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**Moving Beyond Myths:
Institutional Experiences
of Expanded Photography**

Editorial

In the last two decades, digitally-informed practices have permeated the essential functions of cultural institutions. At the same time, scholarship has sought to distil the products of the first 'digital shift' of the 1990s within the contexts of the "second digital turn," which emerged after about 2010.¹ The former, in relation to photography, was described by Katrina Sluis and Daniel Rubinstein as "replacing the technology of ... film, chemical processing [and] darkroom practices with the technology of digital capture and image manipulation," but in a way that "did not radically alter the economy of production and storage of photographic images."² And according to Mario Carpo, the first digital turn "changed our ways of making," whereas the second "changed our ways of thinking."³ A consequent increase in critical, practice-based approaches seeking to reconcile theory with institutional realities has led to noticeable growth of collaborative research initiatives and publications since 2010; pushing questions around institutional policy, procedure, structure and tradition into the fore.

Institutions and research departments regarding media art, broadly, including Ars Electronica, Linz (1979)⁴, ZKM Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe (1989)⁵, and CRUMB, Sunderland (2000)⁶ have existed for some decades. So too have texts exploring the impact of digital technologies on photographic image-making, written by scholars such as Joe Farace (1996) and Steve Holtzmann (1997); examples which are discussed further in **Franziska Kunze's** contribution to this issue.⁷ At this point, responses to evolving technologies were compounded by the concurrent crisis of reality in photography, addressed in theorisations of 'post-photography' by Geoffrey Batchen (1992), William J. Mitchell (1992), Lev Manovich (1995), Göran Sonesson (1999) and Marie Carani (1999), to name a few.⁸ But the application of these ideas to practical institutional contexts was limited and, with the exception of temporal exhibitions with finite legacies, core institutional practices around photography remained largely unchanged.

1. Mario Carpo, *The Second Digital Turn: Design Beyond Intelligence*, MIT Press 2017.

2. Daniel Rubinstein & Katrina Sluis, 'A Life More Photographic', *Photographies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2008, 9–28.

3. Carpo 2017 (reference 1).

4. According to its website, "Ars Electronica has been analysing and commenting on the Digital Revolution since 1979 ... [as a] stage and competition for media art, festival for digital music, showcase for creativity and innovation, laboratory for research and development, [and] school of the future." <www.ars.electronica.art> (07.01.20).

5. ZKM Karlsruhe describes itself as "a place that expands the original tasks of the museum, founded ... with the mission of continuing the classical arts into the digital age ... [it] combines research and production exhibitions and performances, collections and archives, mediation and events. Through interdisciplinary connections of these fields of work, the ZKM as an agile organization can present and produce the development of art and media of the 20th and 21st centuries." <www.zkm.de> (07.01.20).

6. The Curatorial Resource for Upstart Media Bliss was founded by Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook in 2000 in the School of Arts, Design and Media at the University of Sunderland <www.sunderland.ac.uk> (07.01.20) as a resource "to help those who 'exhibit' new media art, including curators, technicians and artists." <www.crumbweb.org> (07.01.20).

7. Joe Farace, *The Digital Imaging Dictionary*, New York 1996, 24; Steve Holtzmann, *Digital Mosaics. The Aesthetics of Cyberspace*, New York 1997, 164.

8. See: Geoffrey Batchen, 'On Post-photography', *Afterimage*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1992, 17; William J. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-photographic Era*, Cambridge, Mass. and London 1992; Lev Manovich, 'The Paradoxes of Digital Photography', in: *Photography after Photography* (exhibition catalogue), Germany 1995. Göran Sonesson and Marie Carani, among others, published texts respectively titled 'Post-Photography and Beyond: From Mechanical Reproduction to Digital Production' and 'Au-delà de la photo positiviste: de la photo post-moderne à la post-photographie' [Beyond positivist photography: from post-modern photography to post-photography], in: *Visio*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1999, titled 'Postphotography'.

