping suggests the photographer was a few feet away, the turn of her head, away from the camera, expresses self-consciousness. The image is reminiscent of Dorothea Lange’s mid-1930s FSA work, particularly *Migrant Mother* (figure 5) which Poignant may well have seen, given his reported enthusiasm for North America’s documentary movement.
In 1940 Poignant formed a friendship and professional alliance with Hal Missingham, a graphic artist and photographer (Newton, 1988, p.122). In 1941 they jointly produced an exhibition, which sought to express, “the spirit of the New Photography and the social aims of the Documentary film” (Newton, 1988, p.123). The Poignant-Missingham exhibition, in its attempt to achieve, “direct communication from viewer to subject via the vision of the photographer”, was, “one of the first demonstrations of the Documentary philosophy in art photography” (Newton, 1988, p.123). This was most apparent in its, “concern to communicate specific qualities and arouse interest in the original subject as much as admiration for the independent Pictorial photograph” (Newton, 1988, p.123).

Edward Steichen’s much contested, but nonetheless history-making documentary photography exhibition, *The Family of Man*, travelled to Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide in 1959. Although only two Australian images were included, the exhibition profoundly influenced Australian photographers (Williamson, 1995, p.12). One of these, titled *Redfern Interior* (1949) (figure 33) by David Moore, depicts three generations of women. A woman and her newborn are seen in bed, while a child of about two years plays on the floor. The older woman (reasonably assumed to be the grandmother) stands at the end of the bed, left hand on hip, the right raised to her mouth in a gesture of concern. Her eyes are directed towards the bottom left corner of the photograph, suggesting her thoughts are inwardly directed, while her face reveals the undeniable expression of grave worry. The family were apparently facing eviction, and as such this image is one of Australia’s earliest depictions of women and homelessness to be internationally exhibited.

Steichen’s emblematic exhibition aimed to incite in the viewing audience a sense of the unity of people from all countries, religions and races. It is doubtful this image of a homeless family was selected to raise issues about poverty and the need for housing and welfare reform in Australia. Although Steichen wanted to encourage a shared sense of global responsibility between all people, a particular moral consciousness was asserted: individuals are responsible for other individuals, as they are in a family. Moore’s photograph represents a family already living in poverty, facing destitution.
The grandmother, or older woman, replaces the absence of the father. Her outward gaze, extended elbows and solid body sheltering the child appealing for reassurance at her feet, signifies this. She stands guard at the foot of the bed where her daughter has recently given birth. Despite this matriarch’s absorption of the needs and worries of the dependants surrounding her, the task seems too great. The photograph begs at the viewer by asking what might be seen as one of the interminable questions of the Antipodes; who else will take responsibility for this ‘manless’ family in need?

Figure 33
The homeless colonial woman

Prior to 1900 visual depictions of the homeless person in Australia had been largely limited to the quintessential swaggie, such as Down on his luck (c. 1893) by Nicholas Caire (1837-1918) portraying a swagman sheltering in a burnt-out tree. This theme of the transient lone male was replicated in the paintings of artists such as Frederick McCubbin (1885-1917) (Newton, 1988, p.65) and the literature of the bush. Such representations deployed and perpetuated a romanticised Anglo-European Australian icon rather than calling for social action, or change of any kind. Distinguished from the urban tramp, the home of the Australian swaggie was the ‘bush’ of the ‘outback’. In colonial mythology, the vast landscape of Australia constituted an untamed home for lone men and Aborigines. Women’s homefulness, on the other hand, remained firmly located within the domestic arena, holding down the homestead, waiting for the men to return, feeding and nurturing children, farm labourers and farm animals. In her manifestation as ‘the good fella missus’, whether pioneer’s wife, Australian daughter, or modern urban woman, the colonial woman was bound by, “goodness, natural or Christian piety, and female authority”, always occupying the role of the carer and nurturer – “she tends the sick, clothes the naked, and soothes the dying” (McGuire, 1995, pp.31-32).

Representations of women outside this role frequently portray them as aberrant, dangerous and threatening. For example, the woman in the painting by Russell Drysdale (1912-1981), titled The Drover’s Wife (figure 34) dominates the picture. Standing in the foreground, she even overwhelms the landscape. In the distance the figure of her husband, ‘the drover’, is barely discernable as he toils at repairing their cart. He appears to be oppressed by both the landscape and his wife, who looks out of the frame at the viewer, distanced from the harsh environment and her hard-working husband. Standing with her bag and forlorn face, she seems lost, on the verge of destitution.

Another example of this treatment of the ‘non-domestic’ woman is illustrated by the lack of representation of convict women. Their presence and role in convict histories
and colonial development is represented as: “at best ... a misspent resource, at worst as drunken, refractory nuisances draining the colony dry” (Oxley, 1996, p.1).

In 1876 John James (a self proclaimed Vagabond) wrote of the street workers of Melbourne:

Walk along Burke-street any night, and girls are to be seen—some merely children, “drifted, drifting, and half-anchored.” The state of morality amongst the working girls in Melbourne is worse than in Paris, and they commence their downward course earlier ... They are led astray by the love of fine clothes and admiration, coupled with early developed strong passions, and their fall is not purified by the ghost of love—love which is the essence of the life of a grisette. The Melbourne Magdalen goes her way wilfully, and of her own accord. She, as a rule has no shame for her wrong-doing, and false sentimentality should not be wasted on her. (James, 1969, p.29)

In either of her oppositional guises, whether nurturing and thus ‘good’, or corrupting and ‘bad’ the antipodean woman consistently occupied a representational space beneath, or at least clearly apart from, her male counterparts, even in destitution. Furthermore, women were not necessarily any more sympathetic to other women. Class often formed the basis of sympathetic interpersonal connections, rather than gender (van Krieken, 1991).

Whether male or female, colonial attitudes were, on the whole, harsh towards the poor and vagrant. Charitable organisations even put in place deliberate strategies to avoid assisting the needy in case they exploited the welfare system. For example the Melbourne Ladies Benevolent Society, established during Melbourne’s foundation years did not provide a central office, because it was believed this would, “attract the undeserving or itinerant” (Maunders, 1984, p.21). Those that applied for relief were assessed as, “Deserving, Undeserving, or Doubtful” and the Queen’s Fund established in 1887 would not provide assistance to women with drunken husbands (Maunders, 1984, p.21).
Figure 34

The masculinity of homelessness in Australia

Alan Jordan, a former social worker, completed a study of homeless men in Melbourne in 1973. Jordan’s research extended over ten years and included a significant photographic collection of the people he had met and worked with. Jordan cites the *The Argus* newspaper, which reported on the 20th May 1876 that the scrub along the banks of the Yarra River harboured numbers of older men and women who subsisted by begging food. Living out of doors throughout the summer months, in winter they would turn to the Immigrants’ Home, the Benevolent Asylum, or to crime in order to achieve jail accommodation. The reason for the men’s homelessness was identified as, ‘strong drink’ together with, “indolence and want of sufficient mental stamina to fight the battle of life”. The women, on the other hand, were described as, “chiefly outcasts whose age and faded attractions prevent them plying their trade” (cited in Jordan, 1994, p.2). The article further stated:

Vagrants and beggars are always dangerous. Individually of weak temperament, they do little harm to society, whilst the law which they fear so much keeps a strong hand on them. But let the reins be once relaxed, and their vicious ferocity will be all the more powerful for having been so long suppressed. (cited in Jordan, 1994, p.2)

Although the buoyant economy of capitalist expansion enjoyed by white Australians during the 1870s collapsed into depression by the 1890s, the destitute continued to be popularly construed as a scourge, even by so-called charitable institutions. The 1891 Annual Report of the Charity Organisation of Melbourne claimed, “Victoria was cursed by a disproportionately large floating body of beggars and vagrants” (cited in Jordan, 1993, p.2). On the other hand, the increasing visibility of the middle-classes amongst the destitute during this period meant that the Australian governments had to respond to poverty, and they did so with a, “stream of legislation” to address social problems, “if only because of the affront these conditions gave to established notions about the functioning of colonial society” (Dickey, 1980, p.98).
Australia’s first official public inquiry into housing the poor was instigated and conducted by Henry Parkes in 1860. It found that the living conditions in Sydney were little different from those of London. The Australian Government however resisted responsibility for provision of adequate housing, seeing this as a matter for private enterprise (Jones, 1972, p.4). No significant action was taken until the charity boom of the 1890s (Dickey, 1980, p.101). During which time, largely due to the philanthropic efforts of middle-class women, the needs of destitute single women, and women with children were brought to the forefront. Not all perceptions of the needy were unsympathetic. Dickey cites a Sydney missioner who wrote in 1892:

Privation among widows and other women who live by washing and charing. I have been able to get some of them work. Widow with three children to provide for, little work, fears to be turned out for rent. Another widow, six to provide for, not strong, work scarce. (cited in Dickey, 1980, p.103)

A hand-drawn sketch in the Illustrated Australian News, May 1st 1884, depicts the handing out of food at the South Melbourne market (figure 35). The majority of those receiving food are women. Two figures form the central focus of the picture. A man hands a food parcel to a woman, she takes it with one arm, while holding a baby to her breast with the other. A young girl appears to walk out of the picture plane, avoiding eye contact and veering right of the viewer. She cradles a tuckerbag almost as if it were a nursing child. No doubt the illustrator was aware that readers were likely to be more sympathetic to women who had children to feed, especially if this meant they were also nursing babies. This visibility of respectable women with children to feed amongst the poor was used to draw attention to an upsurge in poverty in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The same strategy was employed to emphasise the re-emergence of widespread homelessness one hundred years later, during the last decades of the twentieth century.

