

Institutional Photographic Practices & Public Spaces (Paris, 9 Dec 22)

Université Paris Cité, Dec 09, 2022

Deadline: Sep 20, 2022

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Institutional Photographic Practices in the Production, Management and Uses of Public Spaces (19th-21st century)

Study day at Université Paris Cité, December 9, 2022

This study day will explore the photographic practices of institutions whose action is visibly inscribed in built space. This institutional action may consist in direct intervention in spatial planning (for example, the construction of railway stations), in a large-scale building activity that is necessary to fulfilling a certain mission (for example, post offices built and managed by a national postal system), or more simply in the occupation of buildings that are dedicated to a given institution's activities and clearly identified. This action, which manifests itself concretely and visibly in space through constructions, must also meet the communication requirements of public action, including through the production of visual materials. At the intersection of these two principles of visibility, in space and in the form of images, we will study the iconographic corpuses and visual practices that are linked to the activities of institutions that construct, manage, or use buildings. Centering the study on institutions, considered in the extended timeframe of their diverse missions, involves looking beyond architectural commissioning. The attention given to institutions (in contrast with architectural agencies, for example) will make it possible either to focus diachronically on a link in the institutional system that goes from construction to building management, or to observe synchronically a continuity of action.

In order to shed light on these photographic practices and objects, the following dimensions may be considered:

- The diversity of spaces, whether they are built by or for institutions, or more simply occupied by them. Taking an interest in uses, rather than in construction alone, also involves paying particular attention to images of interiors, as well as to the question of scale – from the large-scale housing project to the small counter of public service bureaucracy, and from the dwelling to the office.
- The diversity of visual practices, consisting, just like in the case of buildings, not just in the production but also in the keeping and using of images. This diversity of practices is also linked to the variety of functions that can be given to the photograph. A photographic document may be used as an argument in a discourse or as an object of reference, it may be involved in internal or external communication, it may be addressed to professionals or to a wider public... Beyond the

various forms in which photographs can be circulated, consideration should also be given to the varying degree of control that institutions exert over the space or media where their images are exhibited or reproduced.

- The diversity of the image producers, who may be freelance or studio photographers, salaried photographers (sometimes civil servants), or even employees who occasionally act as photographers. The study of institutional photographs often raises the question of the anonymity of such visual productions, in their conservation or in their published uses, in connection with printed discourses that themselves have a weak relationship to the notion of an individual author. The notion of "grey photography," echoing that of "grey literature," has been used to describe photographic collections documenting vast urban reconstruction programs. Beyond the diversity of producers, one should think of a diversity of actors in the life of images, from their commissioning to their subsequent uses ranging from communication to heritage uses – including cases of institutions that find themselves playing the role of image agencies. Just as the city is a field of interaction between various actors (public institutions, private actors, actors in contact with the private and public, non-profits, militant groups...), photographic productions and uses must be envisaged as a visual field involving complex relationships between diverse actors. Actors in the images should also be considered, and the roles played within them by institutional agents but also by the users and clients of the institution. Indeed, a decompartmentalized vision of the relationship between institutional spaces and images must take into account the spatial practices of users, and the conditions of visibility of such practice. Taking ordinary users into account involves the question of human figures, of the pose, of the implied audience of the images, but also of the competition or coexistence between institutional images and extra- or anti-institutional images.

- Complex temporalities, at the intersection of the life of buildings, the life of images, the life of men and women, and the life of institutions. The construction of buildings, their renovation, their rehabilitation with changed use, their demolition or more simply their ageing... All these moments and temporal processes in the life of buildings can be related to phases of intensity in the life of images, be it in their production, which is typically inscribed in the periods of intentional physical changes in buildings from construction through demolition, or be it in the use or reuse of these images, or even their rediscovery. Of particular interest is the question of the future of certain photographic collections, at a time when institutions are redefining their place in the urban built environment and their missions. Indeed, the parallels and relationships between architectural and iconographic programs are matched by the relationships between architectural and iconographic assets and heritage.

Without restrictions of geographical spaces or disciplinary fields, we welcome papers addressing articulations of institutional, spatial, and visual programs over a period identified with photographic practice, from the 19th to the 21st century. Papers will be 25 minutes in length and may be presented in French or English. This study day may lead to a publication.

Proposals (400 to 500 words) should be sent along with a short biographical notice by September 20, 2022 to the organisers:

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CFP: Institutional Photographic Practices & Public Spaces (Paris, 9 Dec 22). In: Arthist.net, Jun 30, 2022
(accessed Jul 4, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/37046>>.