Circulating Photographs: Materials, Practices, Institutions (Rome, 18–22 Mar 18)

Rome, Bibliotheca Hertziana, Mar 18–22, 2019
Deadline: Oct 22, 2018

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Circulating Photographs: Materials, Practices, Institutions

A photo-historical course organized by the Bibliotheca Hertziana (Max Planck Institute for Art History) Rome and the Folkwang Universität der Künste Essen

Photography has always been a powerful tool of communication and has developed into an instrument of our everyday experience: Through photographs we are able to communicate quickly and easily with each other. As a medium of social interaction, photographic images are used as a handy alternative to language, supplementing or even replacing it. They transport us to sites and individuals, connecting the distant and the temporally remote. This far-reaching development is increasingly driven by the digitization of our everyday culture. Photography is both part of this process, and its most visible expression.
Photo-historical research can contribute important observations to this diagnosis of our own time. From the moment photographic images became a matter of public interest, they served as objects of circulation and social connection. Already by the middle of the 19th century photography had opened global routes of image-based economies, providing and distributing our interpretations of visible worlds. As commodities or gifts, they are traded and exchanged, distributed and collected. The proliferation of photographically based information and the trading of photographic objects constitute important aspects of social interaction in the early stages of globalization.

These observations are our point of departure for the course titled “Circulating Photo-graphs: Materials, Practices, Institutions”. Our aim is to develop a focused, multi-disciplinary analysis of the photographic image as an object of circulation, especially over the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries (up to 1950). In the context of photo-historical research it is common practice to ask about processes of production or reception. In contrast, by putting circulation modalities at the centre of our interest, we would like to accentuate the importance of such interactions for the production of photographic meaning. Acts of transmission constitute an important framework for the semantics of photographic imagery. Thus, we are interested in the realm of photo-graphs as a foundation and tool for social interaction and in the practices that lead to our current understanding of image exchange. The vernacular image and its everyday practices are as important as highly professional appropriations within the domain of the arts and sciences. We are particularly interested in strategies of networking that have been enabled, shaped, modified or rejected by photography.

Looking for historical conditions that enabled photographs to circulate requires a closer investigation of premises related to such interactions:

1. The material foundations of photography, i.e., its historically shifting concreteness in terms of production processes and technologies.
2. The ensemble of practices, i.e., the methods and channels that have been developed, cultivated and refined for the circulation of photographs.
3. The diversity of institutions that have been created or adapted to this purpose.

Examining the variety of connections between these aspects will provide a new under-standing of photo-historical developments that lean on the idea of exchange within the domain of visual media. We are especially interested in practices and strategies that have been developed in photography's pre-digital era and we ask whether, and how, they can be regarded as a foundation for current media practices of transmission and exchange. Such an interest stimulates a variety of questions:

– What types of circulation can and should we distinguish?

– How does the materiality of photographic images affect and shape their circulation? And how does the circulation of photographs have an impact on their materiality?

– What differences are there in professional and private practices among the networks of circulation?

– What kinds of channels have been developed and used for the circulation of photo-graphs?

– In what ways do modes of circulation differ – modes such as sending, exchanging, transferring, sharing, dissemination, dispersion, etc.? How do we perceive and evaluate these historical practices today, and vice versa, how does our current practice shed light on the meaning of past exchanges of photographs?

– How can we conceptualize the difference between circulating photographs as original prints on the one hand, and circulating reproductions of them on the other?

– How does the photographic picture become a social entity in the process of its circulation?

– How is meaning produced and altered through processes of circulation?

– How can we describe the ongoing media change of photography from the point of view of circulation?

– What conclusions can be drawn by examining specific time periods regarding the processes of circulation?

– What kind of media practices of transmission from previous periods of media history are still in use today?

The course is aimed at advanced M.A. students, Ph.D. candidates and recent post-docs in art history and related disciplines with a strong photo-historical component. The course will be held in

English. During the course, all participants will present their current research project, which should exhibit a close connection to the course subject matter. The course is supplemented by visits to photographic archives in Rome.

The Bibliotheca Hertziana will offer lodging and reimburse half of the incurred travelling expenses. In addition, participants will receive a daily allowance.
Please send the following application materials as a single PDF-document to Fototeca@biblhertz.it (subject “Studienkurs”) by October 22 2018:

– Abstract of proposed subject/case study
– Brief CV
– Brief summary of your master’s thesis, dissertation or postdoctoral project
– Names and contact details of two references

For further information please contact: fototeca@biblhertz.it

The course is organized and led by Tatjana Bartsch (Bibl. Hertziana, Rome), Maria An-tonella Pelizzari (Hunter College, CUNY, New York), Johannes Röll (Bibl. Hertziana) and Steffen Siegel (Folkwang Universität der Künste, Essen).

Reference:
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