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Negotiating Nostalgia, Folding Photographs: A Practice-Led Critical Examination of Whiteness, as a Politics of Belonging

Sian Gouldstone 

Abstract

Post-WWII emigration saw over 1.6 million British citizens leave for so-called-Australia, seven of my grandfather's siblings included. Childhood visits from overseas family were instrumental in producing and reproducing real and imaginative encounters with *Australian-ness* for me. This article examines folding, as part of a photographic methodology that critically explores whiteness as part of a sense of belonging, I carry, rooted within these experiences. Whiteness here is considered a form of imperial violence and is explored as an affective atmosphere of *imperial duress*: an encounter with the excesses or debris of imperialism. My practice addresses the complexities of understanding post-imperial spaces. Photography, like whiteness, is bound with imperialism and has long prioritized representational ideologies concepts of truth, reality and the exact. Folding operates in opposition to these. Using nonrepresentational theories to support folding as an affective methodology, I discuss the possibilities of returning to and unfixing photographic practices that perpetuate imperial violence. Folding becomes a method for unlearning whiteness through negotiating its affective qualities. This practice problematizes cultural legacies of British colonialism in so-called-Australia, which remain unsettled and unresolved, highlighting that creativity might help us critically evaluate and expand understandings of coloniality.

Keywords: whiteness, decoloniality, affect, immigration, folding

Introduction

There is a virtual other that inhabits these worlds with me. I describe it variously: a background noise, a presence, a shadow,

an affective pressing. It is a scope, a grouping of potentials, tied to Australian and British histories and cultures I can never know. Dreamlike, fuzzy, half known, it consumes in waves. Rhythmic, it pulses, ebbs and flows. I yearn for its presence, its coincidence, its intent; it finds me feeling lost, ungrounded, or alone. This complicated notion of belonging sought me as a child, in the affective spaces of home; seeping in as I shaped a sense of myself; growing, learning, in a place carved with material and immaterial objects and ideas, now memorials to distance. Difference and anticipation became familiar. Always drawing toward the not-yet-known, and emerging unexpectedly, this presence persists, predatory for years.

This article outlines how I use photography in a practice-led exploration of affective whiteness, as a form of imperial duress, in contexts of British invasion and occupation in so-called Australia. British emigration to the country, between 1945 and 1982, saw over 1.6 million British citizens leave the UK, seven of my grandfather's nine siblings amongst them. As a child in the UK, visits from overseas family evoked a familiar exoticism, producing and reproducing real and imaginative encounters with a sense of Australian-ness. Moyra Davey's (2011) description of reflective nostalgia expands this recognition of my own sense of belonging, which drives the creative practices I share here. Influenced by Svetlana Boym's writing (2001), Davey describes reflective nostalgia as exploring an imagined landscape kept 'perpetually in reserve, with the fantasy that someday I may land there, in what is by now a fictional mirage of time and place' (2011, 14). My practice emerges from such fantasy, a mythologized, imagined, anticipated and desired experience of 'Australia'. This is also, I suggest, an ongoing cultural, personal, and imperial formation of affective whiteness.

The epigraph opening the article, and other pieces throughout, form a collection of paragraphs of semi-fictional prose that I write alongside making photographs. They evoke the sense of nostalgia

I feel, expanding my affective exploration of imaginative and lived experiences of whiteness in so-called Australia. Formed from memories of visiting the country and my desire to live there, these paragraphs should be considered related to autobiographical family histories of emigration, as well as broader cultural histories of immigration in the country. During the twentieth century, Australian immigration long privileged whiteness, which continues to affect understandings of what belonging means and feels like in the country.

This article outlines how I explore experiences of whiteness as an affective sense of belonging, through folding and re-photographing. These methodological processes develop a practice that interrogates felt whiteness, as a legacy of British imperialism. These affective methodologies are outlined as ethical, theoretical and experimental in practice; together they formulate an original, creative exploration of racialized spaces, structures, and forces in a particular context related to British invasion, occupation, settlement and immigration. I understand that whiteness assumes differential forms, is lived with and through, and is continual and emergent. I recognize it as an encounter: never fully present or graspable. My methodologies encompassing folding and re-photographing interrogate something of the in-betweenness of these human experiences and are used to explore how we might (re)conceptualize understandings of the affective violence, persuasion and forces of whiteness as ongoing imperial affects. Whiteness shifts and changes the material, immaterial, human and non-human bodies that enfold with it, and my practices of folding and re-photographing shift with them, by way of a critical intervention.

Folding as theory and method

Having existed only marginally longer than the nation we now know as Australia, photography is bound with imperialist viewpoints, and with the documentation and surveillance of Other. Moreover, photography's cultural and theoretical histories have long prioritized representational

values and ideas: concepts of truth, reality and the exact. Yve Lomax works in contradiction to exactitude as she explores *The Folds in the Photograph*, considering photography 'a (continuous) multiplicity' (1995, 46), inviting us to think that it comprises of 'nothing but relations, nothing but affects' (46). Following Deleuze, Lomax thinks through the affective, relational, and multiple as *becomings*. She writes: 'Something happens between a photograph *and* ...' (46, my emphasis), and that when something is 'in the making' (1995, 46), it is 'irreducible to either ... or ...', oppositional states become deterritorialized through making (46). Folding, for Lomax, *implicates*: it is a continuous, in-the-making, multiple, affective and extensible relation of *between-ness* and '[t]o implicate is to include' (47). She continues: '[v]ery often, however, knowledge demands an explication which requires us to unfold in the manner of making clear cut, of cutting away' (47). Her conceptualization of photography *as* folding then, draws away from representational ideals, from the idea that photographs cut time, or finish at their edges, containing knowledge in their particular mode of fixity: *this is*. Instead, the implication and inclusion in folding recognizes that 'something else is always involved ... we find ourselves *between things*' (51): *this and*.