Apart from photographs of the institutions established for the accommodation, relief and reform of destitute women, pregnant girls and repentant prostitutes there are few images depicting homeless women in Australia available from this period, (although there are some lively written descriptions). As has been recognised this is couched
within the broader context of disinclination to use photography as a means for establishing need. Reluctance to illustrate the plight of homeless women is perhaps also related to the attitude that visibly destitute women were of such low moral character that portraying their images might have constituted a form of pornography.

![Image of the Poor of Melbourne being helped. Copyright 1980 © Brian Dickey.](image)

When charitable organisations did produce photographic images they seem to have been mainly for the purpose of promoting the success of reformatory policies. For example, Figure 36 depicts female residents of the Melbourne Orphan Asylum in 1910. Twelve irls of varying ages are seen in orderly arrangement in a kitchen setting. The girls wear clean starched and ironed dresses and aprons. Three of them hold plates showing their
cookery success. Their hair and clothes are uniform, suggesting conformity and discipline. This is mirrored in the organisation of the kitchen space and objects. Neatly labelled tins are lined up on a table that bears also a shiny utensil of some kind. Tables and benches are arranged in parallel, the girls stand in ordered lines at their edges. A latticed archway frames the picture’s vanishing point and contains the group within its trajectories. No one stands behind the line of demarcation drawn between the workspace and a room in the background, which is possibly the scullery. Light beams through a window on the left wall, and reflects on the floor in the right hand corner. Thus the girls are contained, protected and redeemed. All attentively face those who might be their viewers, displaying the effects of discipline on the exterior of their bodies – neatness, order, virtue and domestic productivity.

Ensnosed in this domestic setting, where nourishment, cleanliness and orderliness define not only the deportment, but also the worth of the subjects, the girls could not be further away from their supposedly contaminated and contaminating origins. Donella Jaggs describes the attitude expressed about, ‘misbehaving Victorian girls’ in an 1886 report by the Industrial and Reformatory Schools Department:

Misbehaving girls were believed to be ‘worse’ than boys and more difficult to reform because their defects seemed to be in their character, not merely their behaviour … Passionate and wilful, they posed problems for administrators and socially concerned citizens alike. When sent to reformatories, they had to be carefully assessed and segregated to ensure that they did not ‘degrade and contaminate’ each other. If the reformatories were unsuccessful in changing them, they were likely to swell the ranks of prostitutes, spread disease and beget more children for the criminal classes. Reformation of girls, accordingly, appeared to call for longer periods of control and even more zealous individual attention than the reformation of boys. (Jaggs, 1986, p.62)
Figure 36

The image is clearly an attempt to provide visual evidence of how a strict regime away from a morally deficient environment can transform ‘passionate and wilful’ girls into disciplined young women who are organised and organising. Protective concerns over age-inappropriate sexual behaviour and experience, even when resulting from sexual assault such as incest, constituted a large part of the rationale for institutionalising young women at this time (van Krieken, 1991, p.93). This photograph serves to inscribe a sense of order and control, converting the chaos of unregulated and morally unacceptable behaviour into a disciplined, domesticated sexuality that could find expression through the gender and class appropriate role of domestic servant, and ultimately house-keeper. In this way young women denied the protection of a caring, nurturing family could be removed from their contaminating environments, reformed and then introduced into middle-class life, to sustain and maintain the family through their domestic labour. It is important to be cautious of the ‘sexualization thesis’ that assumes sexual regulation has formed the central pivot in the institutionalisation of
young women. Rather, a collection of concerns over well being, sexuality, class, race and welfare meet in the, “blurring of care with control, of welfare with justice, and in the inversion of discourses of blame which make the victim … the guilty party” (Carrington, 1993, p.35). The critical gender issue, according to Kerry Carrington, is more about, “the masculinity of criminality [than] the sexualization of female delinquency” (1993, p.35). Similarly, the way homeless women have been photographically represented might be better understood through the concept of the masculinisation of homelessness, rather than simply as the sexualization and feminisation of poverty and destitution, although also important. Therefore, the following sections seek to further unravel the gendered implications of photographic representations of destitution.

The destitution of women amongst men
The photographic portrayal of homelessness and homeless people aimed at widespread public awareness and social reform did not achieve prominence in Australia until the 1970s and 1980s. Often collected and published in texts that contained images of (mostly) homeless alcoholic men, these portrayals are haunted by the documentary sensibilities of John Thompson and Jacob Riis.

In 1972 Barrie Bell, a photographer with Melbourne’s GTV9 television station won the Ilford Photographic competition with four photographs of ‘down and out’ mates. The theme of the competition was ‘concern’ (figures 37 & 38). Bell explains his objective was, “to convey concern for the plight of the ‘down and out’ but perhaps, in a humorous way, the concern these two share for each other” (Bell cited in Marks, 1972, p.10). Contrived and cliché, Bell’s images are intended to portray two men caught unawares in a city back lane against a backdrop of foreboding buildings. Framed by the architecture of heavy doorways, the ‘mates’ look out for one another in a cold, hostile, almost gothic environment. There is a strong sense that in viewing the photographs we are participating in spying on the two men, as if their mateship could only be covertly expressed. The men caring for one another tends to highlight the absence of female presence.
Figure 37

Barry Bell, *Concern No. 1*, 1972. Copyright 1972 © Barry Bell.
Figure 38

Back alleys, looming doorway arches, and park benches are common signifiers in the depiction of homelessness during this period. Alcohol is consistently identified as the key contributor and reason for remaining homelessness, rather than as a symptom, or one factor amongst an array of life experiences such as mental illness, long-term unemployment, disability, relationship breakdown and childhood histories of abuse and/or institutionalisation. The presence of women in these masculine spaces is described as anomalous, and associated also with alcoholism.

Jordan observes that the ratio of women to men on the streets in the 1960s was approximately one to ten (Jordan, 1994, p. 81). He captions a photograph of a homeless woman in a back alley (figure 39) by stating: “[t]here were women of similar type to the men, but not nearly as many ... This woman was drinking in a street in Fitzroy. She asked me for a cigarette and then sat for her picture” (Jordan, 1994, p.81). In 1981, a Professor of Community Medicine in New South Wales, wrote in the preface to a book of photographs produced by Leon Saunders, “[n]o estimates exist as to the number of homeless women, but they are less itinerant and subject to greater rejection by society than homeless men” (Webster in Saunders, 1981, p.vii). Both Jordan’s and Saunders’ volumes, produced in 1973 and 1981 respectively, centre on the homeless alcoholic male. While Jordan is explicit about his focus on homeless men, Saunders does not specify gender in his title. The representation of women in both volumes is largely limited to pointing out women’s comparative absence from skid-row.

Observations about the scarcity of homeless women in male skid-row environments serves to establish and reinforce the social marginalisation of the men by emphasising the domains of street-life as places devoid of the civilising and domesticating influence of women. Each of the chapters in Saunders’ text describes a particular homeless male or homeless haunt, with titles like Clairvoyant John or The Rocket Range. The last chapter is concerned with a trio, and here a woman’s name appears in the titles for the first time, Jimmy, Mary and Tilbury Bill. It is interesting to note the use of the name ‘Mary,’ which as noted in chapter five, Stephanie Golden claims to be an archetypal name for woman amongst homeless populations (Golden, 1992, p.19). Both Jordan’s and Saunders’ texts feature just one full page image each of a ‘down and out’ woman.
(figures 39 & 40). These two photographs share considerable similarities of form and content. Both women appear to be in their late middle age and are posed seated with hands together in their laps.

Each portrayal suggests the women are alcohol dependant. Saunders’ subject sits on what appear to be the steps of a pub, while Jordan’s image displays a near empty bottle in the background. The bodies of both women are turned towards the right side of the frame. Although Jordan’s subject looks straight at the viewer, her gaze is crooked, implying inebriation. The subject of Saunders’ depiction, viewed from a higher angle than Jordan’s looks down to the corner and out of the frame, suggesting disengagement, or perhaps resistance to the photograph being taken. Jordan, on the other hand has shot at equal eye-level, which would have required him to squat down (perhaps revealing his experience as a social worker). Both women have their mouths set, unsmiling, and are similarly attired, wearing coats over dresses. Neither is given a name, although Jordan provides a descriptive caption. Saunders’ portrayal of the sole woman is the only photograph in the book presented without accompanying explanatory text, indicating perhaps that little exchange was shared. The same woman’s photograph appears again in Chapter 14, titled Clairvoyant John (figure 41). Her portrait forms part of a pair of photographs on the same page and is positioned below that of the character that we can assume is ‘Clairvoyant John’. In this depiction she looks directly at the photographer/viewer, half smiling. The look is both knowing and resistant. There is no direct reference to this woman in John’s dialogue, which constitutes the text of the chapter. He speaks about and for himself, although in justifying why he is ‘a bit of a psychic’ John includes a woman in his story.
Figure 39

Figure 40
Copyright © Leon Saunders.
The woman in John’s tale has mystical powers, like the archetypal bag lady described by Golden (1992). She can foresee her own fate. At the same time the mysterious woman is the subject of John’s own mystical-religious vision. Yet again, the destitute woman is presented as a mythical figure offering selfless nurture, returning money to someone of equivalent material circumstances whilst claiming her own needs as secondary.

Both Saunders and Jordan downplay photography as a deliberate, or engaged practice. Saunders’ text assumes a photo-documentary style, without directly discussing photography or the act of taking photographs, except as incidental comment in the written descriptions and dialogues of his subjects. His photographs precede the written text, which form the effect of bringing the depicted characters to life. Jordan’s images, on the other hand are used to illustrate and reinforce the points he is making. Alan Jordan clearly did not see himself as an artistic photographer.

