

Thesis Proposal

Kalaija Mallery

Existential Poetics Through Experimental Darkroom Photography

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Sharita Towne

Teresa Christiansen

For my thesis I propose to use experimental darkroom processes to make a body of work that explores the poetics of the photograph as a means of understanding and questioning our interpretations of reality. Typically considered to be an “art of the real,” photography is a perfect mechanism for exploring our interpretations of reality and our limitations in doing so. By creating work in the darkroom, I am engaging in the poetics of process and exploring the photograph’s fundamental qualities as their own visual language. This is a language I will be building throughout my project.

I will be creating full or partial photograms--cameraless prints usually made from start to finish in the darkroom. Without a camera, negative, or (sometimes) lens, photograms are perhaps the most indexical (evidential, linked to the original) form of photographic image. But even still, they are not a moment or thing itself, just a trace of its referent. The photograms I find most exciting are difficult to decipher. Knowing something is a photograph prompts the viewer to examine it as evidence--when the question, “Evidence of what?” arises, the possibilities become exciting. In my work I am less attached to revealing “truth,” but instead suggest that many truths and many perceptions contribute to the way we arrive at meaning. I am currently exploring the darkroom itself as a space for discovery, and figuring out how to communicate the poetics of this process with my viewer.

As part of my research I am examining the works of other artists in photography’s expanded field who are pushing the boundaries of what makes a photograph: Liz Deschenes, Marco Breuer, Mariah Robertson, Walead Beshty, and Letha Wilson. These artists have explored the photographic medium in very physical ways, and they make works that are about photography while also carrying layers of meaning based on material and the ways in which the works are presented. My own understanding of these works is deeply inspired by cubist poets, because of how these writers rework their medium to create new meanings; they do not completely abandon semiotics, but instead work with language in a different way to allow multiple perspectives to emerge in one piece. Almost all poetry is reliant on rhythm to carry you through the piece and to direct your understanding of that piece as “poetry.” Rhythm is to poetry what light is to photography--a fundamental aspect of our contemporary understanding of what makes the medium.

This new photographic language is difficult to pin down. Charlotte Cotton describes this new era in photography as “dialogical,” meaning conversational or in response to itself and its histories. I consider this project my dialogical relationship to photography and the world around me; in conversation with my predecessors and with what’s happening right now.

My most recent work has involved capturing the movement of liquid on photosensitive paper. When I make these prints in the darkroom I struggle to capture what only I can see when making them. It becomes a matter of scientific method, trial and error. Failure. There is an element of desperation in the process of capturing magic before it disappears in seconds. In my work to date, fixing the moving elements to paper has begun to feel like a metaphor for what I have been searching for in all my work. As I have developed my skills in the darkroom, this process has become more performative and poetic than solely experimental. My prints hold the movement of liquid, available light, and my hand. I now understand this work as a search, deeply rooted in the fundamental aspects of what makes a photograph, in ideologies of representation and reality, and in the expression of abstracted personal narrative. There is a lot of anxiety in questioning your own truth. Instead of determining “truth,” I search for a space to explore perceptual realities and how we collectively and individually arrive at our own sense of meaning. I want to bring the viewer into a response that is also a search rather than a direct answer.

I have been working small scale up until this point, but for this project I will be making my photograms on 44-inch roll paper. Over the summer I will be working in the darkroom and making prints with various materials and light sources, and then in the fall I will experiment with display and installation. I will be researching and developing my definition of existential poetics so that I may fully articulate the fundamental elements of photography as a poetic process. The language I am working in has yet to be clearly defined by the “institution” (critics, academia, and theorists) and I imagine my research will involve collecting a large amount of information from various sources and piecing it together to form a cohesive understanding from my line of inquiry (see: Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades* project).

I am excited to explore the collective and subjective perception of reality through this thesis project. I most look forward to contributing to the ever-expanding realization of photography and towards articulating its tie to poetics. Ultimately through exciting the chaos of being we can inspire perception of an altered state--as well as an altered consideration of the photographic medium.

