Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to disengage the amateur photographer from its coupling to the “insider” art world and, instead, offer an alternative discussion of the amateur using the methodology of the “periphery” put forth in “Why Spatial? Time and the Periphery” (2016) by Foteini Vlachou. Using Vlachou’s conceptualisation of the peripheral space, this paper will argue the existence of multiple peripheries within the amateur grouping form distinct hierarchies.

Using the photography of Vivian Maier (1926-2009) as a case study, the aim of this paper is to destabilise the extant notion of the amateur as a delayed and unartistic response to the professional. Maier’s images have largely been in the possession of private collectors, and the material made available to the public is a version of Maier that has been curated based on their notions of taste and worth. In actuality, the prints that Maier herself either developed or had developed on her behalf include mistakes, imperfections, over/under exposure and repetition. Much of this body of work would be considered by the doctrines of the art world as representing amateur subject matter. By re-reading images located in the Maloof Collection at the University of Chicago Special Collections, this paper will intend to re-evaluate them to expose the ongoing debate concerning the systemic confusion as to the role and function of the amateur photographer.