The case is more ambiguous with Saunders, particularly as his book was published with the support of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council. As close as we get to Saunders’ justification for producing his text is a description of how he nearly urinated, (accidentally of course) on a homeless man, with whom he subsequently shared a bottle of Muscat while listening to his new ‘mate’s’ life story. Saunders tells us: “[f]rom that day on I took a keen interest in the bums, and I’d go out of my way to have a yarn with them whenever they put the bite on me” (Saunders, 1981, p.xiv). Jordan, on the other hand grappled with the ethics of taking photographs of such a disadvantaged and vulnerable group:

I had to deal with the ethical problem in trying to compile a comprehensive set of photographs of homeless people in their physical and social environment. My subjects were often apprehensive and occasionally aggressive. Many were ashamed of their situation and would have preferred that no publicity be given to it. Believing, as I explained to some of the men, that most good would come from letting the truth be known, I took the responsibility of disregarding these objections. (Jordan, c 1973, n.p.)
Figure 41
Jordan and Saunders were primarily concerned with representing homeless men, although Saunders’ connection with his subjects was as another bloke in the park, while Jordan’s grew from his experience as a social worker and researcher. Their work not only typifies approach and purpose in photographically documenting homelessness and homeless people that has existed in Australian practice, it also reveals the construction of an imagined homeless subject as the down and out, alcoholic male – the disenfranchised, urbanised, ‘swaggie’ – a character who, “attracted more pathos than admiration” (Furlong, 2001, p. 10).

Such representation prevailed into the late twentieth century when the issue of women’s homelessness, and the range of differences amongst homeless people were promoted by lobby groups and researchers as evidence of an upsurge in the numbers of homeless. The sight of women in the domains of homeless men – the streets, crisis shelters, soup kitchens and boarding houses – was again used as evidence of the spreading extent of the extreme end of poverty. Although, as I have argued, even amid feminist lobbying, homeless women tended to be popularly construed as either the other of men’s homelessness, or rendered invisible. Mark Furlong’s statement that: “[t]he image of the old alcoholic who slept rough in the alley began to be replaced by a new figure: the bizarrely dishevelled, certainly drug taking, perhaps deranged, beggar-predator” (Furlong, 2001, p.10) illustrates the continuation of the construction of homelessness as masculine experience.

In spite of increased awareness of gender issues, portrayals of women as homeless in the late twentieth century continued to betray lived experience and right of agency. In order to pursue some of the representational transformations of the homeless subject, together with the themes of visibility and invisibility – sight and blindness – so persistently promoted in visual and written discourses of homelessness, the next chapter revisits North American and British social documentary images before finally returning to recent media portrayals in Australia.
Endnotes

88 Roberts argues the case for a dialectical realism that includes the categories of ‘realism’ and the ‘everyday’ as concepts for focussing on the cultural and social divisions that operate within the demands placed on cultural practices by the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production (Roberts, 1998, p. 11). Roberts seeks to “reinstate ‘realism’ and the ‘everyday’ as categories which inscribe the fundamental contradictions at play within photography’s relationship to art” (p 2). He further argues that an error of critical deconstructionist analysis of photographic practice, such as that offered by John Tagg, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, Hal Foster and Craig Owens has been the conflation of ‘realism’ with ‘positivism’, associating naturalistic/documentary photography with claims to ‘truth’ and subsequently resulting in perpetuation of the binary of determinism/pluralism and therefore the loss of a more complex understanding of ‘intention and use’ (pp. 4-5).

89 The special issue of Photofile, No. 58, 1999, titled ‘Document’ explores the idea and practice of contemporary documentary photography in Australia.

90 On the book cover the words are framed out, Carmel Bird provides the full text in the introduction.

91 In 1975 I completed a Tertiary Orientation Year in Visual Art. One of my teachers, who taught sculpture and printmaking and who had a particularly strong influence on me was scathing about any mass produced images of art, dismissing them as deceitful and valueless ‘photographic reproductions’.

92 The reproduction which you are viewing constitutes yet another version.

93 See for example, the photograph titled Emancipated Slaves brought from Louisiana by Col. Geo. H. Hanks in Kimball (1985) “Portraits of Emancipated Slave Children” in History of Photography, 9(3) p.191.


95 For example, on Saturday August 18, 2001, the front page of the Herald Sun displayed in colour a two year old boy with Down’s Syndrome under the headline, I NEED A HOME. The article appealed for adoptive parents for William, “because after weeks of agonising, William’s natural parents decided they could not give him the care he needed”.

96 Elizabeth McKenzie-Hatton was a ‘sympathetic white-woman’, who joined with the AAPA in the early 1920s. Goodall describes her as a, “stalwart and vigorous member of the Association, and apparently the only one who was not aboriginal” (Goodall, 1996, p. 151).

97 I am only discussing the image as news illustration and book cover here, but as indicated, it was also used for selecting a suitable child.

98 Some kind of patriotism urges me to believe the very concept of ‘homeless’ children in a country where everyone is entitled to a ‘fair go’ would have challenged the Australian identity as a generous and inclusive nation (no matter how flawed this really was), and yet as Jaggs points out, the colony was faced with the problem of large numbers of destitute and orphaned children from its early days (Jaggs 1986, p.19). For further discussion on child destitution in the early years of Australia’s settlement see also van Krieken, 1991, pp.45-60.


100 Cato describes the moment of photography’s birth, as 1835 when Henry Fox Talbot made his first paper negative of a window at his home in Lacock Abbey (1977: x). The site of the future city of Melbourne was first surveyed by Europeans in 1803 but not settled until 1835.

101 John Degotardi jnr. of the Public Works Department was commissioned to record the clean-up activities of slums at The Rocks in Sydney, where bubonic plague had broken out in 1900. These photographs are now collected in the album Plague Sydney 1901 – 1910 (Newton, 1988, p.88).
Twopeny was writing during a time of rapid expansion prior to the depression of 1890.

For a copy of this photograph; *Down on his Luck*, see plate 42 in Pitkethly & Pitkethly (1988) *N.J.Caire. Landscape photographer*.

For a thorough history of public housing in Australia which describes the sustained reluctance of the Australian government to take responsibility for housing the poor and destitute see Hayward, D, *The Reluctant Landlords? A History of Public Housing in Australia*. Http://www.infoexchange.net.au/rchome/jurch/s08

See for example the descriptions provided by the Vagabond, James, (1969) *The Vagabond Papers*, pp. 27-40, 249-256. (First published 1877-8).

Given time and resource constraints I was unable to locate any significant evidence suggesting that documentary photographs were used by organisations and groups as evidence of material need in Australia during this time. This is an area that requires more thorough research of Community and Social Service organisation archives.

Even then, the practice of social documentary photography was to be short lived. By 1990 Isobel Crombie was claiming of Victorian photography, “another characteristic of contemporary photography in Victoria is the absence of a strong body of overtly political images … Community or union based photography, which until recently was a significant and vital aspect of work produced in this state, has similarly declined” (Crombie & Byron, 1990, p.11).

Only two images of women appear amongst the twenty photographs in Jordan’s volume depicting homeless people. The other photograph (p 69) displays a woman in a white hat sitting in the centre of a room full of men receiving a weekly hand-out of sandwiches at the Fitzroy Methodist church hall. The caption states “Note the one woman”.

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Chapter Nine

In/visibility: The unseeing subject, the unseen photographer and the photograph

If thou wilt know the invisible
Look closely upon the visible!
(Talmudic saying cited in Sieker, 1989, p. 114)

The new homeless woman

Since the late 1970s socially concerned documentary makers, photographers, welfare and community workers, human service organisations and homeless people themselves have attempted to redress the stereotyping of homeless individuals as not only male and alcoholic, but as oppressed and powerless victims. In spite of much good will and intention, various authors observe the resultant representations have not necessarily provided less stigmatising portrayals (see for example, Ballerini, 1997; Furlong, 2001; Koven, 1997; Platt, 1999; Rosler, 1993; Rossiter, 2001).

Mary Ellen Mark’s Streetwise (1988), Jim Goldberg’s Raised by Wolves (1995) and Howard Schatz’s Homeless: Portraits of Americans in hard times (1993) are examples of socially concerned photo-documentary texts that claim to present faithful representations of the homeless, relating the stories of the photographed characters through a conjuncture of speech, writing and image for authenticity. The preferred approach in these exposés is to utilise a frank and confronting style of portraiture that clearly makes no attempt to conceal the subjects’ scars and flaws, in fact these are often features of the image. The narrative might describe the circumstances in which the photographs were taken, the subjects’ situations, transcriptions of verbal comments (see chapter five) or direct copies of (often awkward) hand-written statements. The reader is notionally offered an insider view of the homeless person mediated by the more privileged position occupied by the photographer. Through this unique relationship in which a conversation is established between photographer and subject, the intention is
to present the reality of an individual who has suffered a seemingly endless run of misfortune. In this way popular understandings of homelessness are simultaneously affirmed and challenged. At times the writer shares their own insights, establishes a rationale or provides background to their exposé. In the majority of these examples the activity required of the reader/viewer is to observe and acknowledge the human vulnerability and victim status of those depicted. In others there is an appeal to enter the discourse and become part of the intimate exchange that took place as the camera clicked.

