

Photography, with or without capitalism (Paris, 18-19 Dec 18)

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Photography, with or without capitalism - International symposium

Under the scientific responsibility of

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Organised by

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Following-up on the study day Photography and Capitalism [\[1\]](#) organized on 20 May 2017 at the National Institute of Art History (Paris) [\[2\]](#), the international symposium Photography, with or without capitalism will be held on 18-19 December 2018. It will propose to develop further the previously initiated reflections.

The initial researches were an historian-led focus on the 20th century and confirmed the need to think about the photography-capitalism duo beyond simple historical contingency. At a time when we constantly question and promote new ways of being-together, of sharing, of redistributing and in the face of growing inequalities, we must assess the interdependencies between photography and capitalism. Embracing an interdisciplinary approach and considering capitalism and photography as symbolic systems, this symposium wishes to establish new paradigms to think about these two subjects concomitantly.

Since Walter Benjamin, a reflection on the economic nature of images has been continually shaped and nourished by new concepts. The existence of a « commerce des regards » (« a trade in looks ») (Mondzain) was revealed, leading to images whose reverse side could be money (Deleuze), as considered in the overall framework of an « iconomy » determining the rules of a « supermarket of the visible » (Szendy) or a « visual empire » (Buck-Morss). From icons to cinema and engravings, images are said to have an economic logic of their own.

However, what about photography? What are its specificities in terms of economics or capitalistic horizons? How does photography fit into capitalism as a political phenomenon? Is capitalism a threat to photography? Can photography fault capitalism?

Since its invention, photography has had a strong relationship with the development of capitalism : not only was its expansion, in the 1870s, dependent on the development of industry (McCauley),

but it was also the prerogative of the bourgeoisie which used it for its symbolic recognition (Sekula, Rouillé). This relationship of contemporaneity, which spans the history of photography, and in part dictates its fluctuations, is almost an ethos of photography. This matter can be observed without interruption up until today, whereas the topic of fluxes is regularly applied to both the circulation of money and of images. Indeed, from the outset, photography has been an image which the liberal logic can be applied to.

That is why, one can ask oneself if the aesthetic developments of photography can be regulated, in one way or another, by its economic ramifications. Both by colluding and/or by resisting, it appears that many formal tendencies result from (or answer to) its familiarity with capitalist logic.

All these questions call for the creation of new theoretical models for thinking about these two transhistorical and ubiquitous phenomena : many notions, such as value, accumulation, crisis, can constitute categories of analysis common to both our objects.

Finally, beyond these convergences, contact points between photography and capitalism can also be considered as singularities that profoundly distinguish them. This is where strategies of resistance, of unveiling, of criticism can be invented: Which ones have been invented by photographers, artists and historians? Which ones are still to be invented for photographs whose general economy is a sharing economy? What can democratic values do in this dialogue between photography and capitalism (Poivert)?

We welcome proposals that examine the relationship between photography and capitalism from the following frameworks of analysis (a non-exhaustive and non-restrictive list):

- 1/ Symbolic value and economic value of photography: a fetish to be consumed with the eyes?
- 2 / Creative processes and reception: the making of an (anti-)capitalist aesthetic?
- 3 / Vices and virtues of liberal values: what consequences for photography?
- 4 / Phenomena of dominations created by capitalism: what position for photography?
- 5/ Accumulation, ownership, debt, credit, flow, etc. : which are the common notions to use to think about the photography-capitalism duo?
- 6/ Cognitive Capitalism: photography in the information and knowledge economy

Guidelines for papers proposals

We welcome 20 minutes proposals in French and English which explore the preceding themes. Please email paper proposals (mail : [photographiecapitalisme\[at\]gmail\[dot\]com](mailto:photographiecapitalisme[at]gmail[dot]com)) of no more than 3000 characters, along with a 150-word biographical note by 12 July 2018.

Proposals have to be sent in PDF format, with a file name on the model : LastName_FirstName_Institution.pdf

The Call for Papers is open to postgraduate researchers (Masters and doctoral) of all related disciplines; attendance is open to all.

The definitive answers will be notified around the 19 July 2018.

Bibliography

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McCauley Anne, *Industrial Madness. Commercial Photography in Paris, 1848-1871*, New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 1994.

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Szendy Peter, *Le Supermarché du visible. Essai d'iconomie*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 2017.

[1] <https://arip.hypotheses.org/1878>

[2] <http://www.imageandnarrative.be>

Reference:

CFP: Photography, with or without capitalism (Paris, 18-19 Dec 18). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 9, 2018 (accessed Sep 17, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/18366>>.