Doing Photography (Durham, 9-11 Jan 13)

Durham, UK, Jan 9–11, 2013
Deadline: Jun 30, 2012

Andrea Noble

Doing Photography

A two-day workshop hosted by
Durham Centre for Advanced Photography Studies
in association with
The Toronto Photography Seminar

9-11 January 2013
Durham University, UK

Applications invited for funded participation
Photographs have for long been central to discourses of human rights, humanitarian activism, pacifism, political mobilization, revolutionary struggle, social reform and warfare. Thanks to their intimate and necessary relationship to the material world -- their 'having-been-there' quality – photographs bear tremendous emotional and affective power in these discursive contexts. Disseminated as they are across an evolving range of media, and spanning geographical distances, historical periods, and cultural and linguistic divides, photographs call on us to recognize our fellow human beings in moments of crisis and duress. As they circulate in the global public sphere, such images invite patterns of identification; they mobilize shame; incite outrage, hatred, fear, disgust, compassion, etc. Offering visual knowledge of suffering and injustice (embodied in the starving child, the destitute earthquake survivor, the victim of torture) photographs expose these conditions to public scrutiny, provoking a reaction in their viewers, impelling them to action, to 'do something'. Indeed, the very fact that they continue to circulate testifies to the on-going belief in their power to communicate affect transnationally and ultimately to effect change.

And yet, when it comes to determining just what it is that such images accomplish, more often than not they are found wanting. Icons of outrage, as David Perlmutter has forcefully put it, "may stir controversy, accolades, and emotion, but achieve absolutely nothing."

The starting point of this workshop is that this paradox should not become an aporia, deterring us in the pursuit of an understanding of how photographs do the work they do. Or, in the words of Thomas Keenan: “images, information, and knowledge will never guarantee any outcome, nor will they force or drive any action . . . Still, the only thing more unwise than attributing the power of causation or of paralysis to images is to ignore them altogether.”

The aim of the ‘Doing Photography’ workshop is to bring together a range of participants from different backgrounds –photographers, archivists, picture editors, NGO activists, academics, etc. – who are committed to exploring questions not so much of whether photographs work, rather of how they do the work they do. We are looking for tightly-focussed interventions on the theme that might engage with some of the following indicative questions:

- How do photographs facilitate the transmission and communication of affect across different geopolitical and historical contexts?
- What are the mechanisms by which photographs foster cross-cultural identification and forge emotional communities?
- How do the changing modes of circulation and display impact on modalities of affect and effectiveness?
- How might we elaborate a critical methodology to account for the reception of photographic images that call on their viewers to participate in transnational acts of witnessing?
- How do we develop a critical vocabulary to discuss these questions that integrates the different perspectives and experiences of those concerned with photographs that do things?

Instructions for submission of abstracts
The workshop is part of a network project funded by the UK’s Arts and Humanities Research Council. We invite submission of abstracts, from which we would expect to select up to 8, and we are delighted to be able to offer funding to cover accommodation and subsistence to those participants whose proposals are selected.
Please send 500-word abstracts for 30-minute conference presentations and a brief biographical note (maximum 5 lines), together with affiliation and contact details to: andrea.noble@dur.ac.uk.

Deadline for abstract submission: 30 June 2012.

Notification: by 12 July 2012.

Reference:
CFP: Doing Photography (Durham, 9-11 Jan 13). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 6, 2012 (accessed Nov 19, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/3434>.