Julia Ballerini (1997) argues that such projects – despite the genuine concern and commitment of the photographers to their subjects’ circumstances, depoliticise social issues through their emphasis on family values and, "promotion of individual moral transformation" (Ballerini, 1997, p.162). Further, these types of documentary projects provide new opportunities to play out the, "ambivalent desires and fears" about, "untamed and uncivilised" people and territories (Ballerini, 1997, p.162) which were previously explored and enacted through colonisation. Alongside these portrayals which seek to establish moral justification through a sympathetic and non-judgemental approach, the homeless continue to be divided into ‘deserving’ victims and ‘undeserving’ villains. Despite concerted efforts by social welfare organisations and the media, it has proven extremely difficult to represent homeless people as anything other than victims (Platt, 1999, p.105).

Endeavours to deviate from an individualising victim pathology have frequently resulted in the representation of homeless children as animalised – hunted and predatory inhabitants of alleyways and deserted dwellings (Rossiter, 1993; 2001). The children in Mark and Bell’s Streetwise (1988), portrayed as scavenging to survive in an inhospitable and mortally dangerous world, are caught within this representational trap. The ‘real’ characters, those who dwell in Pike Street, Seattle, USA, provide a ready made cast\textsuperscript{109} and the necessary elements of oppression, victimisation and dehumanisation required for a successful script. In the introduction to Streetwise (1988) John Irving comments:
The children of Pike Street are runaways; when I first saw Mary Ellen Mark’s photographs of them – in the spring of 1983 – I knew they were perfect characters for an important story, because they were both perfect and important victims. The characters in any important story are always victims; even the survivors of an important story are victims. At the time, Seattle’s Green River Killer had already murdered 28 young girls, yet the teenagers of Pike Street were holding their own – pimps, prostitutes, and petty thieves, they were eating out of dumpsters, falling in love, getting tattooed, being treated for venereal diseases passed on to them by their customers. (Irving, 1988, p. xiii)

In short, the inhabitants of Pike Street were surviving against all odds. The central character in Streetwise (1988) is described as, “a fourteen year old girl, malnourished, an accomplished prostitute with a lengthy record of occupational diseases; her alcoholic mother says that Tiny’s prostitution is ‘just a phase’ ” (Irving, 1988, p.xiii). Tiny’s black and white image graces the front cover (figure 42). Wearing a black dress, black veiled pillbox hat and black gloves, she glares at the viewer from beneath the netting covering her eyes. Her arms are crossed; gloved hands clutch pale skinny arms. The image is repeated again on the last page, and here we learn that Tiny is dressed for Halloween. Throughout the book we see Tiny in a range of settings, on the streets, reclining on a bed, blowing bubble-gum, resting her head on her mother’s shoulder. Many of the photographs of Tiny and her street companions are accompanied by Tiny’s commentary.

The first portrait of Tiny appearing within the covers of the text shows her wearing a leather jacket; in a bandaged hand she holds a flower. There are cigarettes in her top pocket and she glares directly at the viewer/photographer. The accompanying quote is by Pat, (Tiny’s mother), who explains that Tiny, “has grown up since she’s been on the streets. She’s fourteen going on twenty-one”(Mark, 1988, n.p.110). As we work through the book Tiny comments on the perversion of men who like little girls, the cost of a blow job, her desire to own horses, yachts and jewellery. There are pictures of Tiny captioned with Pat’s expressions of unconditional love, and fear for Tiny’s safety. Pat is cast in the role of the neglectful parent, a product of her own history of victimisation. This narrative of unchecked deviancy constitutes a perpetuation of the Victorian belief that the behaviours of the lower, criminal and dangerous classes must be kept under
control for the safety of middle-class society. At the same time the capacity of these types of people to endure and survive their toxic lives is represented as an astounding feat of human survival.

Figure 42
The character of Pat – the dangerous mother – provides a locus through which the audience can play out and appease their own uncertain morality, and within which they (we) can locate responsibility for the cause and solution to Tiny’s circumstances. The viewer’s own role in oppression is obscured by the simultaneous activity and passivity of looking. As Stott (1973) and Berger (1980) observe, photographs that use human agony to confront the remote viewer present discontinuous moments, events and scenes that exist outside of the viewer’s life-world, experience and often comprehension. This can result in the viewer interpreting this disjuncture as, “their own personal moral inadequacy” (Berger, 1980, pp. 39-40). The resultant shock response depoliticises the moment portrayed, and the image, “becomes evidence of the general human condition. It accuses nobody and everybody” (Berger, 1980, p.40).

The in/visible homeless woman

Howard Schatz describes a moment when he was confronted by his own disjuncture with the experience of destitution. Shocked by a scene so different it was barely comprehensible, Schatz realised the only way to come to terms with what he saw was to make a photograph of it. His rationale was to be able to look more closely in order to make sense of, and perhaps also reconcile, what he was seeing. Schatz explains:

She gazed straight ahead, not looking anyone in the eye, as if not to be seen. Business people and shoppers walked by. At the time, begging on city streets in the United States was rare and the sight of this woman shocked and moved me. In order to know who she was, I needed to see her and to make a photograph; and I wanted others to see it.

(Schatz, 1993, p.vii)

Schatz discloses his desire to look at, to see, to gaze upon, not only a destitute woman, but also one who was unable through physical disability, or perhaps unwilling due to shame, to meet the gaze of those who read her sign. As readers of Schatz’s text we are left uncertain of the woman’s capacity to see. At the same time Schatz describes how his own ability to see, and thus know, is enabled and mediated through his camera lens. His account (which is not accompanied by a photograph) states that only by taking a photograph could he know the real woman. Schatz’s description evokes Paul Strand’s well-known image titled Blind Woman in New York, 1916 (figure 43).
Reading Strand’s reflections on his portraits of 1915-1916\textsuperscript{112} my first impression is that these two photographers, Schatz and Strand were using their cameras for very different reasons due to distinctly different codes of morality and loyalty between the two historical periods. Strand, accountable to the art of photography, seemed driven by an aesthetic conviction to produce ‘straight’ photographs uncontaminated by, “other people’s vision” (Strand cited in Gernsheim, 1991, p.154). Although his words at times reveal the objectification of people as subjects for his images, Strand stated, “I always felt that my relationship to photography and to people was serious, and that I was attempting to give something to the world and not exploit people. I wasn’t making
picture postcards to sell" (cited in Tomkins, 1979, pp. 71-72). Strand is also quoted as having said, "I never questioned the morality of it" (cited in Tomkins, 1979, p.71). To be fair this attitude is perhaps more revealing of the discursive regime particular to that historical period than Strand’s personal ethics. Similar to Riis’ detachment from his subjects, Strand did not allow himself to risk engagement with the people he portrayed.

Perhaps less honest than Riis (although there is little doubt Riis would have used hidden cameras if he could) Strand concealed his camera, believing the resultant image, in denying the subjects’ awareness, would reveal the essence of the captured moment. Consistent with the philosophies of the photo-secessionists, Strand held that the beauty of the truth would be revealed through the encapsulated photographic moment. He wrote:

Subject matter all around me seemed inexhaustible. I began to explore the close-up. The portraits of New York street characters represent another trend in experimentation. This was to photograph people without their being conscious of being photographed. The technique I used was a false lens screwed to the side of my 3¼ in. x 4¼ in. camera. [my italics] (Strand cited in Gernsheim, 1991, p.152)

Strand’s hidden camera work did not last for very long. He describes how he stopped taking concealed-camera shots when challenged by a fortune-teller:

I saw an old woman with a cage of parakeets. She was selling fortunes, which the birds would peck out. I walked by her without even opening the camera, and then a little later I came back, and she immediately attacked me. “You’re not going to take my picture!” she said. It was like mental telepathy. Anyway that finished me, at least for the time being. I decided to wait for a better technique. (cited in Tomkins, 1979, p. 72)

Despite Strand’s apparent naivety and humility, I am reluctant to interpret the image, Blind Woman in New York, as anything other than the site of a composite of betrayals. Strand exploited the woman’s clearly advertised inability to see, in stealing the shot and also by permitting the circulation of her likeness for public consumption. He presented her image as a form of art in which the absence of classical beauty signified truth. This is a dialectical inversion of truth and beauty in visual representation, which
subsequently folds back onto itself. The absence of beauty is put forward as beautiful, suggesting that it is the image as object that holds the beauty and not the 'real' woman, whereas her actual embodiment represents the ugliness of life and humanity. There is no evidence to suggest Paul Strand had any intention of assisting this woman, or of raising awareness of her circumstances as a social issue. Although the image may be described as a social document, it is not about changing this woman’s circumstances, but about the voyeurism of art, watching a woman who cannot look back, and at the same time raising doubts about her honesty; perhaps she can see through her (almost squinting) left eye? (Westerbeck & Meyerowitz, 1994).

The woman, a newspaper seller labelled as blind, appears to be looking away, to be avoiding the photographer’s gaze. “Her dead eye draws our compassion at the same time that the acquisitive gleam in her other eye, as it scans the street, makes us suspicious” (Westerbeck & Meyerowitz, 1994, p. 95). It is possible that Strand’s representation is a projection of his own guilt for the dishonesty of stealing the blind woman’s image. Or perhaps Strand’s objective approach exposes his primary loyalty to the aesthetic of modernism, in which all people and objects are reduced to disengaged shape and form. Reflecting on why he took photographs of street people, Strand claimed, “I photographed these people because I felt that they were all people whom life had battered into some sort of extraordinary interest and, in a way, nobility” (cited in Trachtenburg, 1990, p. 16). Strand’s concealed camera provided him with, “a mantle of invisibility” (Trachtenberg, 1990, p.16). Naomi Rosenblum suggests Strand used the camera’s concealment to overcome, “the forced relationship that frequently develops when photographer and subject are of different social classes”. She further states that Strand achieved this, “unqualified – almost embarrassing – directness of expression [by avoiding] interpersonal tensions” (Rosenblum, 1990, p.41). And yet, Strand’s photography according to Trachtenberg (1990) was about social change. Trachtenberg suggests that Strand sought to, “engage photography in the process of social change by depicting the unchanging, the timeless, the universal” (Trachtenberg, 1990, p.16). Although modernist and progressive, it would seem Strand somewhat enigmatically sought to achieve change by confronting the optimism of the new with the unyielding and unchanging old; that which capitalism’s progressiveness could not undo. In this
contradictory vein the subject of *Blind Woman in New York* is both victim and survivor; her portrayal suggests a form of resistance that unavoidably becomes a further act of victimisation. She cannot overcome her otherness, and is thus robbed of hope.