ARTIST STATEMENT

Kalaija Mallery

My work begins with photograms, cameraless prints made in the darkroom. An unpredictable and repetitive process, securing the movement of liquids on photosensitive paper poses a struggle to capture what only I can see when making these prints. It becomes a performative matter of scientific method; trial and error. There is an element of desperation in the process of capturing magic before it disappears in seconds. Fixing the moving elements to paper has begun to feel like a metaphor for what I have been searching for in all my work.

These prints begin at just 4x5 inches, and become a negative themselves to be enlarged and printed digitally. Printing them this way further obscures what material graced the original's surface--and negates the cameraless prints' single, one-of-a-kind authenticity.

My process is a search, deeply rooted in the fundamental aspects of what makes a photograph, in ideologies of representation and reality, and in the expression of abstracted personal truth. Through 2D works, I seek space to explore perceptual realities and create work that aggravates consideration of how we collectively and individually arrive at our own sense of meaning. I like to think of making meaning as a recurring physical process. I think about the body, then, and how it remembers. You can feel it sometimes...

ABSTRACT

If photographs are essays, photograms are poems...

With photography at the end of its life as we know it, the cameraless print acts as the exemplary form of “Photography” in the contemporary technological era. An examination of its crisis and my response through my own works; I explore a brief history of photography, semiotics, and the two together in representation and the real. Through this body of work, I have articulated poetics as a process of making meaning, and engaged in that process through generative chance and abstraction of materials. My work begins with photograms--cameraless prints made in the darkroom. As an unpredictable and repetitive process, securing the movement of liquids on photosensitive paper poses a struggle to capture what only I can see when making these prints. This process may not be apparent to the viewer, but using the language of photography, I hope to create a space where my viewer is prompted to reconsider assumptions of the photographic real through expanding the space between index and meaning in the final works. This conversation, beginning in comparisons between photography and written language, is later opened up beyond medium-specific ideology, to the universal body (abstract and unknowable) and addresses responsibilities of both author and reader as makers of meaning and of culture.

KALAIJA MALLERY '16

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE
PACIFIC NORTHWEST COLLEGE OF ART

a constant, reciprocal process: a poetic act:
cameraless photography as an experience of the impossible

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
BACHELOR OF FINE ARTS DEGREE

Hi everyone, for those of you who don't know me, my name is Kalaija Mallery. Thank you all for coming to my thesis defense. First I'd like to thank those who donated so I could frame the work and exhibit it in its final form--which to me means so much to me and finishes the work, something I will explain in greater detail at the end of this talk. Thank you. And thank you to my family and friends for being here today, it means the world to feel your support throughout this process and now at the end. And finally thank you to my panel for being here today, David, Sarah. And to my mentor Teresa--thank you for your insight, tough love, and positive reinforcement. And reminders to eat. And sleep. Without all I am not sure I would've made it here. Thank you.

The last six months has been a large period of experimentation and reflection and I was able to successfully expand my visual language and articulate my process. It has been an arduous journey getting here, from the moment I came to Art School and experienced my major existential crisis in my practice, to now, using this as fuel to push me into somewhere that was at first uncomfortable but has now become a large realm of possibility for me. In this last semester, I have produced a large number of prints, and the process of selection and installation was perhaps the most difficult part of the work. This project has taught me to be diligent, committed, and trusting of myself. I have learned to appreciate my own dynamism as a maker; and I am sure this work will continue to evolve with me and could take many forms beyond this body in front of you today.

I will explain a bit more about the history behind my process, what I have learned from my research, and why I chose to display these works in this exhibition.

The work in front of you today begins with a cameraless process called photograms--which I will get into in great depth throughout this discussion, but essentially, are contact prints made in the darkroom. These works made and then processed digitally and scaled up but otherwise untouched. They are mounted and floating behind their frames. I view these works as a reality abstract, mediated in such a way that hopefully starts a conversation. I will rely on an exploration of the real, the unreal, and the space between in order to frame this discussion. I make work to engage in poetics of process, how we make meaning, and an exploration of the fundamental aspects of the photograph and its tie to truth. I have developed a visual language in these prints through experimentation with my materials, by utilizing systems of making, and relinquishing control over a medium that is bound to it.