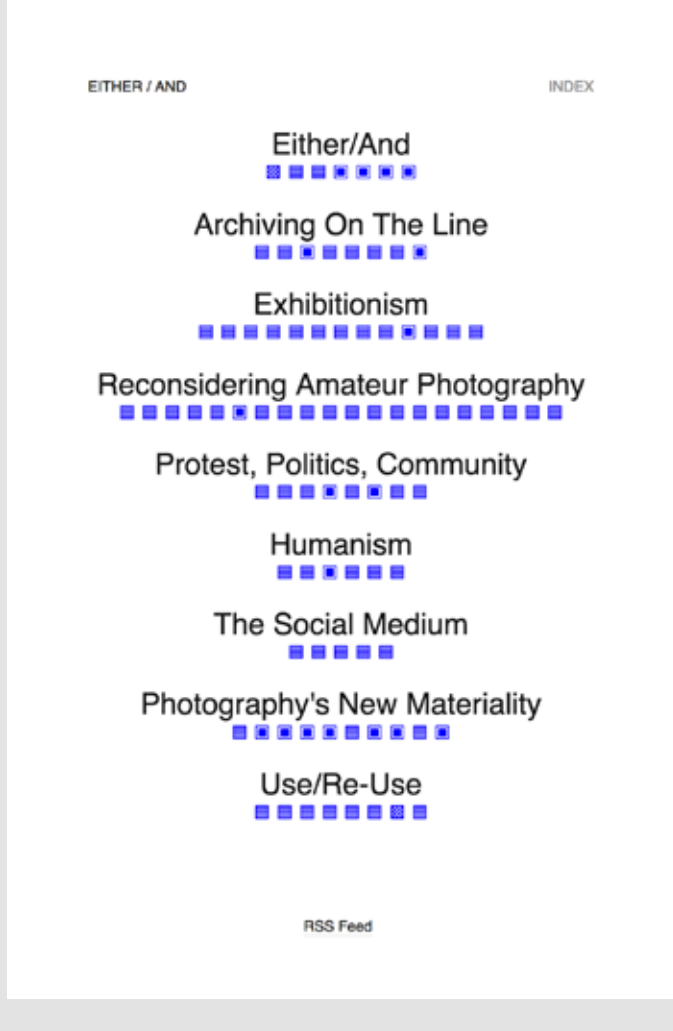


Figure 1
Contents page outlining strands of the *Either/And* project, as presented on its online platform <www.eitherand.org>. Each square represents an essay or image-led content, and hovering over headings provokes introductory text. Screenshot taken by the author.

Since 2010, European initiatives and study centres focussed on institutional intersections with the networked image economy, computational photography and digital culture have increased in number. These include *Either/And* (2012–18) led by Ph: Photography Research Network⁹ (fig. 1); the Centre for the Study of the Networked Image (CSNI) at London South Bank University (LSBU), established in 2012,¹⁰ and LIMA, Netherlands, initiated in 2013.¹¹ Such energies have encouraged institutions to update approaches to reflect a progressively specialised visitor base, and engage with varied disciplines to recognise the hybridity of photo-cultural practices. However, research and practice remain somewhat siloed and aligning disparate aspects of these activities can be challenging. This issue of *PhotoResearcher* aims to contribute synaptic connections for cross-disciplinary schol-

arship, bringing together diverse perspectives on photography, institutional function, and image culture. Through texts ranging from technical to thematic and conceptual studies, it attempts to rationalise discussions of expanded photographic practices in relation to variable institutional roles and experiences.

The internet, the proliferation of digitally mediated image economies, and the advent of post-scarcity (facilitated by social networks, smartphones and surveillance technologies) has given rise to laterally developing interpretations of ‘post-photography’ since the term’s introduction. Joan Fontcuberta described its use “with different nuances ... almost a synonym of the concept of ‘digital photography’ put[ting] emphasis on the new technological aspect, and on the ontological consequences deriving from it.”¹²

Photography’s increasingly distributed, computational character referenced by this concept – rhetorically referred to as expanded photography – has filtered into cultural institutional functions, and these functions have also dispersed beyond institutional boundaries. Across

9. The introduction on *Either/And*’s online platform states it “has been devised as a framework within which to debate and share perspectives, using issues and questions posed by the National Media Museum and its partners as the catalyst for discussion and exchange relating to media.” <www.eitherand.org> [08.01.20].

