

Photography and Museums of Mutuality

A Metaphor

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This article employs photography as a vehicle to explore museums and their increasing attempts to gain an open, discursive, democratic, and inclusive character. It suggests that drawing a parallel between photography and museums, at a time when globalizing technologies, aesthetics, and politics demand the radical redefinition of both, can provide a useful ground from which to examine the role of photography in the development of museums and vice versa, as well as notions of engagement, participation, and inclusion.

In the last 150 years photography has performed a number of unique roles—evidentiary, artistic, commercial, and vernacular—that have all had a great impact on the history of representation, as well as the way in which photographs communicate inside museums (i.e., as artworks/artifacts, as evidence of objects and phenomena found outside the museum, as a record of objects contained in the museum, and as a marketing tool). All of these functions also have an impact on how photography is understood within and outside museums. However, within museums—this applies both to museums of art and other kinds of museums, including anthropological, archaeological, and history museums—photography was originally conceived and still operates predominately as a document; that is to say, as evidence of some kind, whether of an object, culture, or an artist's work. The definition of a document is here taken from Suzanne Briet's seminal 1951 work, *What is Documentation*.¹ In the first pages of her book, Briet asks:

*Is a star a document? Is a pebble rolled by a torrent a document? Is a living animal a document? No. But the photographs and the catalogues of stars, the stones in a museum of mineralogy, and the animals that are catalogued and shown in a zoo are documents.*²

All photographs kept for posterity have been selected to serve a particular purpose: cultural, historical, evidentiary, or political. It is the process of selection and recontextualization that determines the function of photographs as documents in this context, and not their function outside the museum and whether they operate as documents or not in other contexts.

Similar to photographic documents, regardless of their character and value, the documents contained in museums³ are indexically linked to the settings and periods in which they were created.⁴ But they are also linked to realities and functions that are projected upon them, and within the minds of their audiences, often reflecting ideological frameworks and institutional priorities and decisions.

Museums and photography have come together in a number of recent publications, such as the *Photographies* special issue on “Photography, Artists and Museums,” which focuses on artists who, according to its editors, Theopisti Stylianou-Lambert and Elena Stylianou, use photography to address or even challenge the “theoretical complexities” of the relationship between photography and museums.⁵ One of the main premises of the body of work explored lies in the similarities between museums and photography as “authoritative mediums that preserve selected representations of reality, contribute to collective memory (and amnesia) and have the power to direct our understanding of the world.”⁶ In “The Poetics and the Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures,” Henrietta Lidchi employs semiotic analysis to reveal the ideological underpinnings of different ethnographic/anthropological museums and exhibitions.⁷ In the third section of her essay, she analyses the variable and complex role of photographs in adding to and neutralizing the constructed and motivated nature of ethnographic narratives.⁸ In general terms, both museums and photography can be seen as sites of knowledge production. Both sources suggest that meaningful propositions can be formed if we also consider the similarities between museums and photography as mediums, as well as how they both reflect and produce realities.

Much more common ground between museums and photography can be identified within relevant literature, but this text is not intended as a complete survey on the topic. As mentioned at the beginning of this introduction, this article focuses on museums’ increased openness in recent years and their willingness to share resources, admit the relativity of the narratives produced, and involve the public. It is also concerned with opportunities and challenges relating to network cultures and the potential global role of museums. The emphasis is on power structures and processes of inclusion and exclusion in photography and museums, with reference to images, objects, and identities, and processes of decentralization, engagement, and transformation.



Fig. 1. Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature, Plate III. Articles of China*, 1844. Courtesy the Metropolitan Museum of Art, image number 1994.197.1 (3). In the book the image is presented as an example of photography’s capacity to record objects for documentary purposes.

This text is divided into a number of sections, each attempting to reveal a different dimension regarding the complexities concerning the whole debate on the mutuality of museums, their wider geopolitical inclusiveness, and their participation in networked culture. The first section focuses on the transformative and transformable qualities of photographs and other objects inhabiting museums and their compliance or adaptability to context and power/knowledge. Starting with Walter Benjamin's ideas on the impact mass production and the reproduction of images had upon the public and institutions, the second section deals with notions of access, engagement, and participation, and policies and economies relating to these. The third section focuses on recent developments relating to inclusion, active experiencing, and audience identification with collections, whereas the fourth section, through a discussion on practices of inclusion and exclusion in representation, presents some of the limitations to processes of identification and inclusion. Finally, the fifth section explores implications relating to network cultures and the participation of museums in global networks, and discusses an opportunity to reevaluate the specificity and history of photography and museums.

In this context photography can serve as a fruitful starting point from which to discuss museum practices aimed at inclusion and diversity, because of photography's involvement in politics; its historical associations to artistic, mediumistic, and social margins; and the unique processes of engagement relating to its function as an indexical sign—its immediacy, which derives from its direct reference to different realities depicted in the image and in the mind of the viewer.⁹

1

In *Museum Without Walls*, André Malraux suggests that the emergence of museums, as well as developments in technology, allowed for the bringing together of artifacts from different periods and civilizations.¹⁰ This encouraged art historians to produce transformative readings, which were only made possible through associations between works produced in different geographical locations or historical periods. "It is the song of metamorphosis," Malraux claims, "and no one before us has heard it—the song in which esthetics, dreams, and even religions are no longer more than librettos to an inexhaustible music."¹¹ Museums—both the institutions and "wall-less" museums in the form of photographically illustrated books—allowed such original, creative contributions to emerge.