I return again, to the beginning-- to the origin of my line of inquiry--that occurred well before my art practice. Perhaps one of the earliest curiosities of mine was a game I used to play, "Alien", where I would stare at things until all context fell away and I was left with the object in front of me, attempting to place it back into something from the perspective of someone from another world. This worked well with playground equipment, furniture, cars, and other objects that I was exposed to regularly--as well as sometimes, works of art hanging in my mother's studio. This was remarkably easier to do at six years old. There were other games too--staring at the ceiling pretending it was the floor, spinning around so fast and marveling at the movement

that my jumbled senses were churning into visuals. I used to enjoy tripping myself out on the possibilities of what something could be, it was the beginning of my deep understanding of truth, where I could create ways to participate with a truth that was more malleable, and not only that of storybooks or fairytales, but everyday experience. This was not magical realism as much as it was real life potential for magic.

All the while there were photographs. Before coming here, I never considered photographs for their weight--but participated in their histories unknowingly, born into an entitlement with them, a desire to hoard and capture the world and the privilege to be unaware of any consequence or further considerations. I was accepted to Art School with a portfolio of fashion images constructed with my friends in vacant landscapes. Very quickly, this illusion was shattered as I was introduced towards the histories and responsibilities entwined with making art. I engaged in a complicated discourse of intersectional feminist theory and problematized photography's ability to address these things. For awhile, I abandoned visual arts, and instead returned to an intimate questioning that I had shoved aside. What value did my perspective add to the greater conversation in the art world? Why was my perspective relevant to put on the wall?

Some answers, for me, were articulated through my writing process. When I write poetry, I visualize a memory or dream as closely as I can--where my initial referent is fuzzy, incomplete. I then spend a great deal of time articulating and building its description as best I can, before I push the piece through several modes of redaction, translation, and collage. The resulting written piece, if successful, is syntactically confused but elicits strong visual imagery, hopefully

allowing my viewer to piece together imagery from their own perceptions through my coded expression of a private image. This position is in line with the work of cubist poets, who rework their medium to create new meaning and allow multiple perspectives to emerge in one piece. My process and consideration of writing has directly informed my consideration and process in photography. In my proposal I tied these practices together by claiming, “rhythm is to poetry what light is to photography--a fundamental aspect of our contemporary understanding of what makes the medium”. In this project I have expanded that beyond what is fundamentally understood but what is fundamentally understated and yet perhaps engaged with the most in both; semiotic weight is what we rely on in order to read the piece and the image, and make meaning of it.

To define terms I use often in this discussion, I want to take a moment to talk about American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, who wrote on semiology, which is the language of signs and its use and effect in communication. His studies, while almost never directly about photography, have been used by photo theorists for a hundred years to discuss it. Essentially, Pierce articulated the role of signs and their construction of meaning in culture. Three essential terms Peirce defined were: iconic signs, indexical signs, and symbolic signs. Iconic signs have a qualitative relation to the thing they represent--in some way they resemble what they are representing. Indexical signs bear a causal relation to what they represents, a common example of an indexical sign is smoke meaning fire, or a meow meaning a cat. Indices direct attention to the thing they are about, they a “point” towards something. The third are Symbolic signs, that bear meaning because of a cultural consensus and are much more variable. One common

example of this is the color red and its association with “stop” through a common law that governs red lights as stop lights, and red signs as stop signs.

All three of these signs are activated in reading traditional photographs. A photograph, which is an index of a moment frozen in time, displays iconic signs that are read through symbolic ones. Without a camera, negative, or even at times a lens, photograms are perhaps the most indexical form of photographic image. Even if photograms are closest to nature in photography, as they are a trace of reality frozen onto paper, they still are not a moment or the thing itself. Cameraless processes that I find most compelling are difficult to decipher, in that they lack iconic references. By knowing something is photography, the viewer is then prompted to examine it as evidence--when the “of what?” is hard to distinguish, the viewer is aware of the problematic nature of this assumption, and hopefully becomes more engaged in participating with the image in searching for its truth.

