



HDK-VALAND – HÖGSKOLAN FÖR KONST OCH DESIGN

The Objectivity Laboratory Propositions on Documentary Photography

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Akademisk avhandling för filosofie doktorsexamen i konstnärlig gestaltning vid HDK-Valand – Högskolan för konst och design, Göteborgs universitet, som med tillstånd av Konstnärliga fakultetens dekan offentligt kommer att försvaras fredagen den 8 april 2022 kl 13:00 vid HDK-Valand, Kristinelundsgatan 6-8, Göteborg

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Abstract

Title: The Objectivity Laboratory: Propositions on Documentary Photography

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At a moment in history when “post-truth” and “alternative facts” epitomize a political and media landscape that feeds on the circulation of doubt and distrust, *The Objectivity Laboratory: Propositions on Documentary Photography* addresses ethical dilemmas that emerge when artists’ approach the realities and experiences of others.

Prominent photography criticism in the 1970s and 1980s brought a heightened awareness to the politics of representation, resulting in the emergence of a “documentary distrust.” My main objective in this research is to articulate “propositions” that address the documentary blockages that define photography’s framework and possibilities. The propositions—assembled under the headings MONTAGE, INVESTIGATION, RESISTANCE, and NEARBY—seek to contribute to the dynamic dialogue that has evolved in documentary photography in recent years, which has approached photography as an expandable and unfixed practice.

Truth and a “situated objectivity” are investigated as radical tools in the artist’s approach of urgent matters in the world. A commitment to credible, rich, situated knowledges with a basis in reality materializes. Through a research project that has aimed to explore and appreciate the possibilities of photography anew, I ultimately suggest that documentary photography has the potential to lead to important knowledges about the world. This potential, I go on to argue, builds on a responsiveness in relation to the violations that photography can inflict. Values of critical reflexivity, ethics, and responsibility unfold as essential documentary attributes. *The Objectivity Laboratory* has been formulated as a search for considered and considerate procedures in the documentary engagement with the world. In the pursuit of reliable knowledges and counter-narratives, transformation, reflection, and contestation emerge as integral aspects of reliability and credibility. The research is anchored in practice; developed in dialogue with artists and artworks, it is led by the primary research methods of artistic and curatorial practice. The natural sciences—the setting for my artistic practice—has inspired the theoretical outlooks and overall focus of the research and particularly Karen Barad and Donna Haraway’s perspectives, developed within feminist science studies, have acted as a catalyst in the quest for productive takes on contemporary documentary photography.