10. With a research focus on the networked image, the CSNI “brings together a group of researchers who are seeking new knowledge and understanding of how network and computational culture has and is changing the production and reception of art and photography.” <www.centreforthestudyof.net> [08.01.20].

11. LIMA has a range of organisational functions, spanning preservation, research, artist representation and development. It defines itself as “the platform in the Netherlands for media art, new technologies and digital culture, where the discipline is actively questioned and where the field, and its position in society is reflected on.” <www.li-ma.nl> [08.01.20].

12. Joan Fontcuberta quoted in interview with Sabin Bors, ‘The Post-Photographic Condition. Le Mois de la Photo à Montréal’, *Anti-utopias*, 15 September 2015: <https://anti-utopias.com/newswire/post-photographic-condition/> [10.01.20].

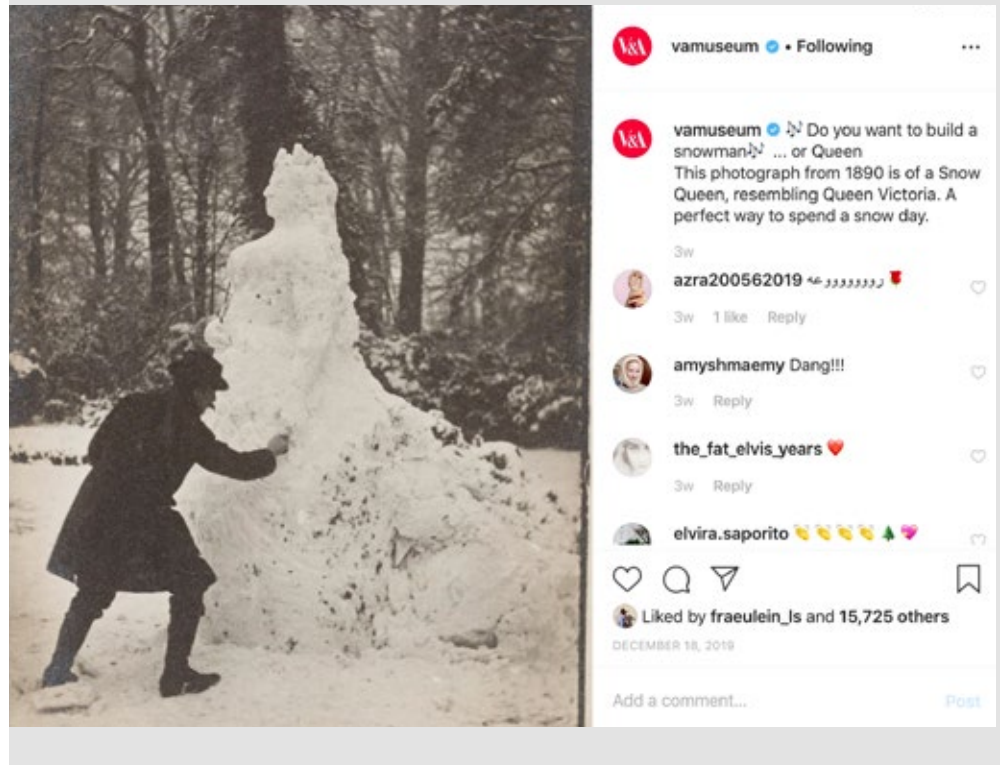


Figure 2
Image posted to the Victoria and Albert Museum's Instagram account, demonstrating the re-contextualisation of museum collections by marketing and communications teams.
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
Screenshot taken by the author.

museums, the term 'digital' carries several meanings depending on application and context, spanning core curatorial tasks to documentation and digitisation, marketing and communications, visitor generation, and research. This has complicated delineations of practice, perhaps most acutely notions of curating. Photography, as a consistent feature in pan-institutional digital culture, is one of the more confused curatorial fields.