My love for works like this was influenced by my early experimentation with capturing the movement of light onto photo-paper submerged in trays of water. I was most drawn to these images for their movement, depth, and abstraction. It was a way of figuring out how to get used to working with the medium abstractly and get reacquainted with the darkroom. As I got more comfortable with this process, I was able to branch out from printing under water and chose other materials that also carried that motion and depth but resulted in prints a bit more abstract and difficult to decipher.

The materials used in these prints are not immediately recognizable, which is what drew me to use them. Because we are trained to view photographs as a window onto the world, capturing images of things that do not look like their materials was critical to enable a sort of skepticism or curiosity from my viewer. It is a trace of the natural world which we cannot link back to its origin. In this way, these prints are an index, but they are a deceptive or uninformative one.

One of the most influential writers in understanding my process was Geoffrey Batchen. His books, “Burning Desire”, “Emanations”, and “Photography Degrees Zero” have beautifully iterated what I was feeling about my work as I made it. His book, *Emanations*, came out this summer and discusses and conceptualizes the history and contemporary practices of the cameraless print.

The first photographs were cameraless. In 1727, Johann Heinrich Schulze discovered the sensitivity of silver salts to light. His early experiments were made by pasting stencils of words onto small bottles filled with chalk and nitrous lime mixture and exposing them to light. Batchen calls the results “ephemeral traces of language, moments of culture inscribed and temporarily preserved in nature”.

This is perhaps the closest way to articulate how I define the fundamentals of photography. “Moments of culture inscribed in nature”--nature being the part of photography that is rooted in science, its chemical and alchemical processes. It’s realness. It is photography’s

closely entwined relationship with the world we inhabit and the world we perceive that makes it one of the most discursive mediums in recent art. Photography now participates across several mediums and has been the dominant force that has shaped the dissemination of information, mass media, and how we view ourselves for a period over the last 100 years. Photography is a vehicle for delivering and reifying culture, and is largely deceptive, as it's tie to "nature" allows those to see a photograph like a window--something that can be looked through and the world seen objectively.

Photograms notably reject this position as a window, as they are objects that are made and thus should be looked at rather than something to see into. One of the inventors of photography, William Henry Fox Talbot, wrote of showing an early cameraless print, a contact print of a piece of lace, to his colleagues and asking them "is this good representation?". The group replied that they were not fooled, and that it was "evidently no picture, but the piece of lace itself". This satisfied Talbot, for it confirmed that contact printing was the most persuasive pictorial illusion. His photogram of lace looked like the real thing, and in posing a question in this way, he articulating a tangible level of a new perceptual truth in art.

At even its earliest stages, cameraless photography was understood as a way to directly trace reality and preserve it as evidence of what was once there. But photograms hold the artist's hand directly and thus are still manipulated traces of culture in nature, as is evident in their transition from the vernacular to the Avant-Garde, beginning in the Dada and Surrealist movements. Man Ray stumbled upon the cameraless print in the darkroom and immediately

declared the discovery “A New Method of Realizing The Artistic Possibilities of Photography” (as was published in Vanity Fair in 1922). By using the photogram to push new perspectives and tones, he was accredited to once again setting painting free. And Photography at once could take on the role of the painterly, could be whatever it wanted to be, and was.

Lazlo Maholy-Nagy pushed the boundaries of photography even more, just a few years after Man Ray, in the Modernist movement. At that time human experience was seen as universal, and modernist artists used their mediums at their most fundamental aspects to communicate something that could be read as a mastery of expression itself. This is an era that celebrated documentary photography and aesthetics of machine, environment, and humankind. Maholy-Nagy set up his works as systematic experiments, using translucent substances and liquids as his materials in order to make his prints. He was the first to name these experiments “photograms”. It was in his hands that the photographic print became free of its production of the outside world. Maholy-Nagy has been accredited, through the use of his photograms, as truly exhibiting the fundamentals of photography.

