

Bordom & Theory

Theory in Failure ( Sequence one ):

**The Daguerreotype and The Laser print.**  
How we never learn from photographic history, just repeat it in digital formats.

By Oliver Griffin 2014

Theory in Failure ( Sequence one ):

## The Daguerreotype and The Laser print.

How we never learn from photographic history, just repeat it in digital formats.

VULET Ink Laser printed on to 3mm Aluminum sheet with a TIGER  
019/00600 polyurethane layer

Oliver Griffin 2015

915mm x 1220mm (Arch E) x 3mm  
(in two parts)

No A/P  
Edition One

Edition Prints In Velvet lined boxed.  
Individually signed and noted by the Artist.  
160mm x 229mm (A5) x 3mm  
(in two parts)

No A/P  
Edition Seven

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Lets start from the beginning. Each Image is a single sheet of 10x8" Rolleiflex Orthochromatic 25iso film stock. Exposed 3min's on with a Wista 10x8" large format camera to the correct exposure and developed with a series of lford chemicals at the correct agitation rate and times. These techniques of photographic reproduction have not changed since the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But negatives are fragile and photographers are even more fragile<sup>1</sup>.

These negatives are now scanned at 3200dpi in which takes 9mins to create a 1.64GB digitalized file of the image. These are then directly laser printed onto aluminum with a VULET ink and a clear TIGER 019/00600 polyurethane is applied to protect the image. This all sound very modern, but in fact the theory dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the Daguerreotype. Printing directly on to a metallic surface that reflects light in order to capture an image is nothing new, but rarely used in this day and age due to functionally.

The combination of the traditional photographic theory and the practice of digital processes to produce this work make me think (the artist; Oliver Griffin) about changes within this medium within his lifetime of photographic education. Trying to understand the philosophy and practice of this medium that is ever changing. But as human beings we only fail and we never learn from photographic history, just repeat it in digital formats.

Oliver Griffin 2015

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<sup>1</sup> The nature of this medium that in order to control the image, you have to control life, I sadly do not have that (the artist; Oliver Griffin). The people that enter into the image are not what I wanted. So the art of negative re-touch was brought in to destroy all elements that were not needed on this using following tools; scalpel blade, lighter, shoe and tarmac. These damaged the negative creating the unconventional effects seen in the final images. But these negatives can also be seen as stress release on photographs that were not necessarily meant to be released to the public.



Theory in Failure ( Sequence one ): Part One (2014)

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Theory in Failure ( Sequence one ): Part Two (2014)

## The Daguerreotype and The Laser print.

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*Theory in Failure* (Sequence One):  
The Daguerreotype and The Laser print.

Historical Associations: Truth, Purity and Forms of Light  
Paddy Butler

Both images in *Theory in Failure* are taken from the same location at Plymouth University, and in design they are ostensibly the same. Both, to a large extent, appear compositionally the same, as are both furnished with the same architectural structures, distinguished by their respective styles. On one side a Georgian building is heavily warped from what seems like the distorting effects of heat, a flame in fact, which has been danced back and forth across the negatives surface. Bisecting the centre of each image a construction crane acts to lead the eye, like an automaton clock perched in the hub of a medieval town it directs like a fixed conductor. By the second image it angles toward the large Miesian-like building that dominates much of right hand picture plane. Intense scanning of the negatives has haloed this building with a penumbra of light, giving the appearance of photographic solarisation. It is like the sun has momentarily pierced through the cloud-insulated sky, the resulting burst of radiation riding a bank of light across the straight flat roof. That a flame is used to impress upon the negatives further artistic signature, post-development, enmesh the prints in a parenthesis of different light forms - fixed natural light within and harnessed fire from without - as if to address a Promethean dilemma.