My rationale for using folding as a methodological approach to negotiate the unfixed and felt relations of whiteness as an imperial legacy is supported by Lomax's thinking. Like photography, whiteness is omnipresent and pervasive, folding and unfolding, relational and affective: *multiple*. We might say that *something happens between whiteness and* ... As such, I acknowledge a parallel between photography and whiteness and use an experimental methodology that is photography *and* whiteness *and* folding. I am drawn, of course, to experiment with the physical folding of images. This is folding photographs *as* a mode of *becoming between*. Folding helps me to communicate the *neither here nor there* in the relations of whiteness that remain continually undetermined, such as those described through my own problematic, nostalgic and affective connections with so-called-Australia. As such, whiteness, as a

consequential relationality between the body *and* the photograph *and* the world, might be thought as shifting through *making*.

Lomax's ideas about multiplicity, in-between-ness, relations, and affect, as well as her *and*, also align with broader nonrepresentational ideas that I also use to influence my work. Hayden Lorimer writes that nonrepresentational thinking (NRT) seeks 'to better cope with our self-evidently more-than-human, more-than-textual, multisensual worlds' (2005, 83). Preferring *more-than* as a moniker, he writes that we need to escape the 'academic habit of striving to uncover meaning and values that apparently await our discovery, interpretation, judgement and ultimate representation' (2005, 84). *More-than*, in the context of NRT, better describes the 'multifarious, open encounters in the realm of practice' (84) that it comprises. Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison's starting points for thinking with NRT suggest 'a commitment to an expanded social including all manner of material bodies, an attention to relations and being-in-relation, and sensitivity to 'almost-not-quite' entities such as affects' (2010, 13). NRT is practical and processual and concerned with locating the making of meaning and signification in the 'manifold of actions and interactions' rather than in a supplementary dimension such as that of discourse, ideology or symbolic order (2). This manifold aligns with Ariella Azoulay's distinction between the *photographic event* (as depicted by the image) and the *event of photography*, as an encounter that involves the camera, but also its operator, subject, and spectator (2024, 27), the *event* here, like Lomax's folding, is *multiple* and expansive. Seeking a form of criticism to affirm the precarious, active and unforeseeable, Anderson and Harrison write that 'it would have to take risks, invent new terms, new tones, new objects, it would draw new maps. Perhaps most importantly, it would have to continue changing, not settle in the satisfaction of a judgment but keep experimenting' (2016, 1). This reflects the intent of my practice, which embraces the ontological politics of NRT, to avoid a reductive or resolute discourse that reinforces, legitimates or

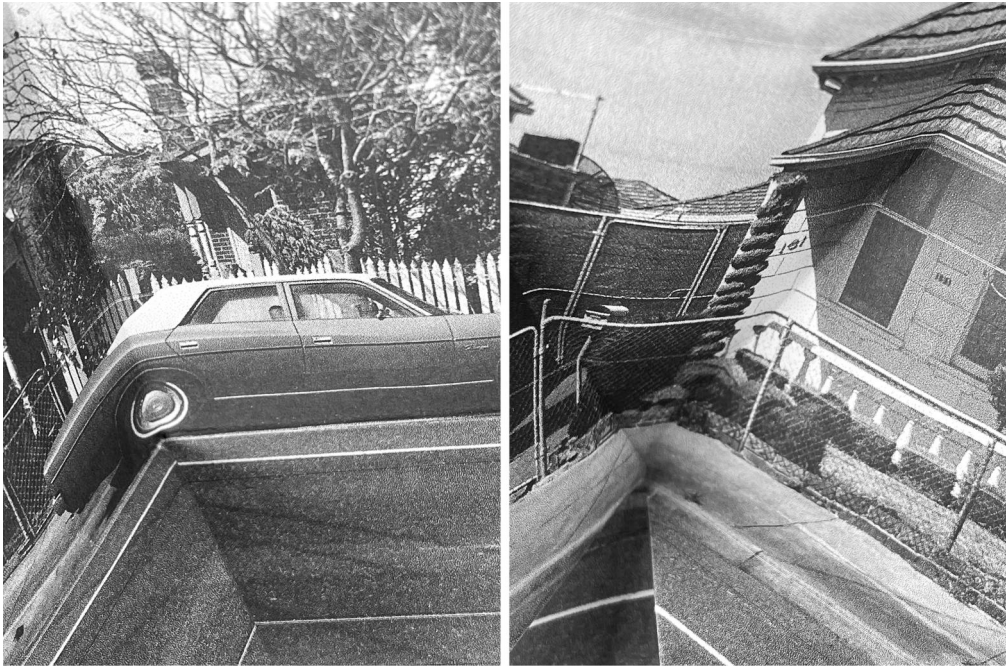


Figure 1. Sian Gouldstone, from the series *(re)instate*, 2023. Digital photographs.

facilitates the inequalities of coloniality. I experiment and work with the in-between and the relational, using folding to *unsettle*.

My practice of unsettling forms in opposition to the fixed and monological. I work to see *otherwise* or *undo* photographic representations that appear resolute through exploring photography's affective qualities and their alignment with *nonrepresentational* thinking through *folding*. Returning to, and changing, the same images and places, happens throughout my practice. This shifts the expectations of viewing audiences, leaving fixed and resolutely meaningful encounters with photographs far from being settled. For example, to explore the resonance of affect in my series *(re)instate*, I revisit and change images taken in suburban Naarm (Melbourne), as seen in [Figure 1](#).

(re)instate revisits images made as research field notes. Frederik Bøhling suggests that field notes are assemblages that 'display the researcher as a moved body that ... moves other bodies' (2015, 12). These images, as an affective return to the processes and

encounters of my research in Naarm explore how my moved body was affected in space. As creative responses to my affective and nostalgic encounters, they aim to affect others through methods of folding and re-photographing. Bøhling suggests breaking with the concept that field notes might reflect fixed truths; instead, they too should be thought metamorphic, changing with time (2015). This emphasis on metamorphosis aligns with my framing of my work as continual and emergent, and I return to discuss *(re)instate* in more depth, shortly.