The substances I used here interacted together in such a way (chemical reactions, fluids and resists to fluids) that allowed even more distance between my hand and the results I came away with. Using photograms in this way further allowed me to let go of control in making, and instead carved out room for discovery and chance within my process that I never had before. I wanted the prints to almost make themselves, to become a conversation between myself and my materials, the artist and photography taking a role that is equally important and responsible.

My hand is in this work, but I was unable to control what images I created. I chose to work in this way very intentionally, as photography is typically seen as a very controlled and technological process. I wanted to free the print to become its highest potential. What I did have control over I approached very much like the scientific method: I set my controls, which were my initial photograms of water, to create a set of standards that I would work under. All prints were exposed to the same amount of light with the same amount of contrast from the enlarger. All exposure times were the same. The prints were all developed in the same strength of developer and processed normally through their stop and fix baths. Because of the nature of my materials I was unable to wash them all the same, some required a private bath so as not to contaminate the sinks, but they all were washed and hand dried.

All the variants in the prints (and no two prints are the same) comes from the materials and how they moved in their bath during the paper's exposure. This allowed the selection and exhibition process to be my main role as Artist and for the prints creation to be an equal exchange between artist and medium.

In many ways I approach photography through the same techniques Lazlo Maholy-Nagy practiced, though I believe that the fundamentals of photography are not just in their sheer materiality. At least not anymore, now that the photographic image is so widely disseminated and has advanced technologically beyond light, paper and process. Through my work I have

come to articulate the fundamentals of photography in line with its very first iteration: ephemeral traces of culture bound and solidified in nature.

Ephemeral being the quality of existing for a very short time--as all photographic images are traces of a moment that ends once it's captured, and is reborn and ends every time the image is viewed. In photograms, it is chemical transformation and their recurring physical processes that allows us to solidify silver halides in their exposure to light, to prompt the silver to cluster in reaction to it, freeze the clusters and let the rest fall away. The image then seems to appear from thin air. This process is the result of a time-based interaction in the darkroom.

The darkroom has become significant to me as a private space for performative generation. Not unlike lucid dreams, when occupying this place you become acutely more aware of your body in its movements through space. Working in the dark, in a sort of desperation to fix moving elements to paper, has become a metaphor for what I have been searching for in all my work. There is a balance of intuition, of becoming a material yourself, and quieting your mind that is imperative to my relinquishing control of the photographic process. The resulting work is evidence of my performative action and devotion to mastering unlearning of seeing, of trusting my process in the most intimate way, and letting nature have more of a shared hand in the process.

Initially I had hopes of using early stages of my process to develop a visual language that could be used to create large scale, abstract photograms. I did work large inside the darkroom,

which was even more performative, but I still found the small scale images to be so much more interesting, as they focused in on a smaller portion of what was happening when they were exposed. At one point I started to run out of photo paper and cut my standard sheets of paper into 4x5” inches so I could keep testing out the conditions of each material. These sheets were able to capture exquisite detail despite their size, and unconsciously reference the 4x5 camera, which is one of the most beautiful and oldest forms of photography--known for the large negative that holds great detail. Enamored, I continued to work at a small scale.

These prints began to become negatives themselves, and I then felt compelled to scan and make a digital print from to see what happened. The results were striking--seeing a print blown up at a large size allowed so many details to come forward that were lost in the smaller sized originals. In this way I consider the scanner to be an enlarger, and the photogram to be the negative from which I am printing.

When pushed through a digital process of translation my photograms became even further from the materials I had used--and suddenly they were not about a trace anymore, but an iteration that could be had from the trace. At this scale, these prints become an expression of something impossible to see with the naked eye or photography alone. They are breaking the conventional boundaries between analog and digital, and in combining the two in conversation with one another, these prints are an experience of something impossible.

The frames were the final critical decision I made for the work. The final, digital prints are dry mounted and floating, preserved and protected behind the glass, held so you can see the edges and the shadow created by the print against its enclosure. I used this decision to return to the idea of the print as an object that is created rather than a window. My viewer is made to be aware of the frame as they are viewing the image inside it. My hope is that the interaction with the print is a movement between viewing what's inside the image and the image as a whole.

