

History and Theory of Photography (New Brunswick/online, 27 Apr 23)

New Brunswick, NJ, 08901 United States / online, Apr 27, 2023

Deadline: Mar 19, 2023

Julian Wong-Nelson

The Developing Room's Seventh Graduate Student Colloquium on the History and Theory of Photography.

The Developing Room, a working group at the Center for Cultural Analysis at Rutgers University, announces its seventh graduate student colloquium. The event is for Ph.D. students from any field of study who are working on dissertation topics in which photography – its histories and theories – plays a central role. This year we particularly encourage contributions on the subject of photography and resistance writ large.

Photography, bell hooks tells us, can be liberating. Using the medium, disempowered subjects can connect “to a recuperative, redemptive memory that enables us to construct radical identities, images of ourselves that transcend the limits of the colonizing eye.” But across its many historical arcs, photography has also consistently offered another side of the same coin: exploitation. Pictures of unwilling and marginalized peoples abound, be they colonial subjects or incarcerated citizens, or in extreme cases victims of atrocities. How do we understand and historicize these countervailing powers of the medium? In what ways might we account for articulations of the self and others that, as Tina Campt suggests, “resist easy categorization and refuse binary notions of agency versus subjection”?

Our next graduate student colloquium at the Developing Room inquires into photography as a dialectical site of resistance and exploitation. The medium may offer innumerable opportunities to thwart forces exercised by institutions, governments, and photographers, and it can contest the hold of images that express such power. But what are the ways in which the medium has been successfully used as a form of refusal despite its frustrating mutability, and are there patterns to the forms of nuanced pushback that it has taken? How do evolutions in the medium's technologies both afford and squelch efforts to image and exercise resistance? And what of the troubled relationship between people engaged in struggle and photographers seeking to speak for them? How might we conceive of self-fashioning and proud quotidian life as itself a form of resistance in pictures, even if the images are “neither wholly liberatory vehicles of agency, transcendence, or performativity nor unilateral instruments of objectification and abjection,” as Campt expands? And how might the unveiling of hidden communities and practices contribute to overturning stereotypes and regimes of repression, only to be absorbed into the body politic as false intimacy or spectacle?

Students selected to present will have the opportunity to share their work with their peers and an official respondent who is a leader in the field. Applicants may be at any stage of dissertation research, but ideally presentations will consist of a dissertation chapter or a section, along with an account of how that chapter/section fits within the larger project. The format involves a formal 25-minute presentation followed by 30 minutes of discussion. Although only five presentations are given at each colloquium meeting, the Developing Room invites a large audience of students in order to ensure a rich conversation and to build a constituency from which papers can be drawn in subsequent colloquia. We encourage participants to present in person at the Developing Room in New Brunswick, NJ, but we will also accommodate those beaming in via Zoom. The event will close with a dinner.

Our respondent this year will be Dr. Kylie Thomas. She has recently taken a new position as Senior Lecturer at the Radical Humanities Laboratory at University College Cork, Ireland. She is also a Senior Researcher at NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Amsterdam, where she co-directs the NIOD ImageLab on war and visual culture. She is the author of *Impossible Mourning: HIV/AIDS and Visuality after apartheid* (Wits University Press & Bucknell University Press, 2014). She is also co-editor of *Photography in and out of Africa: Iterations with Difference* (Routledge, 2016) and *Women and Photography in Africa: Creative Practices and Feminist Challenges* (Routledge, 2020). She has held numerous research fellowships, including the European Institutes for Advanced Study Junior Research Fellowship at the Institute for Human Sciences, Vienna, Austria in 2017-2018; a British Academy International Visiting Research Fellowship at the University of Brighton in 2018-2019 and a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Research Fellowship at NIOD (2019-2021). She writes about visual activism, feminist, LGBT and anti-racist movements, resistance and protest, and South Africa during and after apartheid. Her current research centers on four Jewish women photographers working at the time of the Second World War.

For more information, visit the Developing Room's website.

<https://www.developingroom.com>

To apply, please send the following materials to developingroom@gmail.com by March 19, 2023, with the subject line "Seventh Graduate Student Colloquium Application":

- An abstract of 250 words or less
- A summary of your dissertation progress, 250 words or less
- CV
- A short bio of 150 words or less

Reference:

CFP: History and Theory of Photography (New Brunswick/online, 27 Apr 23). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 22, 2023 (accessed Apr 6, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/38606>>.