
PUBLIC MUSEUMS, MUSEUM PHOTOGRAPHY, AND THE LIMITS OF REFLEXIVITY

An Essay on the Exhibition

Camera Obscured: Photographic Documentation and the Public Museum

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Abstract

This essay gives an interpretation of the first exhibition ever held of photographs from the archives of the in-house photographic studios of major public museums. It argues that the photographic images sketch out a rich visual anthropology of public museums as social and cultural institutions; and that this can potentially contribute to an enhanced reflexivity and a cultural politics concerning the museums' own sociality and hierarchy, and their changing representational techniques. This is a reflexivity, however, which the museums seem officially to resist. Museum photography reveals the labour, artifice and construction in the practice of both museum and photographic representations. In contrast with anthropological photography, the 'realism' of museum photography is shown to be characterized by generic and aesthetic instability and experiment, and this is linked to the relatively marginal role of museum photographers within the public museums. Analytically, the essay proposes that semiotic approaches must be broadened beyond textual representations to include the material and social forms of different media. On this basis, despite their apparent convergence in museum photography, the essay develops an analysis of the distinctive nature of the museum and of photography as representational regimes.

Key Words ◆ hierarchy ◆ museum studies ◆ photography ◆ public museums ◆ realism ◆ reflexivity

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In her introductory essay on the relations between anthropology and photography, Elizabeth Edwards emphasizes the aim of finding 'ways in which one can look *into* photographs and through them into culture, both the culture portrayed and the representing culture' (1992b: 14). The photographs are 'broad texts which reveal . . . hidden histories' (1992b: 12). Reading these histories through the photographic record requires the hazardous interpretation of absences as well as presences; and such a reading must centre on probing the relations between representer and represented, the historical contexts linking photographers and subjects.

In this essay I am going to apply Edwards' injunctions to a reading of images from a recent exhibition of museum photography. The exhibition suggests that the archives from which the images have been drawn offer nothing less than a visual anthropology of the changing forms of public museums. There is a baffling, endless regress in my project: to interpret/represent a representation (the exhibition) of a representation (the museum photographers' texts) of a representation (the institutionalized representations of the museums). My justification is simply that the material is so rich and offers the opportunity for such productive reflection that it demands what may be an unavoidably speculative reading. I will use this as a basis from which to expand both on theories of anthropological photography, and on some current debates within museum studies.

Museum studies have repeatedly been the terrain of three kinds of social and cultural critique in the past decade.¹ The first and most vocal has focused around issues of representation: of the relations between museums and the cultures (or 'communities'), histories, and disciplines that they appropriate, objectify and enshrine (e.g. Clifford, 1988; Karp and Lavine, 1991; Karp et al., 1992). A second, closely related critique has focused on the character of museum objects and displays as representational and material forms (e.g. Stocking, 1985; Durrans, 1988; Duncan, 1995). A third approach has concerned the relations between museums and their visiting publics; for example, the way that museums are implicated in the reproduction of class differences through the exercise of symbolic violence on their publics (Bourdieu and Darbel, 1991); or the historical role of public museums in the rise of new forms of regulation of the social conduct of the mass public (Bennett, 1995).² Such historical research is complemented by studies attending to contemporary crises in the public authority of museums and related policy debates around their continuing dependence on public funding. Both have played a role in the sea change in policy which has seen public museums adopt consumer-oriented techniques and populist modes of address, as well as seeking commercial sponsorship (e.g. MacDonald and Silverstone, 1990; MacDonald, 1995; Kawashima, 1997; Barry, 1998).

One aim of this essay is, through a reading of the museum

photography exhibition, to add a further dimension of critique to the agenda of museum studies, one which has been neglected and has the status of an aporia. It is the need for attention to the social relations and hierarchies immanent in the museum as an institution, and to the practices which derive from these relations and which produce the textual surfaces of the museum – the exhibitions, displays, their spatial forms and classificatory strategies.³ There is a modest cultural politics at stake in the analysis of the museum's sociality. As I detailed in a previous study (Born, 1995), the social relations of cultural institutions are micro-cosmic of a wider, if 'local', social structuring of knowledge and power. The exhibition provides evidence of this, highlighting a defining feature of internal hierarchy: how the museum division of labour is marked above all by a differential space of authorship and anonymity, a space in which the museum photographer occupies a notably ambiguous and liminal position.