The frames also create a faulty preciousness, and like the shadowboxes that encase butterfly wings, connote something endangered and its desperation to remain preserved. The irony here, of course, is that these prints are no longer one-of-a-kind once made digitally--they are not really that precious. My frames are used as a hint to photography's preservation, in a world that is seeing it quickly fade.

Photography and mortality have been entwined in the beginning. Early, long exposure portraits where the sitter had to stay so still they could not smile or even open their eyes yielded images that felt almost ghostly, and even began the controversial practice of Spirit Photography. Walter Benjamin wrote of the death of Aura in works of art due to mechanical printing technologies--as photographs render initially singular works of art like paintings as endlessly reproducible, thus enabling a death. Over half a century later Roland Barthes articulated the most poetic death in art, the Death Of the Author, which is the theory that once a work of art is shared it is remade by the perspectives of those who read it, endlessly reproduced in the hands of those

participating with it. And again in *Camera Lucida*, where he wrote a quiet reflection on photography, memory, and death of a moment and the ghost held in the image's frame.

If death has been a part of photography from the beginning what does it mean to say of its death now under the conditions of the contemporary modes of image making? Barthes reminds us that photography is not representative of a reality present but that it is representative of what once was. Batchen calls photography a "death mask", meaning it is an imprint of what once was there but now is not. It is proof of something's existence, even if not of its truth. Where photographs survive amidst this digital realm is in their identity as indexical signs, as Batchen puts it, "images inscribed by the very objects to which they refer." The death of photography only gives it new life, photography is newly reified in the contemporary era as an imprinting of reality itself.

While photography remains haunted by the conditions of its own termination, those who are devoted to it seek ways to hold onto it, to keep it close even as the social and cultural needs for it change. The postmodern photographers, after running out of things to photograph, essentially photographed photography and put it on display as a tongue-in-cheek critique of their commodification and distillation in culture. Contemporary practices seem more in line with the strategies of the conceptual movement of the sixties and seventies, where performance and material come together, and where photography remains a central tool but photography as a separate entity is quickly fading away.

I am working in a time where these boundaries of photography are activated in both arenas. Liz Deschenes uses the cameraless print and installation in order to quietly and poetically link photography and its origins. Like in tilt/shift, where she installed the works around every corner of the space and eludes to the physical boundaries of perception. She is using photography as a material to discuss photography. Letha Wilson, who has a show opening in January here at PNCA, uses photographs as material in her sculptures. I was fortunate enough to visit with Letha at the beginning of the semester and sticks out to me about her is her unabashed confrontation of photography--she is not bound by its pristineness or its delicacy. Her prints are c-prints, made in the nearly extinct color darkroom, a craft that is difficult if not impossible to perfect. She breaks the print and pushes it as she uses it with poured concrete and other surfaces. Using the print the way she does suggests that the photograph can be a means to an end. There are almost no 'Photographers' in the art world anymore, and more often than not there are Artists using photography. Exploring the photographic medium in very physical ways, sometimes disrupting its surface qualities, using it as a material of emphasis rather than the end of the viewing experience. Often contemporary works are not necessarily about photography, but still are in conversation with it, a working response to a contemporary crisis, its death and rebirth, its epitaph.

Photography's death is something that, much like painting, has been a thrilling and anxious discussion in the art world and stems from invention of new technologies. Computer imaging software can now replicate the world in such a manner that it seems almost impossible to tell computer generated images apart from photographs. Geoffrey Batchen suggests that

because of the proliferation of digital images that look like photographs, photography may have even been robbed of its cultural identity as a distinctive medium, as one rooted in real depictions of reality. Batchen also brings up a second suggestion, that has perhaps exacerbated the first cause of photography's end: as technology continues to advance, we are almost unable to tell the real and the simulated apart. Suddenly, the distance between things and signs, nature and culture, human and machine-- binaric oppositions seems to be collapsing, they are no longer dependant on one another, and distinguishing them as separate entities becomes more complicated. These two factors (which Batchen identifies as technological and epistemological) have together created a space where Photography cannot serve its prior, necessitative purposes. It's death is now a space for freedom, its new beginning.