Malraux also acknowledges that photography itself has the power to transform objects, even before experts begin investing their skills in interpreting their content. Through adjustments in the angle, focus, light, and scale of reproduction, the images can become "fictitious," inviting new and imaginative interpretations. This insight is indeed

evident in Malraux's account, but had already been uttered in the mid-1930s. The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) organized a groundbreaking exhibition of "African Art" in 1935, one of the first exhibitions in the United States to display African sculptures as art rather than as ethnographic objects. The museum commissioned Walker Evans to photograph a selection of works from the exhibition. The images were considered so wonderful (fig. 2) that the museum organized a number of traveling exhibitions that same year, which displayed Evans's photographs.

MoMA embraced the capacity of photographic documents or "straight" documentary images to overcome their evidentiary role. This is apparent in a number of its photography publications. For example, in the exhibition catalogue *The Photographer's Eye*,¹² John Szarkowski, the curator of the exhibition and director of MoMA's photography department during that period, organized the images contained in the exhibition according to their emphasis on a) "the thing itself"; b) the "detail"; c) "the frame"; d) "time"; and e) "vantage point," to the exclusion of the original context and social significance of the images. Again, in *Looking at Photographs*,¹³ Szarkowski approached a photograph from Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* that presents an old lady—a police station lodger—next to a wooden plank (fig. 3), which she was using as a bed, as an example of the photographer's interest in form.

This canonical and decontextualizing discourse was part of the wider program of photography's integration into art, which for a large part of the twentieth century was led by MoMA and its photography directors, followed by Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum in 1958, under director Willem Sandberg. More recently, documentary photography has become an "influential strand of contemporary art,"¹⁴ but for most of photography's history the general consensus was that photography did not have the same status as art. Art photography struggled for legitimization; the medium's inherent role was supposedly to document the world. To counter this, photographers aspiring to make art had to find solutions to prove that their images were "made" and not "captured" or "found."

Art photographers throughout photography's history have had to develop strategies in order to prove that the medium was capable of producing art. As is also apparent in Malraux and Szarkowski's accounts, photography is transformable. Photographs are independent of the realities they depict. Photographic documents can come together in new constellations, they can be decontextualized to be discussed using the vocabulary and concerns of art, and can potentially also inherit a number of other functions. Photography, as Roland Barthes observed throughout his work, is "polysemous"; its meaning is malleable. Depending on context, photographs can lend themselves to realist or ideologically infused readings,¹⁵ but also elaborate engagements, such as the deeply subjective and emotional readings that Barthes produced in *Camera Lucida*,



Fig. 2. Walker Evans, *Ancestral Figure - Head, Gabon, 1935*. The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection Gift of Robert Goldwater, 1961 and 1962 (1978.412.2145). © Walker Evans Archive, The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Scala, Florence.



Fig. 3. Jacob Riis, *A "Scrub" and her Bed - the Plank*, ca. 1890. Image credit: Jacob August Riis/Museum of the City of New York, 90.13.4.236.

illustrating a new interest in the capacity of language to mediate the human soul.¹⁶

Photography, however, regardless of its transformative and transformable qualities, was systematically disinvested by art institutions, for instance, with severe resistance from the academies starting from the early days of the medium.¹⁷ According to those opposing photography's claims at being art, art's purpose was not simply the imitation of nature, but the communication of higher ideas, which could also be made evident in the artist's manual treatment of a work, and which photography was supposedly incapable of achieving because of its mechanistic and referential nature. As a result, photography earned a perception of belonging to the margins, both technologically and artistically.

Photography became identified with what has been left out and ignored in art, but also in society. It is with such terms that underrepresented individuals or groups have used the medium to assert themselves, criticize the center, and gain visibility by the art world and wider society. In an era of identity struggle, holding the camera or mixing the chemicals became an indication of power, and some artists, such as Adrian Piper, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Birgit Jürgenssen, among others, used the medium to communicate their ideas about identity.

Of course, photography was marginalized mostly by art museums and not by other kinds of museums, such as ethnographic/anthropological museums, from which artists often drew their vocabulary. In relation to more recent work this applies, for example, to Carrie Mae Weems's series *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* (1995–1996), in which the artist appropriated a series of daguerreotypes from Harvard University's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, which had originally been commissioned to illustrate theories of racial difference (fig. 4); Shigeyuki Kihara's series *Fa'afafine: In the Manner of a Woman* (2004–2005), which references colonial photographs of sexualized and eroticized Samoans; and Tracey Rose's *Ciao Bella, Ms Cast, Venus Baartman* (2001), which references Saartjie Baartman, the South African woman who was brought to Europe in the early nineteenth century to be "exhibited" as a scientific curiosity. These artists' awareness and embodiment of issues of identity and structures of power can be linked to their use of photography (with its implied withdrawal from the dominant language of art), their referencing of historical narratives inhabiting museums and reinforced through (often photographic) representation, and social marginalization. For example, by inserting photographic documents of marginalized people in her work, Weems disrupts the hierarchy between high and low media, and subverts the authority of documents and their role in writing and forming histories relating to African American identities.¹⁸



