

Photofilmic images (Brussels, 12–15 Mar 14)

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Photofilmic Images in Contemporary Art and Visual Culture

International conference organized by: Université catholique de Louvain (UCL), KU Leuven, and Lieven Gevaert Research Centre for Photography (LGC)

Over the past two decades, research on the interaction between photographic and filmic images has become increasingly popular. This new orientation is partially based on the insight that the ontological differences between film and photography, claimed by scholars in photography theory and film studies up until the 1990s, can no longer hold in the digital era. With the advent of digital technology, boundaries between the photographic and the filmic have become increasingly blurred – both technically, in drawing on the same software and hardware engineering, and perceptually, in leaving the spectator in doubt of the (photographic or filmic) nature of the image. The aim of this conference is to examine how photofilmic images operate within our contemporary media culture across disciplines, modes of display, media systems/economies, and institutional contexts.

Photofilmic images are generated on the basis of both photographic and filmic principles. As such, they are both a symptom and a means of a constantly transforming culture, where content flows across multiple media systems and where the boundaries between disciplines and media seem to dissolve. On the one hand, the study of photofilmic images is closely linked to the question of how new media technologies have transformed the way we use and experience images. On the other hand, it is critical to understand how photofilmic images are not merely a matter of technological change but are actually integrated within, and acting as cultural processes. In line with recent research in visual culture studies, the conference will therefore consider photofilmic images not as passive objects, but rather as active agents or visual events that operate within contemporary media culture, where they have various aesthetic, social, and political meanings and functions.

Whereas most scholarship on the relationship between the moving and the still image is concerned with cinema and/or video art in order to 'offer new conceptions of the ontology of film and photography' (Beckman/Ma), this conference wishes to displace the focus from that of the media (photography, film, etc.) to a question of the image as a place or an event where heterogeneous temporalities, perceptions, uses, functions, and meanings encounter each other and overlap. Photofilmic images are then 'multi-mediating pictures' (Van Gelder/Westgeest) that operate within specific contexts and institutions, and for particular purposes and audiences. Artists such as David Claerbout, Jutta Strohmaier, Elina Brotherus, and Victor Burgin, for instance, merge photographic and filmic techniques in order to reflect on issues of time, memory, and perception. In cinema, techniques such as morphing and bullet-time are used to intensify the experience of a fictional situation. On the Internet, mash-up techniques and virtual panoramas promise seemingly endless possibilities of combination and direct, constant access to the world. Whereas the problem of medium specificity has been at the heart of most recent research on the relationship between photography and film, this conference, instead, focuses on the function and perception of photofilmic images in art, cinema, and popular culture. In order to analyze this matrix of relations, the conference is organized around three principle issues that shape the production and perception of photofilmic images: temporality, display, and socio-political significance.

Photofilmic Time Economies

Situated between movement and stasis, photofilmic images incorporate different time economies typically associated with either photography or film. Even if recent research has proven that photography is as much a time-based medium as film (Baetens, Streitberger, Van Gelder), it is still often perceived as a slice of time, suspended time, or time at a standstill. Film, in turn, as a time-image, is linked to a temporality that endures, to a time that reproduces the flow of the 'live,' or 'real time.' Images that are based on both photographic and filmic processes blur these apparently opposite, mutually exclusive time economies in favor of a simultaneity of multiple, heterogeneous temporalities that compete with, rival, and overlap each other. The papers in this panel will examine how photofilmic images that incorporate different time strata – historically, psychologically, and perceptually – create what the historian Reinhart Koselleck calls the 'simultaneity of the non-simultaneous,' a time economy where the past and the future collide in the present, suggesting a notion of a fractured, layered, multiple temporality. Art historian Terry Smith, in turn, posits that the general condition of artistic production

today is one of contemporaneity, where the urgent question of being with time, or being 'contemporary' in the deepest sense, is a matter of understanding a coexistence of different temporalities and various 'ways of being in relation to time.' This section addresses questions such as: how do photofilmic images reflect the complex relationships among different time economies as they operate within contemporary media culture? What kinds of photofilmic strategies do artists and filmmakers use in order to respond to the perception of time in the mass media environment, where the present becomes a 'collage of disparate times' (Victor Burgin) and an intermingling of the real and the virtual? To what extent are issues of memory and 'post-memory' – an experience that one remembers via stories and images but does not actually live through (Marianne Hirsch) – stressed by the multilayered temporality of photofilmic images?

Photofilmic Displays

Photofilmic images occur in different institutional contexts and media environments. As part of artistic videos or installations, they are displayed in museums and galleries; within films and video clips, they are viewed via cinema and television; and, of course, as products of computer technology, they are distributed via the Internet and mobile phones. Interactive video installations by artists such as David Claerbout and Jeffrey Shaw delegate the responsibility of animating still images to the viewer, who is thus integrated in a heterogeneous media environment. If Marshall MacLuhan defined media as invisible environments, then the aim of this section is twofold: to explore how photofilmic images operate within, or constitute such media environments, and to analyze how artists or filmmakers are using such images to break up and subvert the invisibility/transparency of these media environments. Recently, the convergence of different media platforms, such as the Internet, television, and mobile phones, has led to a crossover of multiple media systems in the space of representation, resulting in the blending together of disparate images and information in one media device, or their manifestation across various media platforms. In this heterogeneous media environment (Burgin), images no longer exist as autonomous, specific entities, but are fragmented, hybrid, fluctuating. Photofilmic images, as transitional hybrids, are ubiquitous within this convergence culture (Jenkins). This section questions the connections established among photofilmic images, displays, and viewers. We welcome papers for this section that analyze how photofilmic images are displayed within given spatial, medial, and institutional contexts, for instance the gallery, the cinema, and multi-media platforms such as the Internet or mobile phone. How do such displays and presentational formats shape or frame the viewer's perception and experience of photofilmic images?

Sociopolitical Significance

The third panel will interrogate the sociopolitical implications of photofilmic images in relation to contemporary modes of power. This not only includes the overt representation of political events and how images are utilized to spread certain political agendas, or in turn, how artists may work to resist such representations. But it also concerns the larger 'event' of photofilmic images within a public sphere and how such images may trigger political imagination or civil engagement (Azoulay). The photofilmic has the potential to highlight a never-ending series of encounters in both their production and reception, to continually catalyze what Ariella Azoulay describes, solely in terms of photography, as an ethos of 'the many, operating in public, in motion.' Through disjunctions in temporality and complexities of display, photofilmic images, as they appear in work of artists and filmmakers such as Harun Farocki and Rabih Mroué, are also conflictual images that have a great potential for what Chantal Mouffe describes as a critical art 'that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate.' The tension between photography and film may contribute to the creation of 'an agonistic situation, a situation in which alternatives are made possible' (Mouffe). Ultimately, photofilmic images have the potential to offer alternative forms of world-making and countervisuality (Mirzoeff) within hegemonic public configurations and networks. How are politically-charged issues being addressed vis-à-vis photofilmic images in advertising, photojournalism, television, etc.? How are artists or filmmakers, through cinema, (post)documentary film, or political video, grappling with inequitable or oppressive systems of power? Can photofilmic images and strategies catalyze spectators to implicate themselves in such settings, to somehow engage as active participants in the reconfiguration of such networks?

We welcome papers from scholars working in art history, visual culture studies, media studies, and film studies.

Abstracts for a 30-minute paper (300 words) in English or French should be emailed to Alexander Streitberger (alex.streitberger@uclouvain.be) no later than October 13, 2013. Submissions should also include a short CV or biographical text.

The research committee will notify speakers of their acceptance by November 8, 2013.

Reference:

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