That is a great deal of what I considered while making this work--bringing photography back to the index. However, it would be impossible to talk about this work without talking about any sort of connotative value--that is, why I chose the prints I chose to display in front of you today. The works in front of you all present foreign, organic structures. Folds, tears, streams, bubbles, knots, layers, and twists make up a dynamic, dark, ephemeral inner landscape. The more I make I cannot separate myself from notions of the human body, as it was the first place I really problematized representation in all art but especially photography. How ironic is it, that after seeking space to get away from it, I come right back to it again. It is impossible to represent every body in a work of art, and yet everyone has one. It is the only universal experience we all share, and yet in many ways, it remains so unknowable. We articulate our bodies through a language not dissimilar to the a language we use to articulate photographs, and I am unsure if

that is knowing them at all. I spent many years unlearning that language so I could try and redevelop a relationship with mine. Like photographs, how we read the external body is only part of the story, and it is not untouched by forces of the outside world. How can we possibly tell the whole story, its histories, its experience, when the language do so is limited?

This brings me to my final point in the work, in terms of reading and readership. I mentioned earlier my desire for works undecipherable, in prints and in poems. Personally, as a viewer I like doing as much of the work as the original creator. I consider this the most exciting thing about poetics--which for me means "making meaning". Sometimes you may not ever get there, but it's the process that is engaging. Perhaps in works more abstract and disrupted, a little Punctum--which is Barthes' term for piercing of the heart from an image before it is articulated--perhaps Punctum is all that drives us to keep looking, keep searching, reading over and over again. If we can consider meaning as a constant reciprocal process, something that is never fixed but that is done and undone and redone again, we can find magic in the cross-over, or the little tunings, that occur with one another. We as makers can understand that making art is a great responsibility, and that signs and their production have power in affecting culture, in reifying it. That this learned language of semiotics goes beyond the production of photography and art but in production of our realities, and to the extent of our own authorship we can address this in ourselves.

Somehow in all of this, the body, photograph, poetics, process, identity as the artist--they all mash together. Meaning is as mortal as flesh, which is somehow more mortal than photography itself.

Annotated Bibliography

Barthes, Roland. *Camera lucida: reflections on photography*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.

Roland Barthes' investigation on the photograph and seeing, the spectator as subject, and develops the terms *studium* and *punctum* as qualitative measures of viewing photographs.

Batchen, Geoffrey. *Burning with desire: the conception of photography*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999.

Batchen beautifully uses history and contemporary practices to explicate photography's death in the modern age.

Batchen, Geoffrey. *Photography degree zero: reflections on Roland Barthes's Camera lucida*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009.

Batchen responds to Roland Barthes' famous book on photography, *Camera Lucida*, in a psychoanalytic and spiritual tone, through a series of essays written on the subject.

Batchen, Geoffrey. *Emanations: the art of the cameraless photograph*. Munich: DelMonico Books-Prestel, 2016.

In *Emanations*, Batchen uproots the history of the cameraless photographic print while also collectively responding to the contemporary use of this practice. The language Batchen uses is poetic and personal, and is perhaps the largest contributor towards my

thesis defense. This is also notably Batchen's newest published work (2016) and has the most slides of any of his books.

Benjamin, Walter, and J. A. Underwood. *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*. London: Penguin, 2008.

Benjamin famously critiques and exonerates the rise of new technology and its possibility to alter perception, privilege, and a work of art's "aura".

Bresson, Henri Cartier. "The mind's eye." *Writings on photography and photographers*. New York (1999).

A modernist photographer and really, an iconic devout follower of Photography. Quote from my proposal: "I believe that, through the act of living, the discovery of oneself is made concurrently with the discovery of the world around us, which can mold us, but which can also be affected by us. A balance must be established between these two worlds--the one inside us and the one outside us. As the result of a constant reciprocal process, both these worlds come to form a single one. And it is this world that we must communicate."

Cotton, Charlotte.