Fig. 4. Carrie Mae Weems, from the series *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried*, 1995-1996. © Carrie Mae Weems. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Similar to photographs, other objects contained in museums have an indexical relationship to particular locations and reflect historical, political, social, and economic conditions and, in many cases, subjectivities. Their main function is as documents, but their meaning is being transformed in the process of their separation from their original context, their isolation or arrangement into groupings, and their installation and interpretation.¹⁹ According to Monica Risnicoff de Gorgas:

*The object per se has no intrinsic value. [...] When objects are displayed in exhibitions, they are transformed and attributed to new categories. In terms of the meaning of the object as symbol, they oscillate between two worlds, namely the world from which they come and the world created by the display.*²⁰

Depending on the character of the museum, objects or documents are selected, organized, interpreted, and brought together in new constellations, and sometimes in the process—again on the basis of the museum’s interests—some functions of the objects might get strengthened, and others transformed or even obscured.²¹ Museum objects serve as documents, but regardless of whether this is to illustrate the character and values of the museum, its ideological foundations and interests, or in order to become material for the production of critically engaged artists’ work through processes of recontextualization, one way or another the meaning of the objects is changed and is becoming different to their meaning in “the world from which they come.”²²

Museums’ and photographs’ transformative and adaptable qualities are subject to similar historical mechanisms and dynamics. The priority of context in the production of meaning and its compliance or adaptability to power/knowledge is evident across different categories of objects and systems of representation. The specificity of the items lies within the processes of narrativization by different parties, including museum specialists, critics, artists, and the general audience. The resulting narratives and their significance are also affected by policies and economies that define people’s engagement with museum objects. This is the focus of the next section of this text.

2

In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin claims that reproducibility with the aid of photography and film “emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual.”²³ From the moment that the relationship between works of art and their original ritual function ceased to exist, another practice became prominent: “politics.”²⁴ Benjamin was concerned with the mobilization of the masses and the ubiquity of fascism. The mobilization of the masses was made possible through increased access to images, history, and culture, and a collective and distracted form of reception that emerged as a delayed response to modern industrial production. This new,

positive form of reception,²⁵ according to Benjamin, was opposed to secularized forms of ritual, which find expression in a canonical experiencing of art, what he calls the Renaissance “cult of beauty,” the notion of “art for art’s sake,” and “outmoded concepts,” such as “creativity,” “genius,” “eternal value and mystery.” These secularized forms of ritual, in Benjamin’s account, are not just ineffective, but in their extreme application they also resemble fascist tactics of offering people opportunities to express themselves, without giving them the right to disrupt power structures and property relations through their expressions.

Embracing principles of greater access and participation is a sign of institutions’ increased liberalism, but this is also associated with changes relating to newly emergent forms of institutional control. Drawing on Benjamin’s ideas, John Berger introduces in *Ways of Seeing* some more implications relating to the mechanical reproduction of works of art, and people’s resulting greater access to art and their own history, which became patently evident at an institutional level in the second half of the twentieth century:

*The art of the past no longer exists as it once did. Its authority is lost. In its place there is a language of images. What matters now is who uses that language for what purpose. This touches upon questions of copyright for reproduction, the ownership of art presses and publishers, the total policy of public art galleries and museums.*²⁶

Copyrights, authentication procedures, collection management processes, access, publication, and other policies are important to institutions for their sustainability and in order to remain relevant as sites where knowledge is accumulated and produced. The image plate from John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* below illustrates new possibilities opened up in arranging images according to personal taste on one’s own bedroom wall (fig. 5). “Logically,” according to Berger, “these boards should replace museums.”²⁷

Arguably, public art galleries and museums have continued to change since the early 1970s in terms of collecting, exhibiting, and participation policies; diversity of mediums, artists, and audiences; and openness and willingness to share information and material and educate the masses. Institutional liberalism is also evident in the eventual demarginalization of photography in art. For theorists like David Bate, it was the alternative political forms of expression that photography offered during that period that eventually caused the medium’s final integration.²⁸ From the late 1960s the medium gradually received wider reception, with the emergence of photography departments in auction houses and more collectors and galleries devoted to it.

Clearly, the increased liberalism of art galleries and museums did not decrease politics of access and museums’ strategies to secure control. Today, Benjamin’s discussion of the different modes of experiencing culture and their political



Fig. 5. Image plate illustrating new possibilities opened up in arranging images according to personal taste in one’s own bedroom wall. Reproduced from John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972). With permission from Penguin Books Ltd. Copyright © John Berger, 1990.

connotations and Berger's list of policies that resulted from the challenges that museums faced after the invention of photography, and which back in the 1970s consisted of copyrights, ownership, and other museum policies, could also encompass the politics of funding, repatriation, restitution, inclusion, the Internet, and global politics and dialogues resulting from the instigation of new, non-Western museums and processes of identification worldwide. All these policies and processes seem to be extensions of "art for art's sake" and the secularized rituals described in Benjamin's essay, as they are also indicative of different modes of social control.