One driving force behind the burgeoning of museum studies in past years has been the desire to create a body of thought that can contribute to greater reflexivity in the practice of museums. This is explicit in early seminal essays in the field (e.g. Jordanova, 1989), and is restated in recent collections (e.g. MacDonald, 1996). The three forms of critique embody variant reflexivities, some intended to have direct implications for policy. My contention is that the reflexivity of museums themselves, and of their critical communities, remains incomplete as long as the immanent sociality of the museum is ignored. I see this as forming part of a broader project which attends to the socialities and materialities characteristic of different regimes of cultural production and of diverse media, and which proposes this as a basis for a cultural politics (Born, 1991, 1993a, 1993b, 1995). But my imperative derives equally from the exhibition itself. Central to the curator's intentions has been to stimulate a consciousness of the social relations of the museum as a working institution and of its varied and constituent labours. It is explicit in the curator's own labours, which sketch out in the exhibition a visual anthropology of the public museum, that such an anthropology taken back inside the museum has the potential to contribute to an unprecedented reflexivity concerning its practices and history.

A second aim of my essay is to give a sense of the range of imagery and themes in this evocative exhibition, to review critically its exhibitionary techniques, and to pursue some analytical issues arising.⁴ In particular, I analyse the dense semiotic tissue produced by museum photography as a medium, focusing on the character of museum photographic representations, their aesthetic potential, and their interrelations with other sources of visual imagery. I locate in this interplay a powerful generic and aesthetic instability. On the basis of this reading I argue that the evidence in the exhibition makes possible, paradoxically, and despite their convergence in this medium, a greater awareness of the

differences in the semiotic, material and social regimes of the museum, and of photography. An underlying analytical point is that semiotic analysis – unless it is broadened to include the material and social forms characteristic of different representational media and institutions – is unable conceptually to capture the distinctive nature of particular media.

II

The exhibition *Camera Obscured: Photographic Documentation and the Public Museum* was hosted in May and June 1997 by the Photographers' Gallery in London. Since then it has continued to tour other European and North American galleries. *Camera Obscured* is the first exhibition to draw on the extensive photographic archives built up since the mid-19th century in public museums in Europe and North America. It spans, unevenly, the period between 1856 and 1960. It spans also a range of museums, primarily natural history museums, with a lesser representation of ethnographic collections and art museums. In 1853, the first position of staff photographer in a public museum was created; Roger Fenton (1819–69) was employed by the British Museum to document its many collections. Soon after, Fenton achieved the status of a celebrity for his photographs of the Crimean War. In 1856, the first internal photographic studio was set up at the recently opened South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum). In addition to recording the collections, the museum's staff photographers began to record the varied activities involved in running the institution, including the construction of displays, renovation, storage, cataloguing, transport, and routine clerical and maintenance jobs. As other public museums followed the British lead and set up their own in-house photographic studios, they too became the object of their employees' representations. The result is a variety of images documenting the sociality and practices of everyday working life in public museums, as well as the objects and final productions of the museums.

Camera Obscured is curated by the Canadian artist and photographer Vid Ingelevics. It consists of 89 loosely themed photographic images, vaguely sequenced in chronological order, which are interrupted late in the series by seven panels of text. Ingelevics resists narrative certainty and teleology, for the most part leaving the visitor to draw out implicit themes and to interpret the imagery. The captions accompanying the photographs are minimally informative, knowingly mute of interpretation, leaving the images to speak. Ingelevics comments in one of his panel texts on the radical incommensurability of photographic image and linguistic caption. The lack of coherent sequencing or theming thus works purposefully against ordering and classifying as primary functions of the museum. Yet Ingelevics also wants the show to present a record of the

museum's evolution, of the changing approaches to selection, ordering and display of collections, towards a visual history of the public museum. And the exhibition indeed demonstrates the great potential of the photographic archives. On this evidence they constitute an astoundingly fertile source of information and insight into the social and cultural history of the museum, a source that Ingelevics tells us has largely been ignored by the institutions themselves, as well as in the wider public culture. Ingelevics' panel texts are intended to offer an anchor for interpretation, but they are ambivalently placed, not up front in the manner of a master narrative. The first of many symptomatic tensions in the exhibition is that between Ingelevics' desire, on the one hand, to avoid overdetermining the viewer's experience through textual directives and commentary, or through an excessively thematic closure of the images, and, on the other, his authorial drive to direct interpretation. There is, in sum, a teasing epistemological break between captions and panels. By extending certain of Ingelevics' themes in my reading, there is thus a danger that I do a violence to his reticence with interpretation.