"[Http://aperture.org/magazine-2013/nine-years-a-million-conceptual-miles-by-charlotte-cotton/](http://aperture.org/magazine-2013/nine-years-a-million-conceptual-miles-by-charlotte-cotton/)." Aperture Foundation NY. Accessed April 21, 2016.

<http://aperture.org/magazine-2013/nine-years-a-million-conceptual-miles-by-charlotte-cotton/>.

Charlotte Cotton explores photography and its use in the contemporary art world. She says "at its most literal, contemporary art photography is beautifully dialogical. Photography is the central subject within photography as an artistic medium, an entity

best understood *in relation* to a host of mitigating factors, from its quotidian cousins in social image-making to the elder statesmen of highbrow art—especially painting and sculpture but also installation arts, including video.... It is clear that we are a million conceptual miles from where we were even nine years ago—when there was a pernicious idea that photography had to adopt the values, traditions, and rhetoric of other art forms and simultaneously deny its own broad lexicon of dynamic and quotidian meaning in order to have credibility”.

Grundberg, Andy. *Crisis of the Real: Writings on Photography, 1974-1989*. New York: Aperture, 1990.

Andy Grundberg explores new media and its tie to reality, and the ways in which we may use it to manipulate or stir a new consideration of the real. He says, “this inability to have ‘pure, unblemished meaning or experience at all’ is, I would submit, exactly the premise of the art we call postmodernist. And, I would add, it is the theme that characterizes most contemporary photography, explicitly or implicitly. Calling it a ‘theme’ is perhaps too bland: it is the crisis that photography and all other forms of art face in the late twentieth century”.

Hejinian, Lyn, and Lyn Hejinian. *My Life: And, My Life in the Nineties*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2013.

One of my favorite contemporary poets, Hejinian uses memory access points in order to write experimental prose about memories from her childhood. Much like a photograph might behave, there are fragments within the piece that make sense on their own, but as a whole one struggles to understand or follow the work entirely.

Heckert, Virginia, Virginia Heckert, Marc Harnly, and Sarah Freeman. *Light, paper, process: reinventing photography*. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2015.

Featuring the works of seven artists who use the photographic process in a new way. Heckert interviews them through several years and writes in detail of their process, how they regard their work, and technical notes that go along with each.

Rexer, Lyle. *The edge of vision: the rise of abstraction in photography*. New York: Aperture, 2009.

Rexer examines the history of abstract photography beginning in its invention, through onto contemporary practices. A psychological and social analysis, the idea of visual confusion as a point of entry is explored throughout the book.

Salesaperture. "Thomas Ruff – Interview with Aperture – Summer 2013 – "Curiosity"" Aperture Foundation NY. Accessed October 12, 2016.

<http://aperture.org/blog/thomas-ruff-photograms-for-the-new-age/>.

Thomas Ruff talks with Michael Famighetti about his newest body of work, digital photograms made with a 3D scanner, and how they are made. Perhaps the most frustrating and exciting new practice in cameraless photographs, they play between Photography's death.

Shore, Stephen. *The nature of photographs*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

A history of Photography and the ways we see it. Shore very perfectly explains Pierce's theories of signs, *semiotics*, and applies it to how we view photographs.

Sontag, Susan. *As Consciousness Is Harnessed to Flesh*.

A collection of essays by my favorite author. A more personal but poetic collection (accumulated by her daughter after her death) of fragmented statements that are inspiring and emblematic of love, life and death.

Sontag, Susan. "On Photography. 1977." *Rpt. New York: Anchor* (1990).

Susan Sontag very critically examines photography in its relation to power, specifically in war, portraiture, and documentary photography. Sontag was the first one to relate the camera to a gun, and assert its masculine power over the world it captures.

Squiers, Carol, Geoffrey Batchen, George Baker, and Hito Steyerl. *What Is a Photograph?* (2014)

What Is a Photograph? is a collection of work shown in the groundbreaking contemporary show at the International Center for Photography. The works and the essay that preface them encase a new interest in the boundaries of photography and how they may be pushed, bended, twisted, collected, or installed. This book was the beginning of my understanding of the possibilities for a photograph in contemporary fine art.