Nevertheless, even if we ignore the policies and other strategies that were developed to stabilize economies of knowledge and the power and authority of museums, the transformation of museums into progressively more inclusive public arenas cannot be perceived simply as a sign of increased openness and liberalism. Tony Bennett's understanding of the progressive openness of museums and collections in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is described as being a question of establishing a "new—and all-pervasive—political economy of power."²⁹ Access and participation produced more complex relations to power, resulting in seamless forms of training and discipline and "voluntarily self-regulating citizenry."³⁰ The idea was that giving the masses access to knowledge and allowing them to understand how they themselves were understood by "power" would eventually lead to the interiorization of power's gaze "as a principle of self-surveillance and, hence, self-regulation."³¹ As people's acculturation in this instance is reduced to a self-watching and self-regulating mechanism, this process is alienating, not empowering, and reminiscent of Benjamin's ideas on the oppressive side of rituals. According to André Lepecki, the function of rituals as described in Benjamin's account is also implicated in an idea that dominates today's social media, or in Lepecki's terms, the "highly policed zones of corporate and governmentally encouraged self-expression."³² This refers to granting the masses "the opportunity for expression (of the personified self), but not the right of expression (of articulated, impersonal, and critical-political alterities)."³³ The opportunity for expression here responds to the recurring pattern of banal and ineffective expressions of individualized societies. This short—and necessarily reductive—account reflects the transposition of power from pagan and feudal laws and rituals to neoliberalist values. All these understandings also refer to examples of involvement, expression, and participation that ultimately aim at social control, and for which "panopticism" continues to be central.

It is important to remember that, in Michel Foucault's terms, "power and knowledge directly imply one another."³⁴ But in order for photography to function as a productive metaphor for a discussion on current institutional frameworks, dialectical schemes in art galleries and museums, and wider cultural/geographical inclusiveness, it is important to acknowledge that museums throughout this period have not been acting solely as authoritarian sites where power is

exercised in acquiring objects, producing knowledge, and disguising ideological hegemonies, but also as sites that reiterate ideological propositions to remain current. This refers to the objects that museums collect and show, as well as the knowledge that museums produce, but also to decisions made in terms of the parties producing the knowledge and the processes of engagement involved. As is also illustrated in the next section of this article, the current consensus is that openness, inclusiveness, meaningful participation, access, and exchange are inevitable if museums are to embrace their potential to become truly global, avoid discursive imperialism, and promote equality and democracy. Considerable effort is currently placed toward this end, but—historically—there are also significant limitations in the operation of museums as social catalysts.

3

The museum can be seen to operate as a medium in a variety of ways. Driven by institutional dynamics and ideological coordinates, it is a medium which employs documents in the process of mediating culture and producing knowledge. As has already been mentioned in this text, it has also been used as a medium by artists whose aim was to challenge the art establishment for its mediumistic closure, and to object to the misrepresentation, mistreatment, and marginalization of subjects in the history of Western culture. The museum has been employed as a medium to produce many other examples of institutional critique, using a variety of means of expression. Keith Piper's *Lost Vitrines* (2007), which was installed at the V&A on the anniversary of the 200 years since the abolition of slavery, attempted, for instance, to open a dialogue on the absence of material relevant to slavery in the V&A's collection, while the *Museum Songspiel: The Netherlands 20XX* by Chto Delat (2011) continues the tradition of critiquing the modern museum for its contradictions and exclusionary practices.

A third way in which museums can be understood as mediums is in terms of communication. This refers to museums employing objects, resources, and technologies in order to communicate with their audiences and other institutions. Such an approach offers a more dynamic understanding of the museum, the impact of its content on various audiences, the channels of communication, and parties involved in various schemes of communication. For example, in their *Handbook for Museums*, Gary Edson and David Dean approach the museum exhibition as a medium similar to artistic modes of expression.³⁵ This, in their view, necessitates a consideration of the views of the people creating the exhibits and their choices, and a need to be more transparent in terms of the partial or subjective truths communicated in exhibitions. Negotiations have also taken place over involving local and wider communities, as well as minorities, in discussions and exchanges on ways to remedy the power imbalance in art and society as a whole.³⁶ Some institutions have shown that they are willing to change, as is

evident, for example, in the return of War Gods and other sacred objects to the Zuni—cultural objects removed during colonial occupation. Such practices are immensely important in validating the ethical operation of museums, as is taking into account and involving their audiences.

“Social inclusion” has increasingly been promoted within the framework of soft power and the heightened role of the cultural sector in social services. Despite the benefits of wider inclusion for social cohesion and persistent attempts to include those who would benefit the most—meaning marginalized classes and individuals—inclusion is still a problematic concept in audience development. According to Richard Sandell’s essay “Museums as Agents of Social Inclusion,” one of the elements that invites consideration in relation to the inclusion of individuals in cultural systems, apart from opportunities to participate and access these services, is “representation—the extent to which an individual’s cultural heritage is represented within the mainstream cultural arena.”³⁷ Indeed, the author highlights a number of initiatives involving targeted groups and the promotion of positive values. However, as long as museums cannot really tackle exclusion and social problems relating to this, such as poverty, crime, and racism in isolation, their role as inclusive cultural institutions is challenged. Another element that impacts “representation” and commitment to social inclusion in museums is the availability and distribution of funding for projects and opportunities that allow participation. This issue is becoming increasingly urgent, for example, in the United Kingdom, and relates to extensive public funding cuts over the last ten years and current financial insecurity.³⁸

A recent study conducted by the European Commission,³⁹ which focuses on “placing audiences at the center of cultural organizations,” and widening, deepening, and diversifying strategies, shows that “audience development” is a complex field that should be seen as a collective challenge to policy makers and cultural professionals. Further, the study shows that even though audience development is better understood today, there are still challenges to “impact measurement” and “difficulty in identifying indicators and being able to demonstrate their social relevance.”⁴⁰ Most institutions invest in active participation (through standard activities), which, the authors observe, takes into account a variety of definitions deriving from philosophical understandings and criticism, such as Jacques Rancière’s, in the *Emancipated Spectator* (2008), and his ideas on active spectatorship and emancipatory practice that highlight the political dimension of spectatorship.