Folding and/as involution emerges further in my work through my iterative combining and critical reflection around and with practice and theory. One thing involves another, implicates another, in a continuous folding upon folding of technologies, ideas and encounters. Lomax writes that such involution brings with it a stretching. Images 'are always involved with something else, always combining with something else, always partaking of becomings. I say this to speak of the affectivity of images'

(Lomax 1995, 49). The conceptual and practical fold thus aids thinking and practice around the work of the photograph and its affectivity. Knudsen and Stage (2015) define an *affective method* as an innovative strategy that asks questions and formulates research agendas 'relating to affective processes' (2015, 215). 'If affect is a bodily state' they write, 'then the challenge is, of course, to collect material about how this state is expressed or documented' (7). This means finding methods that generate 'embodied data that provides proximity to the affective qualities of the social situation under investigation' (7). I adopt Knudsen and Stage's meta-strategies for affective research by *creating experimental milieus* through practices of folding, by *rethinking fieldwork techniques* in revisiting my fieldnotes that provide proximity to affective whiteness, and by *collecting overlooked forms of data* by revisiting my own experiences in space and re-photographing and narrativizing them in semi-fictional reflections.

Interested in unfixing photographic practices that perpetuate imperial violence, I note further parallels between photography and whiteness; both are concerned with appearance, but more broadly connected to that which is unseen—forces of power, race, ownership, belonging, and control. Considering whiteness as dynamic and shifting, I maintain that qualitative whiteness retains a capacity for *transformation*. I think through the (in)visibilities, silences, and powers of its affective and symbolic qualities to negotiate how or where it 'appears' photographically and folding and re-photographing are transformations of the resolute in themselves, which help me to unsettle in the contexts of my research. This critical approach is also one centered around decoloniality.

Decoloniality: thinking otherwise and unlearning

Decoloniality describes processes seeking to understand coloniality's continual organization of the world, and the cultural, knowledge and power structures that form the legacy of European colonizing societies. Catherine Walsh writes that 'decoloniality

seeks to make visible, open up, and advance radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis and thought' (2018, 17). My practice does not claim to decolonize, which would in any case be metaphorical (Tuck and Yang 2012), but thinks with a politics of decoloniality to re-know and confront coloniality. I create practice-borne conditions that assist in unlearning the asymmetry of imperial violence by making an analogy between whiteness and photography and being clear about my relations with them. My practice, within a politic of decoloniality, is an emergent autobiographical praxis of unlearning with decolonial potential.

Unlearning can be thought of as undoing, as seeing or imagining *otherwise*. The visual, as Lola Olufemi writes, 'appears to announce its limitations ... we assume the story begins and ends within the image's four corners' (2021, 20). To experiment with *imaging otherwise* she asks 'what if an image is also an echo that sticks to its context? What if the past is here now, intruding and muddying the present?' (20). Olufemi's provocation allows me to think about how returning to images might interject in the here and now, by bringing their version of the past into the present, prompting me to re-visit images as I do in *(re)instate*. She proposes a *speculative method* that anticipates nothing, in letting the image do its own work and make its own argument. My practice prioritizes returning as unlearning, as it develops a series of experiments for imagining differently. By researching this way, I acknowledge my ethical responsibility to engage with the burden of ongoing imperialism by unlearning imperial violences of whiteness. To do so, I also become unruly, borrowing the notion of unruliness from Azoulay (2019). I search against my assumptions and against dominant understandings of my research contexts, helping to uncover the misrepresentations, the forgotten, and the potentially problematic realities and ideologies created and underpinned by photographic practices and whiteness. This is part of an affective methodological strategy of folding that

disrupts, implicates and informs as part of a process of decoloniality.

Decoloniality needs to be disruptive; it strives not to perpetuate the mythologization of colonial invasion and occupation. The use of intentionally benign terms such as 'settlement' perpetuates coloniality (Decter and Taunton 2022). Settler colonialism, Patrick Wolfe writes, 'is inherently eliminatory' (2006, 387); colonizers come to stay. As such, he suggests that 'invasion' is structured, it is not a passing event (1999, quoted in Wolfe 2006, 388). Settler coloniality presupposes the replacing of Indigenous Peoples and settler is a 'deliberately politicised identification', knowingly implying (whilst obfuscating) a practice of 'invasion, dispossession and replacement' (Decter and Taunton 2022, 251). Moreover, the term white settler further recognizes that coloniality is experienced differently by differently situated subjects. Herein, the terminology that I use to describe the presence of the British in so-called Australia follows this. I also acknowledge the examples that Bronwyn Carlson and Terri Farrelly (2023), and Carlson et al (2023) use to negotiate the lack of agreed terms for referring to the multiple Indigenous Peoples of the Australian continent, as well as to their unceded lands. From the outset, the intentional term *so-called Australia*, recognizes that the place named Australia is a colonial construct; a continent and land invaded. Its colonization and occupation by the British led to the dispossession of hundreds of already self-identifying Indigenous nations. Re-using the term intentionally emphasizes that multiple and continued forms of invasion, coloniality, settlement and immigration continue to shape the place we now call Australia, and it is these contexts that I work within. Terminology is complicit in reinforcing positions of coloniality and should be used to be disruptive of them.

Exploring the personal as political

The familiarity that I sense, walking into a family house in Brisbane for the first time, remains hard to describe. A living room shifts me, virtually, unexpectedly, back to my

Grandmother's house in Staffordshire, England. My mythologised Australian 'good life', in an encounter with its domesticated surface, appears uncannily similar to family life in Britain. Banality: picture frames, photographs, furniture, ornaments, trinkets, net curtains. I know these. I think about this passage of place, through time and distance; the notion that Australia is a 'new' world seems fictional, here is a replacement world. A translation. This evocative reminder of home is jarring at this time. I have driven for a week, through endless forests and giant valleys; strange, vast, imposing, noisy, hot landscapes. Heat seeps into cabins, cars, hostels, and stinking humid compost toilets at the side of the road, as well as into the sleeping bag that I draw tightly around my face to prevent encounters with animal life, alien to me. I have seen snails the size of my fists and ants the size of my fingernails. I judge all arachnid life with suspicion. This place seems, simultaneously, both everything and nothing that I expected.