Schatz, on the other hand, in describing a photographic moment that occurred more than sixty-five years later, is not able to avoid expressing his efforts to engage with homeless people for his photographic project, nor is he able to entertain the belief that objective distance is a more moral practice. Schatz is not permitted the personal comfort of concealing his camera from the people he wishes to portray. This might be because social documentary photography in the late twentieth century is less tolerant of impressions *about* people, placing emphasis instead on providing impressions *of* people. Although some beliefs are enduring, there have also been significant attitudinal changes amongst some groups towards the marginalised since 1916. It is doubtful Howard Schatz would have achieved a sense of authenticity, or attracted the support of a 1990s audience for a publication portraying unwilling subjects, or that even covertly suggested the disadvantaged were dishonest or undeserving. Consent has become a moral issue and a legal obligation in many contexts where photographs are now taken.

Setting up a studio in the streets of San Francisco, Schatz established relationships with the subjects of his photographs, asking various questions about their well being, such as where they ate, slept and the source and level of their income. Schatz is emphatic about his desire to see the faces of the people he met, “I wanted to see – to look directly at each face. I used a dark cloth as a backdrop, so that no other information (locale, street signs, other people) would distract from the eye-to-eye, face-to-face experience … always attempting to be respectful and warm” (Schatz 1993, p.viii). Schatz does not want to simply see his subjects; he wants the experience of connecting with the homeless away from the chaos of their transient environments, as if the illusional eye-to-eye contact, facilitated by the fall of a shutter was akin to a form of communion.

There are traces of Thompson and Smith’s *Street Life in London* in Schatz’s work. As with the subjects of Thompson and Smith’s 1877 and Leon Saunders’ 1981 texts, each of Schatz’s ‘homeless’ subjects is engaged in conversation and encouraged to tell *their*
own story. Rather than offering food and money, as did Thompson and Smith, Schatz offers the subjects portraits of themselves\textsuperscript{13}. However, it is perhaps in providing an explanation for the subjects' homelessness that Schatz's similarity to Thompson and Smith's projects is most revealing. Schatz identifies individual misfortune as the reason for destitution, thus revealing his primary occupation as an image maker rather than informed social reformer. Schatz's words are underwritten by a sense of fatalism:

For many, homelessness in a large part results from misfortune or accident: familial, emotional, social, and economic. An individual cannot choose his or her genetic make-up or skin color. One's social and emotional development, degree of parental care and guidance, family structure, and early education are not matters of choice ... The vast majority of homeless people are poor and vulnerable, struggling desperately and suffering helplessly and hopelessly. They don't know how to or just can't get out from under. [my italics] (Schatz, 1993, pp. x-xii)

Like Strand, Schatz used the camera to look more closely at the 'other'. In the examples I describe here, this 'other' was not only a destitute person, but also a destitute woman. The difference between Strand's approach and that of Schatz is not who does the looking, or who is looked at, but how the looking is done. Schatz does not even need to show us the image on which his confessional introductory rationale is based. For anyone familiar with North American social and documentary photography, his description evokes the image of Strand's \textit{Blind Woman in New York, 1916}\textsuperscript{14}. For readers unfamiliar with that particular photograph, there is little doubt they will be able to draw on their own mental store of urban icons. The iconography of a homeless woman begging on the streets is now so solidly implanted in the social psyche of the developed world that we do not have to look at an actual image; we carry it with us. She appears as an enigmatic, pitiable yet powerful figure in novels, newspapers, movies and television programs. It is worth noting that since the mid twentieth century people are far more likely to have seen a photographic (or digital) representation of something, than to have ever seen the thing itself (Longford, 1999, p.164). As Jean Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum purports, this incessant, insatiable visual fodder produces, perpetuates and responds to, an almost addictive fascination (Baudrillard, 1988). Fed by these countless, daily representations from newspapers, television and computer
screens, advertising, movies, and publicity campaigns, we not only gaze upon, but like Schatz, attempt to consume the other through their representation and constant re-representation as simulacra.

In the closing statement of the introduction to his book, Schatz describes his moral imperative to keep the homeless visible through their representation:

Since the sight of homeless people in the streets has become so common, we have stopped noticing. We don’t want to be caught looking. It is easier to keep on walking, to ignore them, and to imagine that they are not there. I made these photographs because I had to look. (Schatz, 1993, p.xi)

Schatz dealt with the moral issue of observing and photographing homeless people by setting up a street studio, engaging them in conversation and offering to take their portraits. His approach, like that of many social documentary photographers, such as Dorothea Lange and her contemporaries, assumes that awareness is an active and productive behaviour, that photographs of real people, “awaken the viewer’s conscience and incite action” (Rosenblum, 1994, p.204). Although the documentary photographs of Lange, Schatz, Saunders, Thompson and Riis retain an albeit representational presence of the destitute in the minds of those privileged enough to view their images and texts, the visibility of the homeless has not always resulted in actions to their advantage. Large urban centres more frequently seek to have the homeless removed from public sight, rather than addressing their circumstances in any substantial way.

During the 1970s the genre of social documentary photography was challenged by writers such as John Berger (1977) and Susan Sontag (1979). Sontag, echoing Berger’s sentiments stated, “‘concerned’ photography has done as much to deaden conscience as to arouse it” (Sontag, 1979, p.21). Informed by the idea that ultimately all photographs aestheticise their subjects for a consumer market (Sontag, 1979, p.110), some photographers took the position that publicly portraying realistic, documentary style images of socially disadvantaged and marginalised people was a further exploitation. More recently this opinion has been avidly expressed through criticisms of Dorothea Lange’s Migrant Mother (figure 5) that claim the photograph’s subject, Florence Neil,
never benefited personally from the image’s proliferation. Florence Neil’s daughter, Katherine McIntosh, five years old when the picture was taken, laments, “Lange had told mother it would never be published and that it was to help people in the Depression. Now I think it has gone far enough … what upsets us is that people are making money out of our mother’s pain” (McIntosh quoted in Lennon, 1999, p.4).

Martha Rosler (1992), Paula Rabinowitz (1994) and Sally Stein (1983) are amongst those who take issue with the effectiveness of documentary photography in bringing about social change. They claim also that in most cases the photographer’s personal and professional benefit far exceeds any advantages achieved for the subjects through the actual photographs. On the other hand, Vicki Goldberg (1993) asserts that documentary imagery has played a significant role in influencing social reform (Goldberg, 1993, p.163). Offering a less polarising perspective, Rosenblum suggests that for some the issue is less about the ethics of taking the photograph, than the problem of saturation, and thus overkill of the issue at hand. Like Berger and Sontag, Rosenblum observes that the sheer volume of images intended to disturb the viewer have resulted in a diminished ability to effectively respond (Rosenblum, 1994, p.204).

Some photographers have also become concerned with the impact public representation as a disadvantaged person or group has on the portrayed individuals, their families and communities. In 1988 Kristine Larsen produced a series of photographs of homeless women in New York in which the faces of the women are scratched out. It is unclear whether her intention was to protect the identity of the women, or to make a political statement about their status as ‘nonpersons’ (Rosenblum, 1994, p. 204) (figure 44). At first glance the depicted anonymous woman, rugged up in an assortment of clothing, at least two scarves, long pants, coat and jacket, seems to have her face obscured by winter-bare tree branches and twigs. The trees in the background lend support to this perception, as does the iron-rail fence, suggesting the woman is standing either inside or outside a park. In the bottom left corner the purpose of a wire bin is uncertain, the bin may contain supplies, or the marks may indicate flames. We might be seeing a ‘bag lady and rubbish bin’ (source of provisions) or ‘bag lady and fire brazier’ (source of warmth). Even though it is unclear why the woman stands near the bin, she appears to
be turning away from it, and perhaps from the photographer. The sleeves of her jacket cover her hands. The only clearly distinguishable part of her body is her chin.

Figure 44

Looking at where her face should be there is the sudden realisation that the woman’s features have been scored out. When first viewing this photograph I was confused. My impression was that the woman had actually been attacked. The marks on the photograph are concentrated where the woman’s eyes would be, as if having been gorged. There is no way of telling her capacity to see, but it is clear that in her
representation she is blinded, and we are denied seeing all but the winter clothing covering her body.

Larsen’s image has effective emotional impact as it violently confronts the viewer without showing or describing an actual incident, leaving her message open. The violence, uncomfortably personal and aggressive, is also an abstraction. Larsen as the photographer has vandalised her own representation. In desecrating a representation of the representation, ‘homeless woman’, she has produced an image that positions homeless women as victims. She also attacks her own position (and thus ours) as the privileged observer. What the viewer might have seen is already destroyed, and thus we are also blinded. The violated image in this photograph is forever cast as a corruption. It simultaneously constructs and disrupts the sign ‘homeless woman’ by stressing the violence permitted and constructed by photographic representation in the public arena. I have no written clues leading me to an understanding of Larsen’s intentions and am left trying to make sense of the meaning through imagining its political, ideological and social context. Although the appearance of this photograph in Vogue magazine (Rosenblum 1994, p.204) provides some idea of political objective, the photographer’s intentions (as do most authors’) remain obscured, like the identity of the woman herself.