Constructs of curatorship as an exclusive practice have diminished – despite the “semantic war” raging over the terms of its implementation – and its edges are necessarily swelling.¹³ Katrina Sluis has described this swell to “a form of artistic authorship in itself ... in which the artwork is mobilised as raw material for the production of new experiences and encounters.”¹⁴ Furthermore, the fundamental frameworks within which institutional curating is cultivated have shifted. This has led to the devolution of typically curator-led tendencies of selecting, sorting, sequencing and captioning across institutional departments (fig. 2), mirroring extra-institutional realities of curating as “indistinguishable from consumption”, as Sluis continued.

Institutional uses of photography beyond collections and curatorial departments is not a new phenomenon. However, the digitally enforced degree to which these actions have spread has complicated the wider presence of photography in institutional spaces, partly resulting from the incompatibility of evolving modes of cultural production with traditionally discipline-specific structures. This impasse is often framed by notions of materiality, a measure used to discern ‘important’ examples of photography from others. Here, understandings of materiality contingent upon something that can be held, shipped, insured, stored in a solander box, framed and hung

13. Katrina Sluis, 'Know Your Bounce Rate', *Still Searching ...*, 16 September 2019: <https://www.fotomuseum.ch/en/explore/still-searching/articles/156410_know_your_bounce_rate> (10.01.19).

14. Sluis 2019 (reference 13).

on a wall have remained stubbornly prevalent, reinforced by the fact that, for many decades, the materiality of the photographic print was used to justify its seat at the table of 'serious art'. The expanded idea of photography as "an idea and an image category"¹⁵ presents itself to some institutional stakeholders as a regression of sorts; risking photography's hard-won position and inviting public dissection commonplace since "the curdling of the social internet."¹⁶

But deconstructions of such "uncritical"¹⁷ materiality constructs are ongoing, advanced by Joanna Zylińska, Beryl Graham, danah boyd and Christiane Paul, among others.¹⁸ Paul proposed 'neo-materiality' as a framework through which to work through institutional sensitivity around objecthood, describing the neo-material object as one which "incorporates networked digital technologies, and embeds, processes and reflects back the data of humans and the environment."¹⁹ At the same time, examination of the broader functions of archives and 'non-collections' objects, or objects classified as 'non-art' – for example scientific artefacts – has also grown.²⁰ These areas of study are inherently linked. Both argue for renegotiations of institutional value systems and draw on anthropological approaches, encouraging diversified museological studies inherently aware of socio-cultural environments.

Yet, the institutional model itself has broadened, provoking the emergence of organisations more closely aligned to civic, political or economic mandates than those constructed around 'art'. One example of such an organisation is Forensic Architecture, the subject of **Ariel Caine's** text, which regularly manages the balance of this equation (fig. 3).²¹ And with this breadth come new ways of thinking about inherited institutional questions, including materiality as

15. Bors 2015 [reference 12].

16. Jia Tolentino, in her essay 'The I in Internet' wrote: "The tipping point [of the curdling of the social internet] was around 2012. People were losing excitement about the internet, starting to articulate a new set of truisms ... the freedom promised by the internet started to seem like something whose greatest potential lay in the realm of misuse." Published in: *Trick Mirror* by Jia Tolentino, Random House 2019.

17. Joanna Zylińska, 'Encountering the Anthropocene: Geology, Culture, Ethics'. Podcast-article published in: *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2017, 35-37. Podcast: <www.joannazylińska.net/video-and-podcast/> [10.01.20].

18. See: Joanna Zylińska, *Nonhuman Photography*, MIT Press 2017; Beryl Graham, *Rethinking Curating: Art After New Media*, MIT Press 2020; Beryl Graham (ed.), *New Collecting: Exhibiting and Audiences After New Media Art*, London: Ashgate 2014; danah boyd, Mizuko Ito and Henry Jenkins, *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era: A Conversation on Youth, Learning, Commerce, and Politics*, Polity Press 2015.

19. Christiane Paul, *From Immateriality to Neomateriality: Art and the Conditions of Digital Materiality*. Paper presented at 21st International Symposium on Electronic Art (ISEA), 2015.

