Paper / Proposal Title:
Deconstructed Rephotography

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Presentation Method. I would like to:

i. present in person (with a written paper)

Abstract (300 words):
This practice-led PhD project investigates the photographic representation and mapping of lost urban landscapes. Through the use (and deliberate mis-use) of rephotographic techniques and archive images of the city, the work interrogates various ontological problems regarding time, materiality and medium, the spectrality of the changing city and the issues this poses for cultural memory and the archive.

Theories by Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Walter Benjamin and Mark Fisher are brought together to underpin the practice, which deals directly with this absence by returning to places which no longer exist. Archive images of parts of the city which have changed beyond all recognition (either through rapid urbanisation, rewilding or slum clearance), are reappropriated to create ‘impossible’ rephotographic montages, which ‘deconstruct’ themselves. The usual trick of perfectly registering two images of the same scene from different time periods is only possible when features of that landscape persist, rendering the practice a meditation on permanence, rather than transience. This deconstructed form of rephotography works to reveal the latent impermanence of these urban spaces, but also the photographic artefact itself. Subject to the same forces of
entropy and change as everything else, even this photographic afterlife must eventually come to an end – something we don’t usually see in the digital image itself.

The resulting rephotographic works are then projected back into the landscape and filmed, blurring the boundaries between photograph and moving image, then and now, material and immaterial. Through these haunting interventions the project hopes to reveal issues of transience and erasure in our cities, and the photographic archives which represent them.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Michael is a visual artist and PhD student at the University of Leeds on a full scholarship from the School of Media and Communication. Supervised by Simon Popple and Dr. Jim Brogden he is currently undertaking practice-led research into the temporal and spectral nature of rephotography, which he started in October 2015.

His problem concerns the changing ontology of the photographic image in the digital era, with regard to notions of materiality, realism and mediation, and photography’s role in how we perceive the passage of time. Through investigative practice his research aims to reveal the ‘hauntology’ of the photographic image, resurrecting and re-evaluating theories by Jacques Derrida and Walter Benjamin, and applying them to photography’s shifting landscape of technologies and practices. The methodology for this study is grounded in both Mick’s own creative practice as an artist and landscape photographer, and re-presentation of photographic material from the archive.

Before joining the school, Mick was conducting Arts Council-funded research into video archiving technologies for the performing arts. As an artist and musician he creates work under a variety of aliases including Michael C Coldwell, Conflux Coldwell and as part of Leeds’ Urban Exploration collective.