During the 1980s when this photograph was first published the distinctions between art and documentary in photographic practice were not only realised by many photographers to be arbitrary, but were deliberately collapsed. This was no doubt, in part driven by increased efforts to politicise the social injustices imposed by Governments retreating from social welfare obligations. At the same time, it contributed to expanding the audience by appealing to the more traditional art market, in which individual identity is lost in all but portraiture of the famous and notorious. Perhaps there are shades here, also of the Victorian middle and upper classes’ preference for aestheticised images of the poor.
Blindfolds of photojournalism

In photojournalism and news reportage occasional obscuring of the subject’s face is an established practice. This usually takes the form of blacking out the eyes, or more recently, digitally scrambling the entire face. This has the dual function of safeguarding the subject’s identity and protecting the media corporation against litigation. The black rectangle commonly signifies proximity with the law – criminality, the involvement of the individual with the legal system, or their status as a statutory client, such as a ward of the state. As with more artistically or politically sophisticated representations, rather than being obliterated, the subject is deliberately simultaneously displayed, exposed, obfuscated and redefined, rendered at once invisible and visible through the photojournalistic text.

During late November 2000, The Melbourne-based tabloid, the Herald Sun ran a series of articles, which ran over a consecutive three-day period, titled “Clean Up Our Streets”. Images depicted ‘beggars’ ‘addicts’ and ‘squatters’, graffiti and police. In two of the fifteen images young people’s faces are obscured, one with a black rectangle across the eyes, the other is digitally scrambled. Both of these photographs appear on the first day of the series. The first is in colour and fills the right bottom quarter of the front page (figure 45). Two young people climb out of what looks like an underground tunnel or drain. The caption is written thus; “Holed up: two squatters emerge from their city home” (Hodder, 2000, p.1). We can clearly see the face of one bare shouldered young man, the top of his head is haloed by bright sunlight. He looks up, directly into the camera, and thus at the viewer. The eyes of the other ‘squatter’, who it appears would have also looked straight out at the viewer, are obscured by the black rectangle. There is no obvious explanation as to why the face of one young person and not the other is obscured. The picture sits directly below the headline, “Shame of our city”.

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Figure 45

Jon Hargest, *Holed up: two squatters emerge from their city home.*
Front cover photo Herald Sun newspaper, 21/11/00.
Courtesy of Newspix.
On page four of the same newspaper, the storyline continues as a double page spread. Page five displays two more colour images, the larger of these depicts a bare-footed young person crouched on stone steps that lead to large graffiti-covered metal doors (figure 46). Paper and plastic bags, and other debris are scattered around the figure. The gender of the subject is not clear, although hairstyle and posture create the impression of a young woman. Despite the subject looking down, what might have been the visible portion of their face is digitally scrambled. Rather than enhancing authenticity, together with the hastily removed sports shoes and the clumsy enactment of shooting up, the effect throws the realism of the image into question.

The selection of location for the activity is also somewhat unusual; in full public view, seated in the middle of a set of stone steps. It is apparent the author wants the reader to believe this is an everyday occurrence. The caption reads, “[n]othing’s hidden: amid the litter and graffiti a young addict shoots up” (Hodder, 2000, p.5). The reporter, Rachel Hodder, describes her incognito entrée into the, “depressing, intimidating and at times dangerous stretch”, which is Melbourne’s Swanston Street, once Melbourne’s ‘Golden Mile’. The squat (depicted on the front page by its entrance hole) is described as, “something out of a Hollywood movie” (Hodder, 2000, p.5). The homeless life in Melbourne is portrayed as the replication of fiction produced by a billion-dollar mass entertainment industry. The homeless of Melbourne and their environs are simulacra, representations of a representation. The face of this ‘new’ homelessness is teenagers injecting drugs in full public view and living in underground squats that reek of urine. Their faces obscured, like monstrous phantoms, homeless youth dare to come out during the day, lurking amid the other detritus caused by the fast food chains and discount stores, that also affront, “some of Melbourne’s most lavish and expensive buildings” (Hodder, 2000, p.5).
Figure 46

Jon Hargest, *Nothing's Hidden: amid the litter and graffiti, a young addict shoots up.*

Courtesy of Newspix.
The irony is not so much as Hodder suggests, that immoral behaviour occurs amongst cheap and shoddy businesses on the doorsteps of some of Melbourne’s most noble architecture. It is in the tabloid’s sustained emphasis on the criminality and immorality of impoverished and marginalised people going about their daily life within an environment essentially demarcated for commercial businesses. There is no evidence of concern with the gross injustices these people have experienced at the hands of free-market capitalism, and the unravelling of Government responsibility towards the marginalised. Still the news media demonise the poor, construing them as uncivilised and uncivilising, so abhorrent that they can only be compared with the fantasy horror of Hollywood. They are not permitted a place in the real world. Their manufactured visibility is cause for their further exclusion. It is as Pat Carlen writes:

While homelessness in itself has been a site of struggle over social change since the sixteenth century, in western democracies **visible homelessness** has also perennially activated anxieties and ambivalences about the moral foundations of both citizen security (of person and property) and state legitimacy … at the end of the twentieth century, the conditions of misery, poverty and exploitation which the welfare state was supposed to abolish still flourish. [my italics] (Carlen, 1996, p.81)

This series attracted considerable criticism from homelessness activists. An edition of *Parity* (2001), a journal produced by the Melbourne-based “Council To Homeless Persons”, included a number of articles objecting to this media stereotyping". Mark Furlong comments: “[t]his denigrating and scare-mongering image converges the mentally ill with the drug addicted thus constructing new, and doubly disturbing phenomena. This troubling figure is dangerously ‘masculine’ ” (Furlong, 2001, p.10). Ben Rossiter observes, “[t]he nebulous notion of the ‘undesirable’ has shifted into an open hostility and contempt for homeless people. The homeless are now scum that must be ‘cleaned’ from the ‘dirty old town’, the once proud and gracious city now crumbling into urban decay” (Rossiter, 2001, p.13).

Such representation of the homeless elicits images of the dangerous, dark and dank nineteenth century Victorian city of London, gripped into a state of terror by threatening characters such as Jack the Ripper. Surely, though, the irony is obvious, street working
prostitutes were the target of Jack’s sadistic murderous attacks, and there is common belief that Jack was a middle-class ‘gentleman’. So one has to wonder, who is most at risk in the retrograde Melbourne of these Victorian fantasies.

While these vilifying images of homeless people as, “obscene parasites” (Furlong, 2001, p.9) and, “feral runaways” (Rossiter, 2001, p.12) continue to be popular with the media, these are masculinized representations. The women that are portrayed are ascribed with stereotypically masculine features such as personal neglect, substance addiction, anti-sociality, hostility, violence and aggression. They are isolated, non-productive individuals unable to care for or nurture others, and are thus construed as undeserving. At the same time other treatments of the homeless subject have been asserted and circulated, often in challenge to these damning portraits and in respect for the dignity of people so unjustly portrayed. As I have explored throughout this thesis, these less demeaning attempts at representation are often attached to femininity. The cultural signifiers of homelessness and woman converge to produce a redeemable subject.

On Saturday 12th June 1999 The Age newspaper ran a cover story titled, “[s]oaring from the streets to the heavens”. The introductory line reads, “it is when she sets her face to sing that the fight falls from her eyes, squeezed out by the surrender to bliss” (Elder, 1999, p.1). The colour portrait (figure 47) is of an angelic young woman, Isabel. Her face is sun-lit, a forest, or garden constitutes half the picture frame and forms the backdrop. Isabel is wearing a school blazer, and looks serenely over her left shoulder at the viewer. With doe-like eyes and a satisfied half-smile, she leans her back against a broken brick wall. Her face is angelic, if not saintly; in fact the opening paragraph recalls descriptions of the ecstasies of medieval female saints. Paragraph three spells it out for the reader; Isabel is 17 years old, and homeless, she is also about to fly (soar) to England to sing at St Paul’s (heavenly) cathedral. After a childhood of anguish (seemingly self-inflicted), placements in care, suicide attempts, psychiatric interventions and stealing to survive, Isabel is on the path to redemption.
Determination to succeed in education, her angelic voice, the assistance of St Vincent de Paul’s Access Youth Support program, and ‘caring, worried’ parents, are seeing Isabel through the (miraculous) process of her exit from homelessness. Isabel is described as having, “kicked with all her might against the worthy expectations of the people who had called her to life. It was hell for everyone” (Elder, 1999, p.1). Now, with clear skin, bright eyes, tidy hair and the voice of an angel, Isabel is heavenly bound, she is moving away from the downward spiral that leads to destitution.

In this representation homelessness becomes the signifier for having surmounted the impossible. The qualities of traditional femininity – a voice that, “catches in your chest like the soft call of a glass bell” (Elder, 1999, p.1), the ability to manage and survive on a starvation budget (the article claims Isabel saved $1,000 while on Austudy allowance), and the discipline to maintain her education while transient – represent the means of achievement. Isabel’s image draws links with religious joy and ethereality as her accomplishments and self-discipline signify hope for other homeless young people.