Museums have begun to respond to cultural and social exclusion, and their approach is increasingly strategic, addressing specific issues and audiences. This applies to big museums and the incorporation of social inclusion within the long-term aims and strategic plans of museum organizations (such as the Network of European Museum Organisations and the MeLa* Project—European Museums

in an age of migrations), and various local, national, and international museum initiatives, such as Tate's "Inclusive Futures" (2018–2019), which focuses on "race, power, equality and social justice," and the practical application of diversity and inclusion strategies, policies and processes;⁴¹ the London-based Museums Association's "Museums Change Lives" campaign (since 2017); the establishment of "STUDIO i - Platform for Inclusive Culture" in 2018 by the Stedelijk Museum and Van Abbemuseum in the Netherlands, addressing issues of "age, cultural or social background, gender, and disability";⁴² and many more. As is also evident in the European Commission's report mentioned above, cultural and social inclusion is also increasingly becoming a priority to medium-sized organizations and other platforms and agencies.⁴³

Even though a large part of the population is still practically excluded from those spheres, many Western museums, including the ones mentioned in this section, are increasingly offering opportunities to help their audience gain access and actively experience and identify with the material included in their collections. The next section looks at photography, visibility, and inclusion in representation, as well as the effectiveness of images in communicating and addressing social issues within an institutional framework.

4

Photography has played an important role in including the excluded in art galleries and museums by displaying or voicing marginalized identities and subjectivities, as happens in the work Adrian Piper, Robert Mapplethorpe, Carrie Mae Weems, and many more, who have used the medium of photography to express their views on notions of identity, for participatory photography projects (such as Alfredo Jaar's), and in documentary. But the medium's inclusiveness has not always been the most effective in terms of empowering marginalized subjects, whether those subjects are depicted in the images, artists, or audiences.

In terms of content, some photographic material is still problematic within and outside of art, and still generates complex questions of exploitation and voyeurism. This applies, for example, to early photographs of subjects wearing costumes, carrying objects, and imitating poses in the manner of ethnographic images, such as Charles Nègre's *Self-portrait in Oriental Clothing* (ca. 1855), or Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's self-portrait in *Japanese Costume* (1892). Early ethnographic approaches to landscape photography also were and remain problematic in terms of staging, coding, and establishing vocabularies that, in Elizabeth Edwards's words, "Made the colonial simultaneously familiar and contained whilst remaining exotic."⁴⁴ Edwards refers here to the likes of Samuel Bourne's landscape images of India and John Thomson's images of China. Photography reinvented the landscape as a genre and gave it an important role in expansive politics in

the West. For example, the purpose of Timothy O'Sullivan's landscapes from the Geological Explorations of the Fortieth Parallel expedition (fig. 6) was to help assess the region's agricultural potential, but also to map areas belonging to Native Americans and allow the arrival of white settlers. These landscape images were often issued as postcards, advertising the untamed beauty of these remote areas to the settlers. According to Cynthia Enloe, colonial postcards very often misrepresented the subjects they contained. She claims that colonial postcards "were frequently eroticized and surprisingly standardized—a Zulu woman from southern Africa and a Maori woman from New Zealand were asked to assume similar poses for the British imperialist photographer."⁴⁵ All this material inhabits museums, and there is rarely an explanation about its role in processes of exploitation and marginalization.

Such material has offered opportunities for artists to create work that engages with these dark historical chapters. This applies, for example, to artists such as Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, Shigeyuki Kihara, Renee Cox, Katarina Pirak Sikku, and Tracey Rose. However, as photography is no longer marginalized in art, photographic images by artists who employ their own bodies and subjectivities to address issues of ethnic/national identity, nostalgia, homogeneity, and exoticism can raise questions. Gen Doy argues that these artworks are often incompatible with the late capitalist agenda, where consumerism and self-fashioning are seen as the main forms of self-validation and empowerment, and where the concerns of galleries and other institutions presenting the work might be different to the artists' concerns; for example, they could be more focused on publicity and fundraising.⁴⁶ However, she also stresses the increasing importance of presenting subjectivities from the center, rather than the margins, especially with reference to artists who represent communities that remain socially oppressed.