My methodology is not explicitly autoethnographic, although it borrows autoethnographic approaches in its creativity and written reflexivity. My photography and writing become the firsthand data providing proximity to the affective qualities of whiteness expressed and experienced in my research. Nevertheless, I avoid 'following' distinct autoethnographic methodological patterns in order to maintain distance in my research, from problematic and exploitative anthropological and sociological approaches that other Indigenous peoples.

To develop my thinking, I align whiteness with imperial duress, a mark of the endurance of colonial inequities in my research contexts. Ann-Laura Stoler outlines imperial duress as: 'a relation to a condition, a pressure exerted, a troubled condition borne in the body' Stoler (2016, 7). Described as being borne in the body, aligning imperial duress with the felt forces of whiteness connects the immaterial conditions of the encounters I explore. Melissa

Gregg and Gregory Seigworth note that affect names 'visceral forces ... other than, consciously knowing' (2010, 1). These 'serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extensions ... [as] persistent proof of a body's never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms' (1). They describe affect as accumulating and traversing between 'bodies', which have the 'potential to reciprocate or co-participate' (2) in its passage. These ideas support my consideration of whiteness as a shifting and palpable affective atmosphere, formed and (re)formed in, by and through changeable assemblages of human and non-human bodies in time and space. For Brian Massumi, affect is always virtual/immaterial, concerned with 'the felt reality of the abstract as an *emergent* dimension of body/matter' (2021 [2002], xvi—my emphasis), that is: always forming, never fixed and personal and impersonal simultaneously. *Affect is the felt indeterminate*. Driven by the duality of both the intimacy and impersonality of affect, I consider the shifting spaces and times of my practices as atmospheres, which 'come to envelop specific bodies' (Anderson 2016, 160), human and non-human—including that of the photograph. Following Stoler's thinking, my practice aims explore the 'tenacious qualities of colonial effects; their extended protracted temporalities; and ... their durable, if sometimes intangible constraints and confinements' (2016, 7). Working closely with intangibility and divergence, I consider my work and concepts emergent: themselves in process and affective. Notwithstanding, I also acknowledge that imperial duress differently affects Indigenous and non-Indigenous experiences and understandings of coloniality in so-called Australia.

Referencing histories of exploitative research on Indigenous Peoples, Linda Tuhiwai Smith notes the importance that a 'researcher [is] clear and open about who they are and what they are seeking and to locate themselves in context' (2021, 193). As a non-Indigenous researcher in so-called-Australia, my practice is to confront my own complicity with colonialism and dispossession. This confrontation is a key problematic of my research: I am a white British

woman and since childhood, I dreamed of emigrating there. Much of the mass British emigration that occurred to Australia throughout the twentieth century, of which my family was a part, was supported by governmental Assisted Passage Migration Schemes that followed the Australian Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 (NAA 2010), also known as the White Australia Policy (National Museum of Australia 2022). These policies set limits upon non-British migration to the country for three-quarters of a century. Goenpul woman Moreton-Robinson (2015, 14) argues that this forms a white possessive logic in so-called Australia, 'a discursive predisposition' that serves the white first-world patriarchy. Unaware of these racialized politics and histories as a child, my understanding of 'Australia' was as a country of British, white belonging, *a land of opportunity*. I was not alone; this was something that Australian and British Governments had been suggesting for decades in pursuit of their immigration goals. Moreover, Moreton-Robinson writes that it is 'Anglo-centric whiteness' that has become 'the definitive marker of citizenship' in so-called Australia (79), which remains relatively uncharted, and 'invisible, dominant, and pervasive, even as it influences everyday life' (79). Claire Land is non-Aboriginal, living on Kulin Nation land. In solidarity with Indigenous struggles, she writes: 'I do not ... pretend to objectivity ... I attempt to interrogate ... my own partiality. To leave my own social locatedness unnamed would be to imply the universality and objectivity of my argument' (2015, 21). From a self-critical position then, I centralize the belief that it is necessary to know otherwise the worlds that we experience. Land further describes whiteness as dynamic and problematizes abolishing or moving beyond such racial categorization (2015, 32). Instead, she suggests, '[t]o understand white privilege should also be to consider ways to undo it' (31). This is significant, because dismissing whiteness as a concept neglects the fact that bodies marked by it carry very real and deep affective inscriptions (Alcoff 1998, quoted in Land 2015, 32). British immigrants have been labeled invisible (Hammerton and

Thomson 2005), and care must be taken not to conflate the ideologies of whiteness with invisibility. Ahmed (2004a) writes that whiteness is *only invisible for those inhabiting it* and, as such, making whiteness visible only makes sense to those for whom it is not. I work *with* the visibility of whiteness as fact, naming its materialities in my research, and I develop a critical focus on ways that it can become unhidden, as affective and atmospheric. The assumption that whiteness is unseen, as Ahmed emphasizes, is problematic and is not decolonial, it is: 'an exercise in white seeing, which does not have 'others' in view' (2004a, 4). Assuming whiteness as invisible can be argued a perpetuation of coloniality. Nevertheless, I do not purport to 'represent' whiteness as a specific visible form. Rather, my practice is an assemblage of image and thinking that aims to capture something of the slippery and tenacious qualities of whiteness as a problematic of my own nostalgic negotiation of belonging. I do this, by using photographic forms that attempt to re-know as they draw on the atmospheric, the *undoable*, the present and the absent.

