Photography Historians: A New Generation? (Toronto, 26-28 Mar 15)

Ryerson Image Centre, Toronto, Mar 26–28, 2015
Deadline: Nov 30, 2014

Thierry Gervais, Toronto

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

SUMMARY
The fourth Ryerson Image Centre Symposium highlights the most current research in the history of photography, bringing emerging scholars from universities worldwide to speak about their bodies of inquiry, their methods and their findings. This rising group of young photo-historians will engage in dialogue with renowned scholars, revealing how contemporary historical inquiry sits within—and departs from—established traditions. The hope is that participants, and the audience, may better understand how we came to surpass notions of the "history of photography," moving beyond even diverse "histories of photography," to arrive at our present sense that there are many histories of photographs.

BACKGROUND
In the United States during the 1970s, the University of New Mexico, Princeton University and the University of Chicago appointed Beaumont Newhall, Peter Bunnell and Joel Snyder as the first history of photography professors in their art history departments. Since then, numerous such chairs have been created, in photography and visual culture as well as art history departments, and the discipline of photo history has never stopped rethinking and redefining its boundaries, its methods and corpuses.
During the 1980s, the Newhall-ian model of photo history, which had offered coherence to the field and initiated its recognition in the academy and the museum, was shaken by post-modernist historical approaches that addressed the social, political and economic contexts of photographs rather than considering them exclusively as a works of art. The study of photographic history then was swept up in debates within and against French critical theory, which questioned the influence of class structures and power relations and privileged a theoretical methodology at the expense of an historical approach. Discourse regarding the photograph's indexical status emerged in this context and seemed to be a fruitful means to unify the discipline, but the idea was soon (if not immediately) questioned.
Since the 1990s, the digital revolution has challenged the nature of photography and the notion of its indexicality. Historical research about the use of photographs in the sciences or journalism, for example, has demonstrated that the very indexicality of photography cannot adequately explain, or even summarily describe, the many different roles assumed by the medium or the beliefs in its objectivity and truthfulness. This constant epistemological reflection, accompanied by increased scholarly access to significant and varied photographic collections and archives, has sustained

the history of photography as a centre of interest in academic studies. The launch of three new journals dedicated to photography during this period—Études photographiques in 1996; Photographies and Photography and Culture in 2008—provided a complement to such established periodicals as History of Photography (1977) and Fotogeschichte (1981), testifying to this ongoing importance.

“Photography Historians: A New Generation?” offers emerging scholars (post-doctoral and PhD candidates) the opportunity to present their research in the context of the Ryerson Image Centre’s internationally-recognized symposium, and to engage with renowned scholars in discussion of the present state of the field. We invite emerging scholars to submit papers, which question historical methodologies, present new approaches to important collections, and explore new photographic objects and corpuses. Papers will be given in English. Please send a 300-word abstract and a short biography to Thierry Gervais (gervais@ryerson.ca) by November 30th, 2014.

The symposium will be the last in a planned series of four, designed to foster excellence in research related to the study of photography. The proceedings will be published by the RIC in 2016: the second volume in a series dedicated to scholarly research in the history of photography.

Reference:

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