Nav Haq, on the other hand, claims that, in the past, "identity politics" and the making visible of marginalized artists in art, as well as the reasons for their marginalization, was seen as promoting inclusivity and pluralism, but is now redundant.⁴⁷ Drawing on Peggy Phelan's ideas, he claims that making marginalization visible can now be seen as "an institutional trap" and "a ghettoization harbored within the fold of art world legitimization."⁴⁸ In the 1980s, according to Haq, the increased visibility of marginalized artists led to "institutionalized multiculturalism" (the inclusion of artists from diverse backgrounds). This is now replicated in art's "internationalization" (its operation as a global institution addressing global audiences). Haq criticizes notions of visibility and inclusion as a "colonial export," an idea that is promoted by the West to serve its own interests. He suggests that artists should resist or even annul current tactics for the marginalized, for example, through strategies of abstraction, anonymity, performativity, and fiction, which disrupt identification. Considering that photography has communicated mainly by means of schemes of



Fig. 6. Timothy O'Sullivan, *A member of Clarence King's Geological Exploration of the 40th Parallel is surveying from a rock. Shoshone Canyon and Falls, Idaho Terr., in background*, 1868. Courtesy of the National Archives, photo no. 77-KS-4-112.

marginalization within art in the last forty years, it is difficult to think of alternatives.

The same logic could also apply to museums' emancipated viewers and strategies of inclusion. Even though museums are no longer seen as elitist and authoritarian institutions to the extent they were understood to be in the past, the decisions they make are still ideological and political, and not always transparent. It is because of the technological, social, and political infrastructure, and the degree to which audiences are immersed in these, that inclusion practices can be unproductive in this setting. To return to Benjamin, opportunities to express are ineffectual and could also be seen as oppressive if they do not entail any potential impact on property and power structures.⁴⁹

With this frame of mind, it is also important to consider what representations, systems of signification, and genres stand for in the digital age. This is the role of the next section of this article. Museums now provide means for personal/group identification and visibility at a global scale. But the digital age is often presented as an age of global uniformity supported by capitalist trends and networked culture, further complicating the potential of positive social impact and a productive sense of cultural exchange.

5

Within many online museum collections, old and new museum objects, such as the ones I have described earlier in this text, and artists' responses all inhabit the same spaces, allowing comparative procedures to take place. This, however, does not necessarily allow the space to contemplate what really happened in the history of representation, including the history of museums, mediums, objects, and images, and what is still happening today. The V&A's ambitious Photography Centre, for instance, opened in 2018 with a display drawn from the museum's collection of over 800,000 photographs (all available in their online collection). The display is described using an uncannily familiar phraseology, as an exploration of "photography as a way of 'collecting the world.'"⁵⁰ It is difficult to think what the value of this material would be for those subjects who have been marginalized inside and outside representation. Would it, in a similar way to Malraux's *Museum Without Walls*, allow individuals to reinterpret the material as a way of recounting their own history? Global audiences may already be looking at inclusion on that level with a skeptical eye, as more and more countries try to participate in global dialogues by creating their own museums, through which they can highlight their cultural production and contemplate their own identity.

All this is becoming more and more important as museums are increasingly acquiring greater presence online—if, in fact, that is the case. Andrew Dewdney, an important figure

in the debate about museums and networked cultures, claims that even though a few museums are investing in their virtual identities, “museums have generally been slow and in many cases resistant to the larger impact of the Internet and its networked cultures.”⁵¹ Museums still feel threatened by “the networked character of distributed information,” and its “unruly and chaotic” nature. This is why they mainly invest in VR environments that resemble the controlled space of the museum. Institutions, according to Dewdney, still operate under an analogue logic. He adds, “You could say the Internet stands for a contemporary popular culture, from which the museum has always wished to distinguish itself.”⁵² Adding to Dewdney, and echoing Benjamin, the Internet also seems to address “new forms of reception in a state of distraction” that, once again, institutions find difficult to embrace.

There is certainly much discussion and an evident desire for museums to be part of networked culture. There is evidence that museums’ participation in network culture could contribute to more immediate goals relating to audience development, as happened, for example, in “Tate Encounters” (2007–2010), and with the securing of a position in the global arena, as was more evident in the more recent “Cultural Value and the Digital: Practice, Policy and Theory” (2014). But Dewdney’s remarks on museums’ relation to networked culture and the pop culture of the past also needs to be recognized. The sovereignty of the museum and its audiences is not challenged in Artsy or Google Arts & Culture (formerly Google Art Project). But the Internet could be seen as the equivalent of what photography was in the past; it has become a new challenge to the aura of the museum and its objects. The Internet and the opening of archives have offered artists, researchers, and the general public the opportunity to engage with material that would have been difficult to engage with in the analogue era. This applies, for example, to projects such as Walid Raad’s *The Atlas Group Archive* (1989–2004), Camille Henrot’s *Grosse Fatigue* (2013), Louis Henderson’s *All that is Solid* (2014), or curated online content, such as the ongoing Tactical Technology Collective’s *Exposing the Invisible* website. Such work draws attention to the infrastructure and invisible power dynamics in the production of meaning. However, for the most part, material can travel unregulated; discharged from any associations or narrative, it often becomes part of an enormous, poetic cacophony.