Practice-based explorations: photography and folding

An Inventory of Shimmers

Exploring photography as imperial technology, Azoulay (2019) writes about the camera shutter, often assumed a means to an end, and largely considered a technical rather than conceptual event. For Azoulay, the shutter is an imperial operation and '[t]he picture to be' that precedes it, a petty sovereign (2019, 2). This is not the final photograph, but 'the image that prefigures the conditions of the closing and opening of a shutter' (2). The petty sovereign is a work of imagination that 'commands' what gets 'distanced, bracketed, removed, forgotten, suppressed, ignored, overcome, and made irrelevant' (2). The ideological image of the petty sovereign, preceding the photograph, exemplifies an act of repression in thought and generates a photograph aligned with a preoccupation with the socio-cultural backgrounds of its thinking. What the

imagination, or petty sovereign, suppresses becomes exaggerated by the shutter act as an act of omission. Nevertheless, the concept of the petty sovereign as preceding the photograph also draws our attention to the fact that photography is necessarily an ongoing event.

Writing about colonial photography, Mark Sealy notes that it 'has the capacity to function as a morbid reminder of the intense level of cultural violence that was aimed at the Other' (2019, 2). He continues: 'the making of photography, its translations and articulations, its distribution networks and knowledge formations continue to be critically dislocated from the perspective of the subaltern and the marginalized' (6). Unlearning, in practice, offers a space in which to understand how the imperial violence of colonialism and whiteness might rethought, photographically.

An Inventory of Shimmers (AIOS) is a series of folded photographs, made as an unruly experimental practice of disavowing and undermining the imperial scope of some of the camera technologies and institutions that Azoulay (2019) and Sealy (2019) outline. The initial photographs visualize affective environments in what I argue are nonrepresentational ways. I use extension tubes when making the images to think through the in-between-ness of affective space. Added to the lens, extension tubes alter focal length, drastically reducing the depth-of-field and distance at which images can be resolved. Subsequently, photographic subjects draw nearer and images blur: little can be resolute, and thus representational thinking is already complicated by their making. This shifting of the photographic aesthetic is used to explore how to visualize the atmospherics, or *affects*, of a spatial experience, as an intuitive and responsive practice. Images from these original works can be seen in Figure 2.

The series developed following an encounter on a train leaving Plymouth, UK. A marketing slogan on a toilet wall read:

Plymouth, Devon came first. Other places with the same name later popped up in the USA, Australia, New Zealand and the West Indies.



Figure 2. Sian Gouldstone, from the series *An Inventory of Shimmers*, 2016–2022. Digital photographs.

The implication in this statement is that colonizing activities, such as naming places, ‘pop-up’ inconsequentially. Thus, I experimented with pop-up folding, as a critical enquiry into the allusion that imperial violence appears without context. This practice aligns with my thinking around emergent and shifting positions (pop-ups can open and close, appear and disappear). The pop-up thus, critiques the idea that a singular representative position of knowing exists for these photographs. Making pop-up objects from photographs, and re-photographing them sitting on copies of themselves, shifts the possibilities of the photographic through revisiting, duplication, repetition and return. This strategy explores affective space and implicates (enfolds) the absent/present, seen/unseen and material/immaterial at once. Images are shown in [Figure 3](#).

I consider this practice unruly, and the provocation to unruliness is Azoulay’s means to begin *unlearning imperialism* Azoulay (2019). Photography is irreducible to the singular fixed image or operation of the shutter. The petty sovereign is ultimately not the technology which works to fix the image, but the continually imagined certainties associated with what precedes its taking. Photographic operations, as such, are excessive: more than they appear. Photographs emerge from potentialities that exist with the necessarily uncertain qualities of imagination and time. Following Azoulay’s contention to refuse the historical as complete, by reviewing the processes and practice of my photography, by thinking through the excessiveness of photography, and by centralizing the imaginative and affective, I attune to these ‘potentialities that the institutional forms of imperial violence—borders, nation-states, museums, archives, and

laws—try to make obsolete’ using photographs (2019, 286). This is an engagement, as Azoulay encourages, with the outcomes of imperial violence right here, and right now. Re-understanding photography, as a technology prefigured for imperial operations, is a significant return to rethink and relearn photography as a disruption of coloniality.

The image-to-be, the petty sovereign, is what I consider spectral, operating virtually and indirectly, separated from its cultural power by physical and imaginative distances. Butler (2004) argues that petty sovereigns use their authority to operate outside of state laws, undermining order (56). These collective ideas open spaces for thinking about how the spectrality of the imagined image-to-be, might also be analyzed in practice to undermine the ‘order’ expected of the imperial act of the camera shutter. I centralize revisiting and returning, in my practice as further methods of unlearning that problematize the ‘originality’ and ‘authority’ assumed by the unspoken order of photography.

Acts of folding and rephotographing a photograph in AIOS create a rupture; a disturbance of the imperialist photographic, and a sense of provisionality. The work of representation, already shifted and made ambiguous in the original blurred images in AIOS, now appears undoable and/or redoable—unlearned, reconstructed, or changed, *via* the pop-up objects made from them. Initially, I thought these images nonrepresentational because they depict no recognizable trace of an experienced or imagined reality (e.g. a petty sovereign) that could be properly pre-figured in advance. Through folding and re-photographing, they subsequently develop a

