

Weimar Photography in Context (Oxford, 25–26 Mar 15)

Oxford, GB, Mar 25–26, 2015

Deadline: Oct 30, 2014

PD Dr. Silke Horstkotte

Weimar Photography in Context: Sequentiality, Seriality, Narrativity

Wadham College, Oxford University, 25-26 March 2015

Organisers: Prof. Dr Carolin Duttlinger (Oxford), PD Dr Silke Horstkotte (Leipzig)

The Weimar Republic was a golden age of photography in Germany, producing ground breaking and innovative work whose influence continues to be seen until today. Breaking away from a pictorialist tradition of photography which tried to emulate painting in style and subject matter, photographers associated with the 'New Objectivity' movement (Neue Sachlichkeit) and with the Bauhaus school of 'New Vision' (Neues Sehen) drew on new technology, new recording strategies and new subject matters to radically redefine not just the conventions of art photography but the more general role of photography in society, its habits and conventions of viewing.

One central feature of Weimar photography, which accounts for its innovative quality, is its emphasis not on the individual image but on groups, clusters and sequences. Underpinning photography both at the stage of recording and in the ways it is presented are various strategies of serialisation and narrativisation. Photography in the 1920s underwent some fundamental changes as a result of technological developments. Advances in printing technology made it possible for the first time to reprint photographic illustration on a large scale. As a result, new media such as the photobook and its mass-produced rival, the illustrated magazine, emerged, together with new hybrid genres such as the photo-essay. These new forms in turn inspired new photographic approaches, and they enabled photographers to reach a much wider audience. While existing research especially in an Anglo-American context centres on leading figures such as Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, August Sander and Karl Blossfeldt, a more detailed exploration of Weimar photography 'in context' is, however, still missing. Thus, the role of photography within a wider cultural landscape, its straddling of the divide between high and popular culture and its profound impact on habits of seeing remains underexplored.

The conference "Weimar photography in context" will inquire into the consequences that seriality and narrativity have for our understanding of photography in the context of interwar media culture, of Weimar-era as well as contemporary photography theory, and of word-and-image relations. Although some specific practices of serial photography, especially the motion photography of Eadweard Muybridge, have drawn much critical attention, the wider questions of photography's relation to seriality and narrativity and of the putative narrativity of photographic series remains as yet undertheorized. Since serial photography was such a central practice in Weimar Germany, this is a particularly rewarding cultural context in which to discuss these questions. Besides such theoretic-

cal questions, the conference will seek to enrich a historical understanding of Weimar photography. Strategies of serialisation and narrativisation became crucial for how Weimar photographers conceived of their work and for the way their work was viewed by an audience which went far beyond the educated middle classes. Indeed, one prominent theme in photography theories and debates at the time was the need to make photography accessible to the masses by breaking down the barrier between professional and amateur photographers; another recurring issue was the pedagogical role of photography: its potential to change engrained habits and conventions of viewing, teaching viewers to look afresh at their everyday surroundings.

We invite papers that

- explore different strategies of narrativisation by means of case studies;
- discuss possible models for photographic seriality and narrativisation across different public and private media (e.g., the illustrated magazine, the photobook, the photo album, the archive, literature and film);
- theorize narrativity, sequentiality and seriality in relation to photography;
- read Weimar photography in its synchronic contexts – whether aesthetic or cultural, social or political – which underpin and define the field both nationally and internationally;
- or attempt a diachronic investigation to interrogate the common claim that Weimar photography marked a radical break with preceding (and succeeding) photographic movements and conventions.

Papers can be given in English or in German. Please send a 300-word abstract and a short bio to Carolin Duttlinger (carolin.duttlinger@wadh.ox.ac.uk) and Silke Horstkotte (silke.horstkotte@uni-leipzig.de). The deadline for applications is 30 October. Accepted speakers will be hosted free of charge at Wadham College. Unfortunately, travel costs are unlikely to be covered. Please get in touch if you have any questions.

Reference:

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