Arguably, networked cultures, to an even greater extent than photography or museums in the past, require multidisciplinary dialogue. This was also one of the outcomes of the report produced within the AHRC-funded “Modelling Cultural Value in New Media Cultures of Networked Participation,”⁵³ a collaboration between a number of influential cultural institutions in the United Kingdom, including the Royal College of Art, Tate Research, and the Centre for Media and Culture Research at London South Bank University. The authors of the report claim that interdisciplinary and cross-sector research is understood to be “a fundamental necessity to help develop a more

inclusive, less esoteric, and technical or theoretical-orientated language across disciplines and sectors so that better quality discussion can be forged between practice, policy and theory.”⁵⁴ Photography itself has already become part of networked culture. Daniel Rubinstein and Katrina Sluis, who for a number of years have been exploring the implications, claim that recent literature on photography and the networked image “can do without the persistent questions about representation that fascinated writers on photography for decades.”⁵⁵ In this setting, notions relating to the role of representation or the power structures which surround photography receive lessened importance. This is to highlight the fact that such a turn also implies discursive adjustments, which require the reevaluation of photography’s specificity.

At the moment, discussions in relation to the networked image, but also to the networked museum, seem to mainly concern the infrastructure of the network, the algorithms, software, and metadata. Such discussions often seem to neutralize the history and inherent tensions of both photography and the museum, when in fact their nature and function have not been affected much.

Conclusion

This article has sought to draw a parallel between photography and the museum. This is in an attempt not to efface their differences, but to allow the development of analogies between the indexical properties of photographs and other objects contained in museums, the realities from which these objects come, the parties interested in them (including artists and audiences), and their proximity to the center, processes of engagement, and impact of technological advancements. Selecting, organizing, interpreting, and sharing can be loaded with cultural, political, and ideological hegemonic interests, and indeed this is one of the reasons why the museum continues to be a site of complexity.

As this article suggests, photography can serve as a fruitful starting point from which to discuss museum practices of inclusion and diversity. Photography, as a reproducible and indexical medium, had an immense influence on the museum and cultural production as a whole. It has long been regarded as a political tool for its documentary qualities, but it has also been involved in and even contributed to politics of representation, which is also one of the reasons why it was excluded from most museums of art until the end of the twentieth century. In this context, photography’s creative, transformative, and transformable qualities were ignored, because of the medium’s links to the industry and low culture. As a reproductive technology it has also paved the way to the digital age and networked cultures. This, in turn, has also influenced institutions’ more liberal attitude in relation to sharing information, the reconceptualization of collections from physical museums

and archives to virtual viewing environments, and the desire to imitate the way communication is achieved on social media platforms, which necessitates greater interaction with global audiences. In fact, the history of both photography and museums has been influenced by their mutual relation, and is characterized by a few similarities (e.g., in terms of the synthesis and subjectivity involved in processes of interpretation, the ideological messages conveyed, their political role, and the increasingly important role of their audiences). By rethinking their collections and relationship to various audiences, institutions are already supporting changes in economies of information and knowledge production, but the true and unlimited participation and integration of museums in global networked cultures seems as yet premature and difficult to envision.

Conflict and power relations are far from resolved. Global antagonisms could lead to the displacement of the West, or Western institutions may continue operating as instigators of such dialogues. Regardless, this stage of self-awareness can be extremely useful in light of museums' impending internationalization and reevaluation of what a museum could be, so that they can continue to operate as productive communicators and positive catalysts for society's current worldviews.

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1. Suzanne Briet, *What is Documentation?* (Paris: Edit, 1951), 9, accessed December 15, 2018, <http://ella.slis.indiana.edu/~roday/what%20is%20documentation.pdf>.
2. Briet, *What is Documentation?*, 10.
3. Borrowing from Michael Buckland's definition of all museum objects as documents, a document here signifies "any source of information, in material form, capable of being used for reference or study or as an authority," including "manuscripts, printed matter, illustrations, diagrams, museum specimens, etc.," and "any expression of human thought." See Michael Buckland, "What is a 'document'?", *Journal of the American Society of Information Science* 48, no. 9 (1997): 805.
4. This understanding of museum objects as documents is influenced by Suzanne Briet's documentalist definition of a document as "any concrete or symbolic indexical sign [*indice*], preserved or recorded toward the ends of representing, of reconstituting, or of proving a physical or intellectual phenomenon." Briet, *What is Documentation?*, 10. Briet's ideas have influenced the understanding of museum objects as documents.
5. For a list of photography's official roles in the context of museums, see Theopisti Stylianou-Lambert and Elena Stylianou, "Editorial: Photography, artists and museums,"