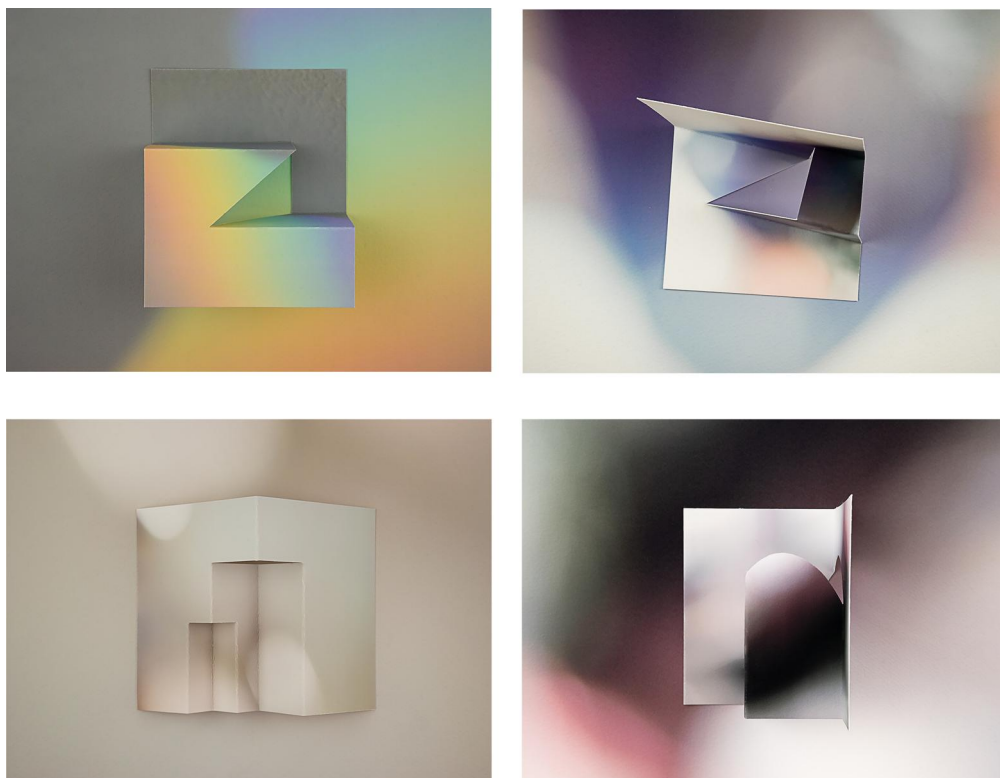


Figure 3. Sian Gouldstone, from the series *An Inventory of Shimmers*, 2016–2022. Digital photographs.

multiplicity, as relational and affective bodies and, in the context of thinking with nonrepresentational theory (NRT), this shift to explore their excessiveness, or their more-than qualities, is also significant as a mode for (re)membering, unlearning and seeing otherwise the 'originality' of the image subject. Following this initial practice of folding for exploring the affective, I more deeply concern myself with how photography might examine whiteness specifically, as affective atmosphere, in a continuation of a folding practice.

(re)instate

Absence and emptiness, everywhere alone. I walk for hours until I swim, scorched by the heat, contained by humidity. Rising from the

ground, returning to the sky. Descending from the sky, sent back to the ground. My skin is a shade of grey, made ashen. Smoked by the flames of the sun. I stand and watch cobwebs as the light starts to fall, stretched out in the distance, taking with it its fever as it drops. The webs glisten and move in the breeze, fragile lines of impermanence and strength. I sense the space beyond me as passed and yet to be. Hope, shaped by something coming. The spider lowers itself from the roof of the shelter and it falls before my face. I sense myself moving, shifting, changing. I walk swiftly, onwards. Forever different, never the same.

My research methodology embraces a framework of decoloniality that encompasses experimental,

intuitive and iterative strategies and practices for undoing, returning and seeing otherwise, it embraces inward and outward looking (Dexter and Taunton 2022), connecting and activating ideas with practices; I focus on these in the research and creation of new photographic work. Folding as a methodology reflects the emergent and shifting nature of this thinking. It becomes a reckoning with imperial duress, an *inventive methodology* (Lury and Wakeford 2012) that manifests as an iterative process of exploring thought-as-practice and practice-as-thought. Folding photographs and photographing folds acknowledges that material and affective bodies shift and change. As such, my practice works knowingly with a multiplicity and plurality of encounters as it explores imperial duress, and it is always open to change. The assemblages of provocations I make are intended to fuel the imagination, conjure new ideas, feelings, thoughts, and responses not currently present, emphasizing the importance of displacement as a process of decoloniality.

The images revisited in (re)instate were originally made, echoing AIOS, as responses to the evocative familiarity of spaces in which I found myself; in this case in Naarm (Melbourne). Founded upon the traditional land of the Kulin Nation, a collective of five Aboriginal nations: Wurundjeri, Boonwurrung, Wathaurung, Daungwurrung and Dja DjaWurrung, who have inhabited the area for an estimated 40,000 years, Naarm was settled by Europeans in 1835, and its English name refers to the British Prime Minister at the time, Lord Melbourne. Prior to invasion, the Kulin nation comprised more than 20,000 people (Welcome to Country 2019), since dispossessed of their lands. The historian Tristram Hunt notes that the 'charm' of the imperial city of Melbourne was to be found in the 'contrasting characteristics' of its suburbs, invariably likened to their namesakes in Britain (Kew, Richmond, Brighton, Surrey Hills, for example), for their beauty and geography (2014). Moreton-Robinson though makes clear that such naming reinforces the dispossession of the traditional owners of the land. She writes that '[t]he persistent presence of English names

continues to convey a sense of Anglocentric whiteness's divine right and entitlement to Australia' (2004, 86); in adopting Indigenous names for these landscapes, we affirm their ownership. Nevertheless, Moreton-Robinson also writes that colonial era cities such as Naarm:

... signify with every building and every street that this land is now possessed by others; signs of white possession are embedded everywhere in the landscape ... Indigenous sovereignties [are] disavowed through the materiality of these significations, which are perceived as evidence of ownership by those who have taken possession. This is territory that has been marked by and through violence and race. (2015, 3)

As one of ten cities that he suggests made the British Empire, Hunt writes that Melbourne 'came to maturity as the greatest urban embodiment of a mid-Victorian belief in imperial solidarity, Anglo-Saxon brotherhood and civic pride' (2014, 307). That Melbourne might wholly embody *imperial solidarity*, and *Anglo-Saxon brotherhood*, re-emphasizes that Naarm displays the material *signs of white possession* that Moreton-Robinson describes as embedded in the city landscape. In the twenty first century, the city is still mythologized as 'European' (Davison 2001) and one in ten British immigrants in Australia live there. In 2017, it was voted the world's most livable city for the seventh year running (Wahlquist 2017). These imaginative qualities of livability, Europeaness and imperial legacies are affective, and play a large part in drawing me to focus upon Naarm for my research. My drive to foreground the city's British past, though, is not one of celebration, as I explore the excess and *otherwise* of British colonization and its legacies there.

