

Interpositive, Internegative

Abstract

This PhD proposal argues for an expanded conception of photography - one which is in dire need of new frameworks and accordingly, new work spaces to create images not supported by antiquated infrastructures. Through research into unorthodox photographic practices, I will establish methods as a reference for fellow artists who engage with light sensitive materials. This art making will be accompanied by a technical manual which advocates for a fresh and radical photography lab, outlining the necessary tools and latitudes required for present-day artistic practices.

Photography is categorically defined by its indexicality, flatness, and capacity for repetition. With the camera as its center, the medium has long been considered a documentary instrument employed by man to replicate the world. Rather than viewing photography as an independent entity, scholarship buoys the spectator, operator, or spectrum. In *The Stereoscope and the Stereograph* Oliver Wendell Holmes writes, "In fact, matter as a visible object is of no great use any longer... Give us a few negatives of a thing worth seeing, taken from different points of view, and that is all we want of it. Pull it down or burn it up, if you please."¹ By labelling the world as a picture and suggesting that once documented it can be thrown away, Holmes spawns our present conviction that a photograph is disconnected from the events it captures.

As a visual artist, my investment in the medium lies in re-shifting these established paradigms. Proposed art making will expand on media theories put forth by artist and writer, Susan Schuppli, who sparked an alternative definition of photography in her 2015 essay *Dirty Pictures*. Schuppli refers to images of polluted landscapes resulting from human industrial activity as "dirty pictures". She means this in a nuanced sense, arguing images to be aesthetic agents and active participants in the environmental changes they depict.² By transcending the prosaic definition of photographs as static representations, Schuppli proposes a conceptual shift in how we perceive and engage with images, characterizing them as self-governed agents.³

However, Schuppli is uninterested in expanding this argument beyond the theoretical. My PhD research will re-orient her position toward art making, creating methods which destabilize predetermined photographic processes. By uncoupling photography from the camera, I will argue

¹ See Oliver Wendell Holmes, 'The Stereoscope and the Stereograph,' *The Atlantic Monthly*, (June 1859).

² Schuppli, Susan. 'Dirty Pictures' in *Living Earth: Field Notes from the Dark Ecology Project, 2014-2016* (Sonic Acts Press, 2016) pp. 196.

³ Ibid, 199.

that photography is neither flat, replicable, or archival. Rather it is a medium occurring beyond the lens.



A ship floats in a sea of spilled oil in the Gulf of Mexico after the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster, 16 June 2010. Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/49503002894@N01/4710168878>. CC BY-NC-SA 2.0. Photo by Kris Krug.

Susan Schuppli

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Dirty Pictures

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Research will include site visits, residencies, and an index of equipment supporting alternative image-making practices. Furthermore, it will incorporate praxis and dialogue with peers like Diana Thater, Veronica Kelndorfer, Thomas Feuerstein, and Anicka Yi among others, who experiment with multi-planar and multi-scalar images. This foundational work will not be limited to traditional art spaces but rather will extend to unorthodox labs like industrial kitchens and biotechnology divisions who actively welcome interdisciplinary collaborations. With this groundwork in place, I will generate designs for a new lab focused on light-sensitive modalities.



Solar Oven, 2015⁴

⁴ Polaroid from 2015 MFA thesis exhibition *How to Tell When Its Done*, where images were “cooked” in a solar oven.

My proposal is a logical extension of twenty years studying photography, the last six of which have been committed to researching biological photographs through my art practice. This work will build on the what I have termed “the biopower of image-making”, or the power of a photograph to ‘*make*’ live and ‘*let*’ die.⁵ By untangling the relationship between photography and the camera, I will illuminate images are not fixed in time or space, but are dynamic agents already engaged with by artists.

⁵ In her introduction to *The Miracle of Analogy or The History of Photography, Part 1* (Stanford University Press, 2015), Kaja Silverman prescribes extensive ontological properties to photography, 14-16.