Trajectories of Images

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Edited collection

In today's society, digital images have become increasingly mobile. They are networked, shared on social media, and circulated across small and portable screens. Accordingly, the discourses of mobility and circulation have come to supersede the focus on production, indexicality and manipulability which had dominated early conceptions of post-photography and post-cinema. However, the mobility of images is neither technologically nor conceptually limited to the realm of the digital. The rising traffic of digital photographs, films and videos in our time invites us to re-examine the historical and theoretical relevance of images' mobility and to provide a materialist account of visual media. A materialist perspective does not restrict itself to questions of social practices around and usages of images or to the circulation of recurrent motifs, but rather interrogates the conditions which make the transmission and circulation of images possible or stand in its way. It addresses the trajectories, spacing, deferrals and intervals between production and exhibition which give weight to the materiality of mobile images.

In contemporary culture, images seem to circulate and move with ease. Yet the "logistics of images" (Rothöhler 2018) are dependent on material, infrastructural, technical, political, economic, and social resources and preconditions. In order to traverse space and time, images rely on a multiplicity of human, technical, natural, animal and other non-human actors and actor-networks (Callon 1986; Latour 1991; Law 1992). Human and non-human actors transport and safeguard images, ensure technical compatibility in transit, or introduce interference and noise. The "logistics of images" is a complex process of negotiation between the stability of forms, "translation without corruption" (Latour 1986; 1997), and the undesirable transformation which leaves visible material traces of damage, wear, compression or pixellation, producing "poor images" (Steyerl 2009) or encrusting images with historicity. During transportation, images are subject to the materiality of routes and infrastructures; the logics, standards, protocols of transmission technologies; the agency and cycles of ecological milieus; economic considerations; or territorial politics. Further, images do not simply circulate in given techno-social or techno-ecological actor-networks and adapt to them; instead, they actively contribute to the making and remaking of networks and logistical relationships by functioning as "quasi-objects" (Serres 1980).

The movements of images span distances and shape the spatiality of communication. On the move, they face interruptions, obstructions and attempts to control. Sometimes images have to share the same paths, networks and, with it, channel capacities. Equally, they differentiate themselves from one another by the types of routes they take and the actor-networks of mobility they form. The "circulation of forms" goes hand in hand with different "forms of circulation" (Appadurai

2010). In addition to space, their key features include time and scale (ibid.). The movement of images takes time and is subject to various logistical and technical temporalities and speeds which exert pressure on the ideal of pictorial presence and unity (Roberts 2014). The speed of circulating images increases with their miniaturisation and the reduction of their size and weight. Small images move faster and are easier to transport. The different speeds also depend on the formats and compression techniques which enable, accelerate or, conversely, undermine movement. In case of failed delivery, the temporality involved may manifest as delay, deferral and interruption, inscribed on the images as the “aesthetics of lag” (Starosielski 2015). Monumental and site-specific formats, from frescoes to urban screens, slow down the flow of images and complicate their detachment from a specific spatial context while mobilising their viewers. The formatting of circulation is closely linked to issues of technical compatibility, standardisation and capacity. Yet more than this, formats, and the associated compression techniques, are the pivotal point which inextricably binds aesthetics and modes of representation to the materiality of infrastructures, networks and sites of exhibition (Sterne 2015).

A planned edited volume on “Trajectories of Images” invites contributions exploring the materiality of circulation and transportation of analogue and/or digital images (paintings, postcards, photography, film, wirephoto, mail art, etc.). We particularly welcome proposals which consider the implications of mobility for theories of media and images.

If you are interested in publishing a chapter in this volume, please submit an abstract of approximately 300 words and a short biography to olga.moskatova@fau.de by 31 July 2019. The deadline for submission of chapters will be 15 December 2019.

Reference:

CFP: Trajectories of Images. In: ArtHist.net, Jun 14, 2019 (accessed Oct 31, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/21047>.