Returning to and reworking the photographs in (re)instate explores the affective atmospheres of belonging that I encountered in the city during my research. Whilst printing these images to fold them, an error in my printing process made visible lines on

the prints. The unpredictability of my technical process became a 'hinge' to grasp a connection between the virtuality and actuality of my research contexts (Lury and Wakeford 2012, 9). My photographic technologies had unintentionally made visible and physical something excessive, (re)positioning my photographs other to what was expected, and I worked with this unintended disruption in the spirit of decoloniality. Folding into these momentary and emergent dimensions of my practice, using the unexpected, critically intervenes in the 'order' expected of the representational contexts of my photographs. Moreover, I had already cropped into speculative signs of white possession in the city, represented in these images, before I printed them. These materialities include street signs, cars, roof tiles, skyscrapers, bungalows and the botanical: which I suggest are *material manifestations of whiteness* (Gouldstone 2025). Figure 4 is a quadriptych from the series. These quotidian urban materialities, hiding in the background of these images, are in plain sight, which is also where Daniel Blight notes we find whiteness (2019). Whiteness then, is brought back into consideration through my re-turns and re-views of these materialities, in a critical examination of their ordinary banality and in a transformation of their visual and imaginative qualities.

In *(re)instate* I also use extension tubes to make photographs, this time to re-photograph the folded photographs I am working with. The resulting shallow depth of field is extreme and focuses on the creases and the folds themselves. The fragmentation and materiality of these re-photographed images are thus scrutinized closely. I suggest that the implication in this nearness is stretching, involution, or folding that allows viewers to imagine differently. It is an amplification of the photographic context that makes visible the dots that form the layering of ink on the paper, and the texture of the paper itself. These material details become strange continuities of imperial duress, disrupted and *seen otherwise*. This investigation of the continuity of 'colonial presence', and what it looks like' by re-photographing the folded photograph, follows Stoler's suggestion

that we think with "recursive analytics' or history as recursion' (2016, 26). I understand this as the resonance of the past, making itself felt in the present, an affective history that, Stoler writes, is uneven, unsettled and contingent. She writes: It 'folds back on itself' to reveal new surfaces, planes and possibilities (26). I argue that photographic folding, as a mechanism for countering fixity and repetition, echoes the 'processes of partial reinscriptions, modified displacements, and amplified recuperation' (27) that Stoler describes. My practices, as such, can be used to explore historical presences in our current times.

Folding in practice and theory, reveals new possibilities, in the generation of recombinant surfaces, and in proximity to the critical forms of whiteness as affective belonging I explore. Stoler borrows the idea of recursive analytics from Michel Foucault and the language of 'reinscriptions, re-transcriptions, and recuperations' (2016, 30), echo the focus on decoloniality and folding that I make in my broader research, *via* returning and revisiting in practice, to *re-know* as a form of unlearning. Folding the unanticipated altered images of (re)instate, and subsequently rephotographing them, creates a space for interrogating the temporal, spatial and material capacities of photography, and the presence of colonial legacies therein.

Folding is an ontology of becoming, of continual differentiation that is *inclusive*, encompassing of the ethical responsibilities of my research in being open to multiplicity and change. The conceptual and representational ambiguity in the practice of folding, emphasizes Lomax's suggestion that the photograph does not seek to suppress the implication that something else is involved; here the absence of a clear representational photographic image on photographic paper implicates its detached or absent *otherness*. The dichotomy in presence and absence evoked by this work realizes a photographic event in which representation is only a part; furthermore, an imaginative enfolding of representation *as a form of exchange* is prioritized, over ideas around fixity. Photographs are irreducible to resolute forms when ideas about representation are