In addition to this ambiguity it is the human element within these images that receive particular attention from the artist's hand, the sacrificial result of which produces strange contorted apparitions. Other figures have been likewise effaced from these landscapes suffering from more direct physical scratches and abrasions, but it is the female figure in the first plate which draws particular attention, one might say symbolic attention. For this figure has been violently preserved in melting celluloid, her head and shoulders fossilised and framed in an impossible relief. Accidental though it may be, this impresses an eerie visual trope of a religious resonance, leading one to compare it to those ever repeated representations of the Virgin Mary throughout the Middle Ages, where for centuries she has haunted us with an angelic, albeit agonised purity. Indeed fire is very much a part of the historical legacy of the Christian Church. More specifically employed in its brutal assertion of power with the perennial burning of heretics, and the more recent phenomenon of book burnings, the earliest known instance of such being that of Dante's *De monarchia* in the 1350's. In these extreme measures of coercion, the thread of violence that is so inscribed in the history of Christianity leads us inexorably back to the sacrificial sufferings of Christ on the cross; that abstract lodestar of an all-powerful, all-consuming monotheistic faith. What is of interest here is that religious Western art of the Middle and late Middle Ages shares much in common with contemporary artistic practice and thought. Artists of the Me-

dieval period were invariably dealing with complex theological themes, but the sophistication of their visual language and the invention with which this was applied is often overlooked. Their concern with the materiality of the object, and therefore a knowing incorporation of self-reflexivity, conveys a very dynamic, honest realisation. This is apparent in much the same way contemporary artists deploy similar techniques in order to reveal what art in a secular society might be. In a similar capacity it can be said that the artist's use of the harnessed flame in *Theory in Failure*, has the effect of drawing our attention to the images own existence and its artificiality, addressing the photographs (and technology's) ability to hide its dual process of becoming. To effect a trick, as if a spectre of a numinous kind.

The predominant source of this becoming is of course the sun, the god-like presence and giver of light which served as a potent Christian motif. After Constantine in the 4th Century A.D. the sun as symbol becomes more prominent as a guiding principle. It is his vision, a burning image of the cross by way of the searing sun, that triggers one of the most momentous shifts in the history of civilisation. With this and the subsequent rise of Christianity the sun becomes a dominant religious and imperial symbol. Light from the sun as spiritual sustainer of life on the one hand and as religious symbol of god-fearing power on the other. Almost two millennia later we still worship the sun's light whether religiously or scientifically. Indeed we now know that it is the photons from the sun's core that charge life on earth as much as they charge life into the photographic negatives from which these plates are made. What's more, current scientific calculation brings into sharp relief the estimated journey of these photons from the sun's core to its coronal surface at something in the region of 200 thousand years. If we are allowed leeway, the time-frame of this phenomenon approximates the age of the photons we consume on a daily basis to that of the age of our own species. But it is subsequent to Constantine's revelation and the conversion of the Roman empire to Christianity that heretics and, some time later, books are censoriously burned.

What might be interpreted as a straightforward, albeit intriguing, landscape diptych is transformed by these physical indices inscribed after the negatives have been developed, after the sun's impressions have been chemically fixed. This artistic intervention punctures notions of purity and technological progress; thus whilst the attributions have broken a contract, they at the same time indenture the prints to further meaning, asking pertinent questions of qualification and authenticity. Qualification of what we attribute as perfect, original and presentable. Constantine's vision, working just like a photographic negative, promulgates an image by way of the sun; its impressionistic power is given by the sun and is not possible without the sun's phenomenal power. In *Theory and Failure* recurring themes of old and new are played out both within and without these photographic plates. The abstruse knowledge of process as understood by the expert plays against the immediacy of the image within the frame. But the sources of energy or light are primordialially the same, whether the universal god-like power of the sun, or the all too Promethean harnessing of fire, at once creative giver of life and almighty destructive force.

Hannah Barry Gallery Peckham London  
22 January - 27 February 2015

We are excited to present three new exhibitions in the space at 4 Holly Grove

**Oliver Griffin** *Theory in Failure (Sequence one): The Daguerreotype and The Laser print. How we never learn from photographic history, just repeat it in digital formats.*



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