- Photographies* 7, no. 2 (2014): 118, accessed March 31, 2019, doi: 10.1080/17540763.2014.943053.
6. Ibid.
 7. Henrietta Lidchi, "The Poetics and the Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures," in *Representation*, eds. Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 1997, 2013), 120–214.
 8. Ibid., 174–179.
 9. As summarized by Göran Sonesson, indexicality in photography can be introduced in a multiple sense, indicating part/whole relationships, logical deductions, or physical effects. Also, for him, indexicality is the general principle of perceptual experience, possibly as old as humankind, and derives from a psychological need for immediacy. See Göran Sonesson, *Semiotics of Photography: On Tracing the Index, Report 4 from the Project "Pictorial meanings in the Society of information"* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1989).
 10. André Malreux, *Museum Without Walls* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1965).
 11. Ibid., 240.
 12. John Szarkowski, *The Photographer's Eye* (New York: MoMA, 1964).
 13. John Szarkowski, *Looking at Photographs* (New York: MoMA, 1973).
 14. Julian Stallabrass, ed., *Documentary: Documents of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 12.
 15. Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana, 1964).
 16. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980).
 17. A few artists have shown that photography could overcome such difficulties through artifice; nevertheless, in the early days such attempts received severe resistance. For example, in 1857 Oscar Rejlander made *Two Ways of Life*, a composite work comprised of thirty-two images, representing an allegory of the paths of vice and virtue. This work was praised when it was first exhibited at the Manchester *Art Treasures Exhibition* of 1857, and was actually bought by Queen Victoria. But immediately afterward, academies rushed to criticize the work as a hubristic insult to art. This refers to the supposed intention of the artist to bring photography onto equal terms with painting, which the artist denied. Images like this might confuse people into thinking that photography was art. See Oscar Rejlander, "An Apology to Art Photography," in *Photography in Print*, ed. Vicky Goldberg (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1863), 141–147. This echoes Baudelaire's article from 1859, where he disapproves of artists' using photography. Photography, in his opinion, was deceiving people and could corrupt art. See Charles Baudelaire, "The Salon of 1859," in Goldberg, *Photography in Print*, 123–127.
 18. See, for example, Cherise Smith, "Fragmented Documents: Works by Lorna Simpson, Carrie Mae Weems, and Willie Robert Middlebrook at The Art Institute of Chicago," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 24, no. 2 (1999): 244–272, accessed March 26, 2019, doi: 10.2307/4112970.
 19. Buckland, "What is a 'document'?", 805.
 20. Monica Risnicoff de Gorgas, "Reality as Illusion," *Museum International* (Paris: UNESCO, 2007), 210: 10.
 21. The recontextualization and decontextualization of objects in museums is central in a few debates and in relation to a variety of museum types. The following books summarize some of these debates: Dominic Thomas, ed., *Museums in Postcolonial Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Didier Maleuvre, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Helen Rees Leahy, *Museum Bodies: The Politics and Practices of Visiting and Viewing* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2012); Christopher Whitehead, *Museums and the Construction of Disciplines: Art and Archaeology in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009).
 22. For a summary of these processes of transformation, see Marisa Nakasone, "Museum (1)," *The Chicago School of Media*

- Theory, accessed April 23, 2019, <https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/museum>.
23. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Photography in Print*, ed. Vicky Goldberg (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1859), 326.
 24. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 326.
 25. For a distinction between this positive take on the notion of distracted reception in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and the way that the term was employed in his earlier writings, see Howard Eiland, "Reception in Distraction," in *Walter Benjamin and Art*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Continuum, 2005), 3–13.
 26. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972), 33.
 27. Ibid.
 28. David Bate, *Photography: The Key Concepts* (Oxford: Berg, 2009).
 29. Terry Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," *New Formations* 4 (1988): 76.
 30. Ibid.
 31. Ibid.
 32. André Lepecki, "Under Attack (or Expression in the Age of Selfie-Control)," *L'Internationale* (2015), accessed December 15, 2018, http://www.internationaleonline.org/research/real_democracy/17_under_attack_or_expression_in_the_age_of_selfie_control.
 33. Ibid.
 34. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 27.
 35. Garry Edson and David Dean, *Handbook for Museums* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013).
 36. Lidchi, "The Poetics and the Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures."
 37. Richard Sandell, "Museums as Agents of Social Inclusion," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 17, no. 4 (1998): 410.
 38. David Cannadine, *A Report on Museum Collecting Today* (London: Art-Fund, 2018).
 39. Alessandro Bollo, Cristina Da Milano, Alessandra Gariboldi, and Chris Torch, *Final Report: Study on Audience Development – How to Place Audiences at the Centre of Cultural Organisations* (Brussels: European Commission, 2017).
 40. Ibid., 46.
 41. "Inclusive Futures," Tate, accessed April 2, 2019, <https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/projects/inclusive-futures>.
 42. "STUDIO i – platform for inclusive culture," Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, accessed April 2, 2019, <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/news/studio-i-platform-inclusive-culture>.
 43. Bollo, et al., *Final Report: Study on Audience Development*.
 44. Elizabeth Edwards, "Colonialism and Photography," *Answers*, accessed March 5, 2015, <http://www.answers.com/topic/colonialism-and-photography>.
 45. Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1989), 42.
 46. Gen Doy, *Picturing the Self: Changing Views on the Subject in Visual Culture*, (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2005).
 47. Nav Haq, "The Invisible and the Visible: Identity Politics and the Economy of Reproduction in Art," in *Decolonising Museums*, ed. Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez (L'Internationale Online, 2015), 13.
 48. Haq, "The Invisible and the Visible," 13.
 49. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."
 50. "Our New Photography Centre is Now Open," V&A, accessed December 15, 2018, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/news/our-new-photography-centre-is-now-open>.
 51. Andrew Dewdney, "What is the Current Fascination with VR on the Part of Museums and Art Galleries?," 8. Paper presented at

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- the annual conference “The Virtual in Museums: Hot Medium?,”
Contemporary Art Society, London, May 10, 2018.
52. Ibid.
 53. Victoria Walsh, Andrew Dewdney, and Emily Pringle, *Modelling Cultural Value within New Media Cultures and Network Participation* (London: AHRC, 2014).
 54. Ibid., 19.
 55. Daniel Rubinstein and Katrina Sluis, “A Life More Photographic: Mapping the Networked Image,” *Photographies* 1 (2008): 16, accessed December 15, 2018, doi: 10.1080/17540760701785842.