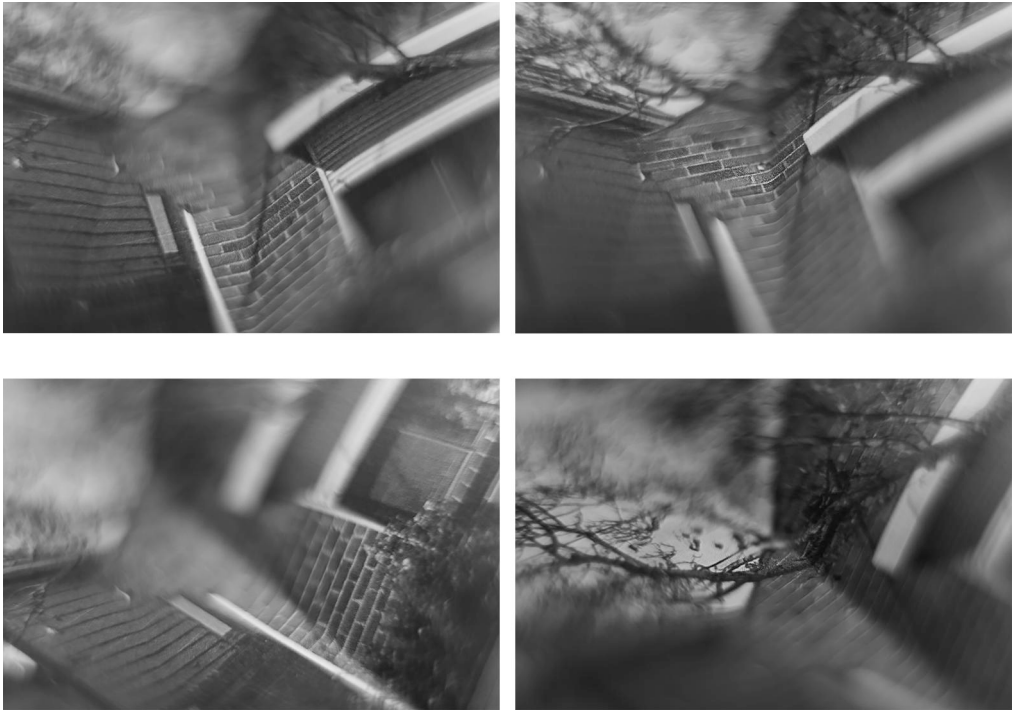


Figure 4. Sian Gouldstone, from the series *(re)instate*, 2023. Digital photographs.

negotiated; like kneading dough (Lomax's exemplar involution), exchange as representation implicates neither 'inside nor outside'. Being neither here nor there, original nor copy, the fold in both theory and practice problematizes the binary oppositions inherent in representational thought: 'we find ourselves between things' (Lomax 1995, 10). In the art of literally and theoretically folding photographs, we find in-betweenness: *affect*. Lomax too imagines photographic folding as *ethical*:

... an ethics of multiplicity unfolds and enfolds the photograph ... the photograph becomes an event; and finally that tiresome debate of 'reality or representation' becomes a matter of something else. (Lomax 1995, 58)

So, the contexts of folding in my practice begin to address my ethical responsibility for thinking through

otherness, which is crucial for taking positions of decoloniality in my research practice. There is a sticky passage of whiteness in the creation of the atmospheric conditions for, and of, my practice.¹ This is a complicated mediating process concerning encounters with affect, and as Anderson writes, 'complex spatial-temporal formations' form the combinations of processes of affective life (2016, 168). The work of re-mediating encounters (with whiteness) in my practice assembles in a myriad of experimental ways. The affective passages of my work are experienced through an interplay of working to unlearn how coloniality might be felt, as I criticize representational politics and their ontologies. Folding and rephotographing allow me to critique the values of photographic forms that historically privilege fixity, certainty and flatness, through utilizing the potential in critical perspectives of decoloniality.

Conclusions

This article, exploring whiteness in so-called-Australia, outlines a semi-autobiographical, critical visual, and affective written and photographic practice for unlearning imperial duress, a practice that explores the disparity between my experiences living in Naarm (Melbourne) from September 2016 to May 2017, with my childhood memories and encounters. My work aims to expand thinking around how we might understand the complexities of post-imperial spaces and our relations to them, through practice. It draws on the provocations of writers such as Wolfe (1999, 2006), Land (2015), Tuhiwai Smith (2021), Decter and Taunton (2022), and Azoulay (2019), to challenge the dominance of linear narratives and ideological representations of so-called Australian cultures. This challenges ways to understand the ongoing legacies and violence of colonial thinking. As experiments to evoke the atmospherics of *felt* whiteness, folding and re-photographing allow the familiar to manifest and re-activate on new planes. This re-accessing of colonial presence through my iterative practice creates what Azoulay refers to as *potential histories* (2019), making impossible the transmutation of Imperial violence into fixed and finished mnemonic forms. Folding *together*, my written and practical creative works offer a unique challenge to established colonial linear narratives, and instead *establish* alternatives to colonial control and domination. My contribution to the theory and practice of photography and whiteness is in elucidating its *potential* for change, and for an alternative *re-membering* that can be personal and embodied. I have used the possibilities in folding as my own theory and practice of relations to respond to the affective presence of whiteness: '[a] photograph may appear to be still or singular yet still it is a relation; it demands a response, a responsibility, from both the image-maker and the image-viewer' (Lomax 1995, 17). Understanding that imperial *durabilities* morph and readjust in relations and are subsequently reactivated through processes of folding and involution, helps in thinking through their aftermath: imperial

debris. The fold as a physical and theoretical motif exemplifies a thinking otherwise. Folding becomes a mode for tracing *whiteness as affect* in my research. Folding is abrupt, a creative outburst from the assumed flat, fixed, photographic surface. Examining whiteness as momentary and emergent, using folds, develops my processual and movement-oriented thinking, and the ability to disturb whiteness to make it visible as/in landscapes. Whiteness is sticky in my practice, attaching to objects, subjects, material and immaterial, humans and non-human, actual and virtual. This affects how these bodies can be valued and understood. Folding highlights that there is a continual agency in the (photographic and imaginative) image, to be excessive and affective, while rephotographing problematizes originality and/as the shuttered 'event' of imperial imagination. Folding and rephotographing are processes for and of obfuscation, repositioning, removal, reconsideration, and review. My research is an ethical practice that reviews my own racialized experiences of nostalgic belonging; it uncovers and unfolds, imaginatively and productively, new positions for remediating colonial violences in visual and non-visual ways. My practice remains inescapably sutured to whiteness, in accounting for my own presence in the world; it can be thought a material manifestation of whiteness under conditions of imperial duress, nevertheless unfolding as unruly and affective itself.

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Notes

1. Writing about unconscious emotions (affects), Sara Ahmed (2004b) notes that it is Freud, and psychoanalysis, that demonstrate how emotionality involves movement across levels of signification, and that 'feelings' shift, 'not all of which can be admitted in the present' (120). She refers to this as the rippling effect of emotions that, she writes: '... move sideways (through 'sticky' associations between signs, figures, and objects) as well as backward (repression always leaves its trace in the present—hence 'what sticks' is also bound up with the 'absent presence' of historicity) (120). This 'stickiness' of whiteness is found, seen and felt throughout my research, in its affective shifting, in its atmospheres that are emergent, revealing its signs, figures, and objects, as well as being bound with the absent presence of a historicity irreducible to it.

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