At the same time a more discomforting message is conveyed – the homelessness of children can result from their own unmanageability (it is their fault). Further, overcoming family disconnection and state-care requires the heroic conviction of the child. Only when this is proven, as in Isabel’s case, do big rewards follow. For the Saturday morning reader this fable might be reassuring, while for homeless young people it is likely to remain a fairy tale.
Figure 47

Matthew Boumeester. *Isabel, a runaway whose singing will take her from St Paul’s Cathedral in Melbourne to London.*

The subject of new homelessness

The commencing chapters of this thesis described the phenomenon of the swelling numbers of homeless people during the late 1970s in the streets of major cities of Western Europe, the United States (Wagner, 1997), Great Britain (Carlen, 1996) and Australia (Hallebone, 1997) (see chapter two). Key contributing factors are described as the effects of economic downturn and subsequent adjustments to fiscal policy in order to address balance-of-payment deficits (Hallebone, 1997, p.68); gentrification of low cost housing; the withdrawal of federally and regionally funded public housing and welfare programs, and increasing poverty due to rising unemployment (Daly, 1997, p.107). Women with children were identified as the largest growing subset of this new homeless population (Carlen, 1988; Huth, 1997; Rossi, 1990; Tierney, 1989; Watson & Austerberry, 1986). Within this climate of increasing social problems, retreating Government responsibility for social welfare, and return to Victorian social values and welfare policy (Carlen, 1996, p.4) there was a revival of the documentary zeal of the 1930s and 1940s, in which I was a participant. However, “[d]espite its archival palimpsestry” (Carlen, 1996, p.6), social documentary photography at this time was also a product of its postmodern location.

Photography as a professional and academic activity enjoyed a new status in the last quarter of the twentieth century, even though direct government funding for social documentary photography programs had all but disappeared. Photography was being offered at post-secondary levels not only as a technical course, but also as theoretical discipline, informed largely by the work of social and cultural theorists such as Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, John Berger and later Victor Burgin. The ready availability of 35 mm SLR cameras meant everyone had access to taking professional quality prints. Despite much critique of the assumed reality of the photographic image, photographs retained considerable evidentiary authority and were used to record events at political rallies, demonstrations and women’s marches. While the news media continued to provide a forum for the work of photojournalists, documentary photographers were left to seek opportunities to display their work through visual art avenues such as galleries and large format, glossy coffee table publications. For many, distinctions between documentary and art became far less important than their conflation, as the survival of
documentary depended on establishing its status and public acceptance as art. The documentary photographs of the 1930s, such as those produced out of the FSA were now becoming collector’s items (Rosenblum, 1994). The rapid rise in popularity of photography as a course in its own right within Visual Arts education, particularly in the United Kingdom (Roberts, 1998) saw the emergence of a more critical and subjective form of photography intended to convey meaning according to the prejudices of the viewer (Longford, 1999, p. 179).

During this period the feminist movement also exercised considerable effect on political, social and cultural life and activity. Feminist photographers created an eclectic intermix of art, documentary, self-reflection and self-parody to produce ironic commentary on the life experiences of women and their portrayal in visual media. Critique of the representation of women and women’s bodies as objects for male sexual pleasure became a key focus of feminist concern across almost every form of visual media (see Janeway, 1974; Kuhn, 1985; McRobbie and Naven, 1984; Mulvey, 1991; Nochlin, 1991; Pollack, 1988; Spence and Holland, 1991). A deliberate intention of this activity was to throw into question women’s individual and collective identity. For example, Jo Spence simultaneously re/presented and erased her patriarchal ‘self’ by inscribing a self-image more closely attuned to who she felt that she was, or appeared to be (see Spence, 1988). This interception of the photographer’s own image in the photograph, particularly a politicised self would have been considered unacceptable in the first half of the twentieth century, when inclusion of the photographer’s shadow was considered anomalous (Trachtenberg, 1978). The presence of the photographer up to this point had been commonly asserted through titles, captioning, or even accompanying textual narrative, as remains the convention in much documentary even today. In the work of image makers like Spence and Larsen such intervention, as intrusion and re-inscription, became a political and ethical obligation. In much feminist photography of this period there is a clearly communicated moral imperative to deliberately and self-consciously rupture the assumed, or implied transparency of the image-surface in order to expose, and at the same time imprint its opacity on the surface. The image is simultaneously invalidated and validated by the presence of the photographer either together with, or in the form of, the deliberate interruption of any nostalgic or indeed,
uncritical interpretation by the viewer. In this regard little faith is placed in subjective interpretation, instead a distrust of uninformed and unexamined readings is communicated, exposing the naivety of assuming that any reading can be positioned outside ideology and the political.
Endnotes

109 The photographs and text in *Streetwise* (1997) were produced as part of a collaborative project out of which the documentary film of the same name by Martin Bell (Mark’s partner) was produced. An edited version of the film’s soundtrack appears at the back of the text.

110 The pages of the book displaying photographs are not numbered.

111 Paul Strand was a ‘straight’ photographer of the American photo-secessionist movement, led by Alfred Steiglitz (1864-1946).

112 In the form of a letter written to Helmut Gernsheim in 1960, (Gernsheim, 1991, p.152)

113 I also did this in the “Looking You in the Face” project.

114 Walker Evans described this photograph as ‘charging him up’ and teaching him what to do in photography (see Trachtenburg, 1990, p.16).

115 I have been unable to find any information on Larsen’s photographic work.

116 The subject’s shoes can be seen in the foreground, suggesting they were removed for the photograph.

117 The subject holds a syringe, implying that the young person is injecting drugs, but looking at the angle of the needle, it would be into the veins of the wrist; not a common choice for regular users.

118 The editorial and four out of nine articles addressed the issue, see *Parity*, v.14, no.1, 2001.

119 This phrase is borrowed from Pat Carlen, who was referring to youth homelessness (Carlen, 1996, p.6).

120 See for example the work of Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman (see Rosenblum, 1994) and Jo Spence (1991).
Chapter Ten

The visible homeless woman: Concluding comments

As outlined at the beginning, there is a significant collection of feminist research and literature about homelessness that stresses there have always been homeless women, who unlike their male counterparts, have remained invisible to the public, governments and policy-makers (Golden, 1992; Hirst, 1989; Hughes, 1996; Mulherin, 1996; Watson and Austerberry, 1986; W.I.S.H., 1991). One explanation offered for homeless women’s invisibility is the masculinization of homelessness, that homeless people only become visible when their image complies with hetero-masculinist gender stereotypes. Such representations often take form around social pathologies such as violence towards self and others. However, as the Madonna images reveal, a self-effacing, nurturing femininity is also afforded considerable power in this discourse.

The homelessness of women has attracted attention since the earliest sociological studies were conducted in Britain, even though these observations were invariably comments on the lesser proportion of homeless women in comparison to homeless men. In the mid-nineteenth century Henry Mayhew observed women amongst the tramp population, claiming: “[o]f the age and sex of tramps, the general proportion seems to be four-fifths male and one fifth female. Of the female English tramps, little can be said, but that they are in great part prostitutes of the lowest class” (Mayhew, 1967b, p. 375). However Mayhew also observed that more women and girls were to be found in shelters than men, and suggested protection from weather and other vagrants compelled women to make the choice:
The proportion of really destitute women in the tramp-wards (generally widows with young children) is greater than that of men—probably from the ability to brave the cold night wind being less in the female, and the love of children getting the shelter, above dread of vile association. Girls of thirteen or fourteen years old, who run away from masters, or factory employment, often find shelter in the tramp-ward.

(Mayhew, 1967b, p. 375)

Stanley James, (‘The Vagabond’), wrote about the outcasts and homeless in Melbourne and Sydney for The Argus newspaper during the late 1870s. He found no shortage of women amongst the population of vagrants, ‘larrikins’ and scoundrels. James often repeated his claim that the ‘fallen’ women of Melbourne flaunted themselves shamelessly in public, even amongst decent women and children and were the most publicly vulgar, socially undisciplined and aggressive he had seen (James, 1969, p.231). James’ reportage creates the impression that the ‘Magdalens’ of Melbourne were clearly visible. Describing the slums between Burke and Lonsdale streets he states:

The occupants you will see are mostly women, and of what a type—low, degraded, brutal-looking, who, young and old, seem as if virtue and purity had never been known to them even by name ... The number of very young girls to be seen in these quarters is something to shock even one used to the aspects of vice in the Old World. Melbourne is remarkable for this, and, as a rule, men are not so much to blame. These women, I am told, never see innocence, but they wish to mar it, and they tempt children to their ruin—some so young that they really may be said to have never known any other state. There is little of the woman about these unsexed beings. (James, 1969, p.31)

In spite of these and other colonial observations made during the nineteenth century (see van Krieken, 1991, p.49) the presence of women amongst the homeless was believed to be scant by many twentieth century social workers and researchers. A reasonable explanation has been that homeless women’s obscurity is due to a culture of femininity which veils women’s destitution from public sight. The ability to see destitute women is framed by the definition of who homeless women actually are, and therefore how they might appear (Watson, 2000). The represented woman (in this case, homeless woman) begins as a representation (Pollack, 1990). Thus the construction of homeless women’s in/visibility is exacerbated by the reliance of policy-makers, researchers and key state
departments on various forms of secondary representation. These determine what will be seen and how the particular subject (or in government department jargon, 'target' or 'client' group) will be deemed visible. The challenge then becomes how to produce a representation that is not dependant on much worn 'traditional' frameworks for defining the subject 'homeless woman'. This necessarily requires that as a representation she must have infinity of form and as many locations. However, portrayals dependant on notions of woman as guarantor of social and human reproducibility through her *virtues* of domesticity, nurture, sexual passivity and peace-making do little to bring the experiences of women's homelessness into the light. These act instead to satisfy fantasies of the privileged in their desire to vicariously access their own liberation through the imagined freedoms of the other.

