

RESEARCH SEMINARS IN CULTURES OF PHOTOGRAPHY.

Autumn 2014

Tuesdays 4 – 6pm Hugh Aston Building [check rooms for each seminar]

October 14 (HU 2.31)

Caroline Edge (University of Bolton)

Creating a collaborative Worktown Archive: Mass Observation and mass photography

In 1937 Mass Observation announced their intention to create an 'anthropology of ourselves' which would document everyday life in Britain. Photographer Humphrey Spender was recruited to participate in the organisation's experimental study of Bolton. This lecture examines how his photographs, now held in the Worktown Archive at Bolton Museum, have been documented and reactivated using photographic methods in collaboration with the local community.

November 11 (HU 2.08)

Dr Louise Purbrick (University of Brighton)

Collodion prints and corrugated iron: photography, materiality and the nitrate trade

On the surface of slag heap in an abandoned nitrate works lies a broken panel of corrugated iron. The nitrate works, *Oficina Alianza*, is one of many industrial ruins of the Atacama desert of northern Chile, sites once exploited by European speculators who dominated the extraction and export of nitrate, a highly valued ingredient of fertilizers and explosives. At the height of the trade in late nineteenth century, a photographic album, *Oficina Alianza and Port of Iquique 1899*, was sent as a 'souvenir' to the senior partner of British merchant house Antony Gibbs and Company at his City of London offices by representative of his firm in Chile. It contained around a hundred collodion prints that traces the mining of nitrate, its movement across the desert to Pacific ports and European markets. The album, a material form in its own right, also documents the materials from which nitrate works were constructed: corrugated iron, an industrial colonial architecture that remains characteristic of industrial ruins of northern Chile. These entangled material presences of nitrate trade are examined in this paper as documents of the chemical, industrial and capitalist transformations of a remote desert landscape.

December 9 (HU 2.31)

Professor Maiken Umbach and Professor Mathew Humphrey (University of Nottingham)

Picturing Nature: Photographs (and Non-photographs) Between Political Mobilisation and Ideological Decontestation

Pictorial representations of nature abound, but how, when, and why are images of the natural world used for ideological purposes? In this paper we examine two, apparently conflicting, ideological strategies involving

representations of nature – stabilisation and mobilisation. Ideological discourse can utilise nature for the purposes of naturalisation: they link politics with a particular conception of the natural order that reinforces existing belief structures and renders them 'invisible'. Nature can also be used to mobilise support against existing political arrangements, to disrupt and challenge hegemonic power structures, to critique industrial society, even civilisation itself. As we shall argue, the two can also become paradoxically intertwined. Images play a crucial yet complicated role in such processes. Thus, when and for what purposes those who mobilise nature politically think photography a helpful vehicle, when they consciously abstain from using photographs, and when they reach for alternative genres of visual representations, are questions we explore (though shall not be able to answer definitively) in this paper.

All welcome, no need to book, just turn up.

Any queries, please contact the convener: Professor Elizabeth Edwards, Photographic History Research Centre (eedwards@dmu.ac.uk). For abstracts check PHRC website or PHRC blog <http://photographichistory.wordpress.com>