

[David Jones](#), Northwestern University

“In However Low Degree: Reframing the Role of Silverfish in Louis Fleckenstein's Photography”

Abstract:

This presentation seeks to suspend the assumed relationship between an anthropomorphic sense of permanence and property in order to explore the eighteenth-century concept of the picturesque in photography from the disadvantaged perspective of silverfish. Turning to the concept's preoccupation with decay in the natural world and foregrounding how silverfish transform such notions in the early twentieth-century photographer Louis Fleckenstein's work, brings to light an interspecies discourse that unfolds over time. What kinds of insight emerge when we regard the negative, and the print thereafter, as a "contact zone," to borrow cultural theorist Mary Louise Pratt's language? Thus far, the emphasis on reading such exchanges for photo historians takes place through the image as a window into a photographer's subject position in constructing an idealized worldview. In turn, while this method has been generative, it leaves unresolved the possibility of understanding the depth of an image's relationship to the concept of the picturesque beyond the specificity of its initial form. Therefore, taking the ensuing bite marks of silverfish as more than mere infringements on a given photograph's value offers a promising means to more fully account for the production of such images, and the material conditions of our capitalogenic epoch.

Bio:

David Jones is a second-year PhD student at Northwestern in the Department of Art History. His research focuses on pre-industrial photography, specifically exploring transnational colonial networks and the disjuncture between the ideal constructions of space described in wet-collodion manuals and the fraught reality of early photographic applications in the field. David's critical writing can be found in *The Studio Museum in Harlem's Archive* and *tba: Journal of Art, Media, and Visual Culture*. His curatorial collaborations include Wedge Curatorial Projects in Toronto and the Brooklyn Museum in New York.