

Call for Papers

VIRGINIA WOOLF AND IMAGES: BECOMING PHOTOGRAPHIC

SEW International Conference, 30 juin-1^{er} juillet 2016, Université de Toulouse 2

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Confirmed Guest Speaker:	Maggie HUMM (East London University)
Deadline for submission:	February 28 th , 2016
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*What is the difference between a camera and the whooping-cough?
One makes facsimiles and the other makes sick families*
Stephen children, *Hyde Park Gate News* vol. 1, n° 9, Monday, 6th April 1891

Virginia Stephen was nine when, with her sister Vanessa and her brother Thoby, she invented riddles and wrote regular chronicles involving photography in the family newspaper. She was still nine when, for Christmas, she drew successive ink vignettes which build up a “story not needing words”¹. Later, in 1906, while trying to depict “great melancholy moors”, she passionately penned in her diary: “But words! words! You will find nothing to match the picture”². For Woolf, be it through a malicious play on words, a lively succession of images or the expression of a young writer’s frustration, words and images are set in fruitful tension. The quotes mark out the intermedial interaction and emulation underling Woolfian prose, its becoming other.

¹ *Hyde Park Gate News*, vol. 1, n° 51, in Gill Lowe (ed.), *Hyde Park Gate News. The Stephen Family Newspaper. Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell with Thoby Stephen*, London: Hesperus, 2005, 19.

² Mitchell Leaska (ed.), *A Passionate Apprentice. The Early Journals 1897-1909*, London : Hogarth Press, 1990, 305.

It is now common knowledge in Woolfian studies that Woolf's oeuvre enjoys intimate relations with the visual arts; Maggie Humm's 2010 edition of *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts* has proved it admirably. Yet Frances Spalding's 2014 exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery, "Virginia Woolf. Art, Life and Vision" blatantly showed that Woolf is still mainly related to Post-impressionism and to Bloomsbury pictorial influence. While Maggie Humm and Elena Gualtieri, among others, have brought to the fore the crucial part played by photography in Woolf's life and cultural environment, there is nonetheless a need to focus on photographic intermediality and its textual effects in the oeuvre. This conference therefore intends to consider how, in its relation to photography, the plasticity of the Woolfian text actually becomes photographic and makes us see.

Thus taking its cue from the preceding SEW seminars and conferences "Outlanding Woolf" in 2013, "Humble Woolf" in 2014 and "Trans-Woolf" in 2015 this two-days symposium will explore multiple aspects of Virginia Woolf's relation to photography.

1. VIRGINIA WOOLF AND IMAGES

One might return to Woolf's rich family heritage, to what constitutes the *studium* (Barthes) of her knowledge and practice of photography, namely the work of Julia Margaret Cameron or Leslie Stephen's 1895 *Photograph Album*, but also to what François Brunet calls the "Kodak revolution". In the wake of Humm's latest articles, these decisive influences might be analysed in relation to (auto)biography, diaristic writing, the need for self-expression and the private recording of daily life.

Between theory, amateurism and actual *praxis*, Woolf's intimate relationship to photography might be brought to bear on contemporary French research into visual cultures, thus opening onto ethical as well as aesthetic debates. One might also focus on photography as a humble craft, that is, a "middlebrow" (Bourdieu) or "vernacular" (Chéroux) practice and a "conversational medium" (Ghuntert) which challenges literary writing.

2. BUILDING THE IMAGE/TEXT

Thanks to the Hogarth Press, Woolf printed illustrated books – iconotexts – and included photographs in some of her own productions (*Orlando*, *Flush* and *Three Guineas*). She also collected newspaper articles and press images for her 1930s scrapbooks. One might indeed analyse how the photographic image works in and with the text, how it acts as an actual rhetorical tool, actively contributing to building up the image-text.

One might also reflect on the *punctum* (Barthes) of Woolfian photographic style, in order to see how photographic visibility translates into words, either through the literal metaphors Woolf uses in both her essays and fiction or through the implicit ones which adapt the photographic process or album design into writing.

3. PHOTOGRAPHY'S INVISIBLE REVOLUTION (Ortel)

Another possible aspect of enquiry might be the photographic unconscious or photographic "third" (Louvel). This could be linked to questions of representation (realism, phenomenology), of perception (optical or mental, the mind's eye), and of traces (photographic memory, history, haunting in relation to Georges Didi-Huberman's work). Last but not least, it would be interesting to try and circumscribe Woolf's imaginary museum, to delve into her connections with 19th- and 20th-century photographic aesthetics such as Pictorialism, the Kodak snapshot or the 1910s-1920s avant-garde.