20. See: Elizabeth Edwards and Christopher Morton (eds.), *Photographs, Museums, Collections: Between Art and Information*, Bloomsbury 2015; Elizabeth Edwards and Christopher Morton (eds.), *Photography, Anthropology and History: Expanding the Frame*, Routledge 2016; Julia Bärnighausen, Costanza Caraffa et. al (eds.), *Photo-Objects. On the Materiality of Photographs and Photo Archives in the Humanities and Sciences*, Berlin 2019; Costanza Caraffa, 'The photo archive as laboratory. Art history, photography, and materiality', *Art Libraries Journal*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2019, 37-46; Gregg Mitman and Kelley Wilder (eds.), *Documenting the World: Film, Photography and the Scientific Record*, University of Chicago Press 2016.

21. Forensic Architecture (FA) is a research agency, based at Goldsmiths, University of London. The organisation "undertakes advanced spatial and media investigations into cases of human rights violations, with and on behalf of communities affected by political violence, human rights organisations, international prosecutors, environmental justice groups, and media organisations." <www.forensic-architecture.org>. In 2018, FA were nominated for the Turner Prize. Christina Varvia, deputy director, commented that there were "mixed feelings", as "on the one hand there are a few cases that we are working on that we are having struggles with, at the same time there is the recognition from an art institute." <<https://www.dezeen.com/2018/04/27/turner-prize-shifted-focus-onto-issues-forensic-architecture/>> [07.01.20].



Figure 3
Installation view of the Forensic Architecture
exhibition *Counter Investigations* at the Institute
of Contemporary Arts, London, 2018. This
exhibition, and other similar examples, formed
the basis of Forensic Architecture's Turner Prize
nomination later that year. © Mark Blower.

a legitimising or actualising concept for photography. Therefore, this issue does not suggest moving beyond the “myth of materiality”, as Paul put it, because such frameworks are defunct, but rather as the expanded constitution of photography requires different terms of institutional reference that are freer from the dialogical baggage of photographic materiality.²²

PhotoResearcher No 33 aims to extend the parameters of institutional photography to emphasise wider spheres of relevance amongst varied perspectives and written approaches. The issue includes a combination of thematic, conceptual and case-study texts, developing from a range of practical, theoretical and experiential points of departure. Earlier texts address the core bases of the issue: digital theory, institutions and curated output. **Franziska Kunze** begins by exploring ideas of transformation, matter and glitch, assessing institutional presentations of expanded art photography in the evolving discursive landscape of the past three decades.

