

## Photojournalism and the Archive (Amsterdam, 25 Jun–2 Jul 21)

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Jun 25–Jul 2, 2021

Deadline: Nov 15, 2020

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Special issue and symposium/TMG Journal for Media History: Photojournalism and the Archive: from analogue to digital

The subject of this special issue of TMG - Journal for Media History will be one of the themes addressed at the symposium in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Depending on the specific content and how it relates to the overall approach, several papers will be selected for a presentation at the symposium.

In recent years, millions of pictures taken by photojournalist for newspapers and magazines between the late nineteenth and early twenty-first century have been digitized. While commercial parties, such as Getty Images, seek to monetize their picture libraries by charging licensing fees, national archives and other heritage institutions have made millions of pictures freely available to researchers and the general public. For example, with over 15 million pictures, the Dutch National Archive maintains one of the largest digital collections of (mostly) freely available press photographs. Similarly, the National Library of Congress provides free access to famous collections, such as the 39,744 digitized glass negatives, taken between 1900-19220, of Bain, one of America's earliest news picture agencies and 175,000 black-and-white negatives of the Farm Security Administration Office, taken between 1935-1944. In France, the digital portal Gallica offers access to 24,845 digitized photographs of the famous photographer Nadar and 119,443 pictures of the Monde & Camera picture agency.

The special issue hopes to shed light on what happens to pictures of the news and the way(s) that we (can) see them when they are moved from the analogue to the digital realm. In doing so, it aims to contribute to the development of new theoretical and methodological frameworks to study photojournalism and, more generally, historical images in digital collections. Until recently, (semi) scholarly work on press photography mostly focused on 'iconic' images and famous photographers (Hariman and Lucaites, 2011). However, in *Reading Magnum* (2013) Steven Hoelscher noted that a collection of (press) photographs also functions as an ecosystem: larger patterns in the change over time of subjects, themes, technologies and aesthetics can become evident in the interplay and interrelation between images in the archive. This view of the visual archive as an ecosystem, coincides with the 'visual digital turn' in the humanities: the increasing use of computer vision techniques, such as object and scene detection, to study collections of historical images (Wevers and Smits, 2020). Instead of close reading individual pictures, researchers have started to 'distant read' of 'distant view' visual archives to discover large-scale patterns. Or, to put it in

other words, the rules of the ecosystem (Arnold and Tilton, 2019).

The special issue intends to bring together papers that open up new venues for research that move beyond single press pictures and famous photojournalist. In collaboration with the Rijksmuseum, TmG invites articles that (particularly, but not exclusively) focus on:

- Theoretical and methodological reflections on photojournalistic archives as ecosystems.
- Case studies of photographers, subjects, themes and aesthetic styles within these archives.
- The problems and possibilities of the digitization of photojournalistic collections.
- The (loss of) materiality of photographic objects.
- New digital methodologies, such as scene and object detection, image and style classification
- The relation between 'iconic' and 'normal' pictures in digital photojournalistic collections.
- On and offline (re)use of photographs in these collections

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International Symposium: Photojournalism in the 20th century, June/July 2021, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

This symposium will present a wide range of themes, which have as common thread a specific focus on the production, distribution and reception of photojournalism in the 20th century. For many years, research has been focused on iconic images and famous photojournalists on the one hand, and ethical issues surrounding violence and manipulation on the other hand. However, a more profound knowledge about the way visual news was produced and disseminated in the past, can enlighten current debates about fake news, image manipulation, online platforms and citizen journalism.

The symposium's ultimate goal is to take the historiography of (Dutch) photojournalism to the next level. Presentations and discussions by international speakers from a variety of backgrounds are intended to stimulate the exchange of ideas and experiences, and to inspire research into specific aspects of the history of photojournalism in the Netherlands. In addition, the symposium will hopefully also generate more attention for the rich collections of press photography in the Netherlands and abroad that have been used only sparsely for historical research so far. Therefore, the symposium is aimed at a broad group of interested parties including researchers, academics, curators, conservators, (photo)editors, (photo)journalists and others from the field of photojournalism.

The symposium is supported by the Vincent Mentzel Fund, a Rijksmuseum Fund with a specific focus on the history of photojournalism in the Netherlands. Due to COVID-19 regulations, the symposium will have a hybrid form and will take place both online and in the museum's auditorium. More information will be available on the museum's website later this year. You can also contact Saskia Asser, curator at the Rijksmuseum's History Department and the organizer of the symposium, for more information: [s.asser@rijksmuseum.nl](mailto:s.asser@rijksmuseum.nl)

## Practical guidelines

We ask interested researchers to submit an abstract of max. 350 words which clearly outlines a research question, relevance of the topic, a theoretical/historical framework, justification of research material and approach, and main argument. Please also indicate if you would like to be considered for the symposium.

Please send your abstract to the editors: Saskia Asser, Rijksmuseum (s.asser@rijksmuseum.nl) and Thomas Smits, Utrecht University (t.p.smits@uu.nl) no later than 15 November, 2020.

## Tentative timeline

The authors of accepted abstracts will be invited to contribute a full article (max. 8000 words, excluding references and bibliography).

- Abstract deadline: 15 November, 2020
- Notification for acceptance (special issue and symposium): 15 January 2021
- Full version of articles accepted for the special issue and the symposium: 15 March, 2021
- Full version of articles accepted for the special issue: 15 June, 2021
- Symposium: June/July, 2021
- Revised version of articles (after peer-review): 1 November, 2021
- Publication special issue: January, 2022.

## More information?

For more information on the special issue, please contact Dr. Thomas Smits at Utrecht University: t.p.smits@uu.nl

For more information on the symposium, please contact Saskia Asser, curator at the Rijksmuseum's History Department and the organizer of the symposium, for more information: s.asser@rijksmuseum.nl

## Bibliography

Arnold T and Tilton L (2019) Distant viewing: analyzing large visual corpora. *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* 34(Supplement\_1). Oxford Academic: i3–i16. DOI: 10.1093/llc/fqz013.

Hariman R and Lucaites JL (2011) *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hoelscher SD, Magnum Photos and Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center (2013) *Reading Magnum: A Visual Archive of the Modern World*.

Wevers M and Smits T (2020) The Visual Digital Turn. Using Neural Networks to Study Historical Images. *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* 35(1): 194–207. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/llc/fqy085>.

## Reference:

CFP: Photojournalism and the Archive (Amsterdam, 25 Jun-2 Jul 21). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 18, 2020 (accessed Sep 5, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/23569>>.