It has not been my intention in this thesis to place under question the moral and ethical convictions of authors and photographers who attempt to raise awareness of the circumstances of marginalised and destitute women and children. That said, in exposing the tragic and untenable, much socially concerned photography trades in street-level sensationalism. We are shown child prostitutes, tattooed teenage mothers holding the hands of their poorly clothed children, elderly women in hats and overcoats gripping bulging plastic shopping bags or searching through rubbish bins. These women, rendered visible, are constructed as sensationalized problems, objects of hetero-masculinist sexual fantasy, deviants from a constraining femininity that requires woman to be the gender responsible for the reproduction of human life through ordered and orderly social organisation.

The representational space of photography always exists in reference to reality and is at once more than the real and less than real. In its para-realism the photograph offers a crude, imperfect simulacrum. As much as it is impossible for the photographic image to offer the actual, it balances the deception of realism with the realism of deception. If photographic images were completely false, the power of the photograph to be so convincing a rendition of the real would be undone. All fiction must tell some truths. The strength of socially concerned photographs lies in their ability to sustain tension between truth and fiction, science and art, because as cultural objects they are always
simultaneously both. John Tagg refers to this as, “the metaphoric tendency of Realism, in which a part can stand for the whole, and easily identified similarities substituted for one another” (cited in Davidov, 1998, p.237). The socially concerned documentary image must contain enough authenticity to convince us that what we see is a reality.

Whilst representative of an imaginary figure, the image of the homeless woman can be reasonably associated with real women’s lived experience of social exclusion and marginalisation. The idea of the existence of woman in a state of non-belonging has operated over centuries as a metaphor and icon to signify a liminal zone of near, but not quite, hopelessness. A condition and a place where some shadow of hope might still be found through individual and collective, and real and imaginary acts of redemption. In this sense, the idea of ‘homelessness’ provides a measure for human will and desire, an indicator of the possibility for the isolated to overcome the obstacles of marginalisation in order to re/gain social belonging and material comfort. In this way, the ‘problem’ of homelessness is able to represent unrealised potential.

The homeless woman, as the Madonna, is portrayed as having some level of responsibility for the survival of others, mostly her own children, but also street companions or even strangers she has met. In this guise she is a redeemer and thus redeemable – salvation belongs to her. Her ability to participate in social exchange and achieve connection is signified by selfless giving; whether with her own body through sexual union, the nourishment of children, or the sacrifice of giving to others that which might have fed her own undernourished mind, body and soul. Thus her representation symbolizes the fabric of human survival, the self-sacrifice of interdependence that is required for functional social organisation based on a polarized, and polarising gender order. In representing the point at which the social body can turn back from the abyss of non-belonging, the ‘homeless woman’ symbolically overcomes social exclusion for us all, as she is at the same time the signifier of this void.

Foucault proposes that from the outset the prison performed the dual tasks of detention and correction. Its power as an institution was located in its constitution as, “an enterprise for reforming individuals” (Foucault, 1984, p.216), as a place where the
detained individual body was rendered docile and made constantly visible to an invisible observer. Women’s (and men’s) bodies are subject to this constraining, disciplining, regulating, subjectifying and objectifying gaze. Outside prevailing hetero-masculinist vision, we are either invisible or monstrously deviant. At the same time, documentary imagery, as a technology of social action has been engaged in efforts to discipline and reform. At first, the differences of the depicted subject formed the focus of the desire to produce their representation. More recently the aim for many photographers (myself included) has been to assert homeless individuals as subjects with physical characteristics and features resembling those who are not homeless, as if homelessness, poverty, destitution, marginalisation, even gender might be transformed within the space of the photograph itself. Certainly, within representational space, images of people can be transformed. The question remains whether or not the lived experience of those portrayed can be also.

The intention has not ever been simply to transform the depicted subjects; social documentary photographs seek to affect the viewer’s attitudes and beliefs in order to transform the lives of those represented. In this way they constitute an intervention, an interruption into everyday life (Roberts, 1998). Founded on the belief that to see is to know, photographs intervene through their currency as truth objects. However, as sight – the visible, is a way of knowing, it is always at the same time a means of unknowing. Even though photographic images derive meaning from, and perpetuate their discursive contexts, their ‘realism’ also enables subversion of the discourses that contain them. For example, the discussion about the photograph of my aunt at the beginning of this thesis demonstrates how the narrative associated with a split-second imprint has the potential to simultaneously fix and destabilise the identity of its subject and the meaning of the image.

The challenge I see now is how to produce representations of women as homeless that resist the sociocultural and political constraints in which they are located, while also asserting and effecting social responsibility for the people who are our destitute, and not the responsibility of the already destitute woman. There is nothing new about this problem, or even possible strategies for addressing it. As photography was launched
into the public arena, Daguerre promoted it as a process that allowed, “nature to reproduce herself” (Daguerre, 1980), and as I have argued, this quality of reproducibility contributed to its success as a method for representing reality. It might be overly simplistic to suggest that to become visible homeless woman must become her own photographer, but this must surely be where the process of her realisation begins. In Hélène Cixous’ words: “[s]he must write herself” (Cixous, 1991, p.224). As social activists, documenters, workers, researchers and policy makers, we are too often drawn into reducing our subject into an identifiable and measurable object. Therefore I feel it only apt that my final statement belongs to a young (homeless) woman who offered me this representation of herself:

![Figure 48](image.png)

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Between theory and practice lies the shadow.


Imag(in)ing Women as Homeless: Re/tracing socially concerned photography

Karen Maree Crinall
DipA&D (CIT), GDipEd (GIAE), MEd (Deakin).

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PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning this thesis,

and the best possible result has been obtained.
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Statement of Authorship

This is my own original work. Except where due reference is made the thesis contains no material previously published by another person. Some sections have been used in publications authored by myself during candidature as follows:

An early version of chapter one, incorporating sections from chapter five, discussing the formation and fluidity of self identity in family photographs appeared in “My Aunt, Our Mother, Their Face: Sharing Identity in a Family Photograph” (Crinall, 1999), published on the Sights Visual Anthropology Forum website: http://cc.joensu.fi/sights/karenc.html.


Some of the ideas, research and analysis employed in chapter four informed the article “Photography becomes her: Evoking the feminine in early photographic discourse” (Crinall, 2000a), Southern Review, Vol 33, No 3.

The article, “Representing the invisible: Images of women among the ‘new’ faces of homelessness” (Crinall, 2001) which appeared in Parity. Vol 14, No 1 drew on aspects of chapters one, nine and ten.

Finally, this thesis has not been accepted or submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

[Signature]
Abstract

This thesis is primarily concerned with the meanings that are produced when women become visible amongst the homeless through photographic representations. While there have always been homeless women, unlike their male counterparts, they have remained largely invisible to the public and government policy-makers. Social documentary photography has acted as one of the main avenues through which homeless women have, literally, been rendered visible. As an evidence producing technology, photography has exercised considerable influence in the construction of meaning about homelessness by employing concepts of the feminine and the masculine in various, and oppositional ways. Driven by, and implicated in complex sociocultural and political circumstances, socially concerned photographs draw on the real and the fictional to generate truth/power effects. Thus, the thesis re/traces the representation of ‘homeless woman’ in a range of visual texts and ask how this construct has been discursively produced and deployed.

Informed by feminist postmodern and poststructural theory, semiotic discourse analysis is employed to explore the visual re/presentation of women as destitute. The subjective and affective are asserted from the outset as inseparable from other knowledge/power effects, and my ‘self’ is unapologetically written into the discussion. The structure and tone of the thesis deliberately diverges from a traditional social science format because this would have constrained intertextuality in the analysis, and also in its reading. Instead, the research constitutes and relates a critical and reflexive journey through socially concerned photography.

In order to explore how socially concerned photography has contributed to, and made use of the idea of ‘homeless, or destitute woman’ examples are drawn from a range of photographic genres. These include traditional social documentary, public collections of photographs, photojournalism and publicity materials. I did not search out archival materials because a key criteria was public visibility, the photographs needed to have circulated ‘on the surface’ in readily accessible, ‘everyday’ locations. The majority of these photographs have been reproduced many times, for numerous purposes. In their
manifold reproduction previous meanings are retained, and new ones are adopted. This layering of meaning and effect is of central interest. Discursive inter/connections between my own and other socially concerned photographs, sociocultural and historical locations, and pertinent images and icons are traced and examined. The selected images, the circumstances out of which they emerge, and those in which they are read, are interrogated along, and with consideration of the interconnections between axes of gender, genre, race, class and power.

The field of inquiry radiates out from Melbourne, Australia, at the turn of the second millennium, as this is the capital city and the historical period in which I am situated, and where the photographs that incited this journey were produced. However, because the past exercises influence in the present, I also refer to other historical periods and the wider globe, especially Renaissance Italy, where not only the ocularity of the photograph took significant formation, but also one of the most powerful and enduring icons for depicting poverty, the feminine and humility: the Virgin Mary. Great Britain during industrialisation, and the United States during the Great Depression are also treated as pivotal locations in the emergence and development of socially concerned photography.

Although particular historical moments and events are recognised and explored as significant and formative, the inquiry does not aim to establish a unitary source, or coherent trajectory of the visual representation of the ‘homeless woman’, because origins, particularly of ideas, are always contestable. While I ask how photo-documentary images are authored, authorised and employed, how they are coded, and the truths they construct and deploy about women, and homelessness, I do not seek to provide definitive answers to these questions. Rather, a primary aim is to expand the field of possibilities for the visual portrayal of women’s experiences of homelessness.
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