22. Paul 2015 (reference 19).

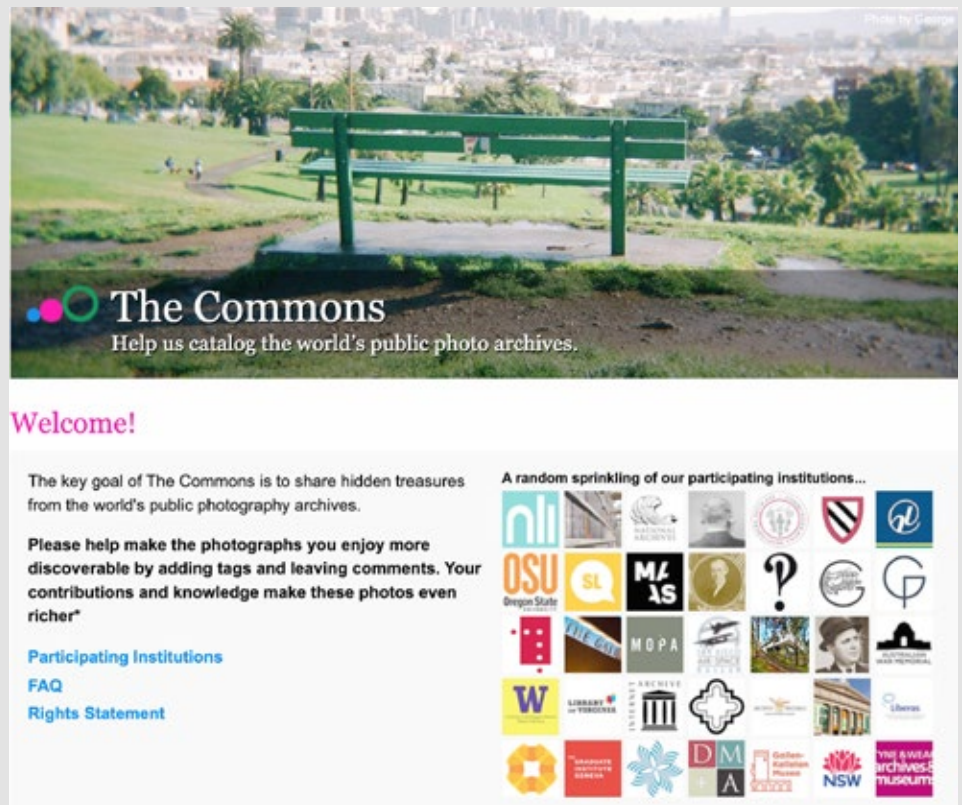


Figure 4
 Flickr The Commons homepage, emphasising its crowdsourced model and institutional premise through the tagline 'Help us catalog the world's public photo archives' and the grid of institutional logos. Screenshot taken by the author.

An interview with **Natalie Kane** progresses this discussion in relation to digital design, situating photography as one component of social, ethical and political ecosystems. Considering her role as Curator of Digital Design, Kane deliberates the institutionalisation of a new curatorial discipline in which the ubiquity of photography is embedded from the outset. Then, **Catherine Troiano** examines approaches to exhibiting expanded photographic practices, illuminating the medial and cultural environments within which modes of display act as interface between institution, practitioner, public and the digital or computational technologies employed.

The subsequent texts explore particular aspects of participation and experience, reflective of developing institutional models. **Bronwen Colquhoun** considers implementations of Flickr The Commons (fig. 4) as a manifestation of attempts to both augment and control the knowledge economy around collections. Addressing buttressing notions of 'user' and 'audience', Colquhoun explores institutional motivations and means for participation, agency and devolved authority. Next, **Ariel Caine** discusses the progressive model of Forensic Architecture and the importance of 'spatial photography' in its civic-led work. Caine probes the links between three-dimensional photography, architecture, mapping and destruction, emphasising the diversity of expanded photographic practices, their ambitions, applications and outcomes. **Rosa Menkman** references related concepts in the following article, which traverses experience of vectors and vision. An artist and theorist whose writing reflects the breadth of her work, Menkman's experiential

text embodies numerous (post-)photographic ideas – unstable images, maps, the flattening of visual references, and the collapse of time and space – as well as alternative outputs for reflections on image culture. Menkman’s ideas exemplify the types of shifts in thinking needed to apprehend the complexity of photographic experience, beneficially framing institutional questions and emphasising the ideational potential of interdisciplinarity in a deeply hybrid field.

The issue continues with focussed thematic studies that position ideas raised thus far in immovable and often technical or function-led contexts. **Béla Tamás Kónya** looks at the increasingly social strategies of museums, arguing that social media, documentation and conservation are pan-institutional practices that would benefit from less internal segregation. Kónya draws on personal experience as the Head of Conservation and Collection Care at Ludwig Museum Budapest – Museum of Contemporary Art, and also considers the role of digital information in institutional geopolitics. Then, **Kai Mewes** examines digitisation processes, connecting an area of institutional function to photo-historical theory that has typically been considered separate. Mewes advocates for the importance of joined-up systems to ensure effective, future-proofed results. **Christina Radner** closes the issue with a case-study of Ars Electronica, highlighting the changeable roles of photography in digital archives – famously the hubs of ‘non-collection’ photography – and the developing intersections between archives and objects in the context of a digitally-driven, non-collecting institution.

Drawing lateral connections between varied yet interrelated positions, as we have done here, illuminates the crucial but oftentimes obscured juncture of institution, social experience and cultural production. Moreover, it diversifies the view with which institutional photography is considered, growing the potential for cross-disciplinary histories and collaborative outcomes. The issue’s interrogation of photographic value systems dismantles hierarchies that isolate institutional activities from one another, and from lived experiences beyond the institution. Re-evaluations of institutional photographic experience, therefore, relate not only to their immediate environments, but to wider political, economic and social behaviours that shape and are shaped by digitally mediated photographic culture.

Catherine Troiano, Ulla Fischer-Westhauser, Uwe Schögl
Vienna, March 2020