III SITE: SIGHT; ARTIFICE: REALISM; CULTURE/LABOUR: NATURE

DOCUMENTS OF OBJECTIVITY

Until relatively recently, public museums, rooted in the rational philosophies that attended their early-nineteenth century births, were considered to be neutral entities. They saw themselves as engaged in the creation of objective, value-free presentations of ideas, illustrated through the display of collected objects. Such beliefs implied that the museum could be seen as an invariable reference point, a timeless place of rock-solid truth. [But] museum architectural styles change, lighting and display techniques change, the nature of museum work changes, and the content of exhibitions changes in response to new discoveries, social and political trends and ideology. It is the museum's photographic documents that help make visible to us an institution in flux, influential and influenced. As we now move from the modern era of the museum to an increasingly self-reflexive vantage point, what becomes more evident is that the historical photographs are uniquely able to show us the relentless construction of an impression of objectivity. . . . This . . . has been the public museum's project for over a century. The photographs selected for this exhibition draw attention to the museum as a construction site (a sight, in fact), sustained (and, yet, altered) by many forms of labour.

(From a text panel in *Camera Obscured*, by Vid Ingelevics)

It is in the craft of killing that life is constructed. . . . Taxidermy fulfills the fatal desire to represent. . . . The ambiguity of the gun and camera runs throughout Akeley's work. . . . Akeley said he set out to design a camera 'that you can aim . . . with about the same ease that you can point a pistol.'

(Haraway, 1992: 43)



FIGURE 1 Mr Rockwell preparing armature for bull giraffe, Water Hole Group, African Hall, 1927, trans. no. 312076 (Photographers: Irving Dutcher and H.S. Rice)

Reproduced by courtesy of the Department of Library Services, The American Museum of Natural History, New York

At first sight, the primary function of museum photography as presented in the exhibition is a documentary one: to create a historical record of museum objects, architecture, techniques and practices. This documentation appears initially as a modest instrumental, technical and empirical labour, confirmed by images of the photographers going about their routine duties. But this is only the beginning of an analysis of museum photography.

In the panel text just quoted, through his play on words, Ingelevics probes the role of the incestuous coupling [construction site : construction of sight] in the museum's dominant realism, a coupling the naturalness of which is completely undone by the exhibition. Image after image presents a humorous

unmasking of 'nature' – ordered and represented in displays and dioramas – in the process of being laboriously built by museum technicians, staged by museum craftsmen, touched up by museum artists. The overriding theme is the construction of the infrastructure of the museum's heroic realism. There are armatures of different scales (architectural, and for animal models), frames and scaffolds (for the support of models, skeletons, statuary), and means of transportation: the stuff of effortful and skilful construction (Figures 1, 2, 3). Taxidermy is shown in macabre process, the art of mounting explained; both are central realist practices of the natural history museum (Figure 4).⁵ The building of life-like models and their setting in dioramas as a scenario/environment come into view as the focus of an intensified *artistic* intervention in the production of realism. This is the construction of mere display as spectacle, and with this we enter the era of illusionism, of the full *staging* of the contents of the museum (Figures 5, 6, 7).

Throughout, the exhibition plays with the irony that we are made aware of this dense visual construct-
edness through the sight-
centred photographic frame:
through the realist framing
of the realist frames. Ingelevics is concerned here to
flesh out the long-standing
concern in museum studies
with the construction of
objectivity central to the
epistemology of scientific
realism which informs the
great science, natural
history and ethnography
museums. What the exhibi-
tion drives home is how
this is a realism which is
always *also* an attempted
aesthetic realism (Jordanova,
1989; Haraway, 1992). It is
the exhibition's relentless
peeling back of the skin of
aesthetic/scientific realism,
its incessant revelation of the routine,
mundane, hidden labours of realism,
which create the effect in the
viewer of a sustained, chronic 'shock effect' – the shock effect deriving
from the naked arbitrariness, in strict Saussurian sense, of the relation
between artifice/labour/technique in construction and realism of effect.
As Wright (1992: 27) comments, in relation to Peirce's (1940) semiotic
trichotomy, photographs do not deal only in one form of signification –
purely iconic, or indexical, or symbolic (arbitrary). Their strange alchemi-
cal power derives from the fact that they partake variously in all three.
The museum photographic images work in a similar way, and yet add a
further layer of complexity deriving from their representation of the
semiotic regime of the museum. Ingelevics' exhibition shows all three
semiotic strategies at work in the museum. Indexicality is the principal
representational/ideological technique of the museum: the bringing of
'original', 'natural' or exemplary (part-)objects within the museum's
space, and their framing and setting such that they speak, metonymi-
cally, of the wider practice/environment/species/oeuvre of which they
form a part. Taxidermy, in its dependence on death as a basis for the rep-
resentation of life, reveals the perceptual (and literal) violence inherent



FIGURE 2 Moving 'Mourning Victory',
1944, trans. no. MM13998B (Photographer
not recorded)

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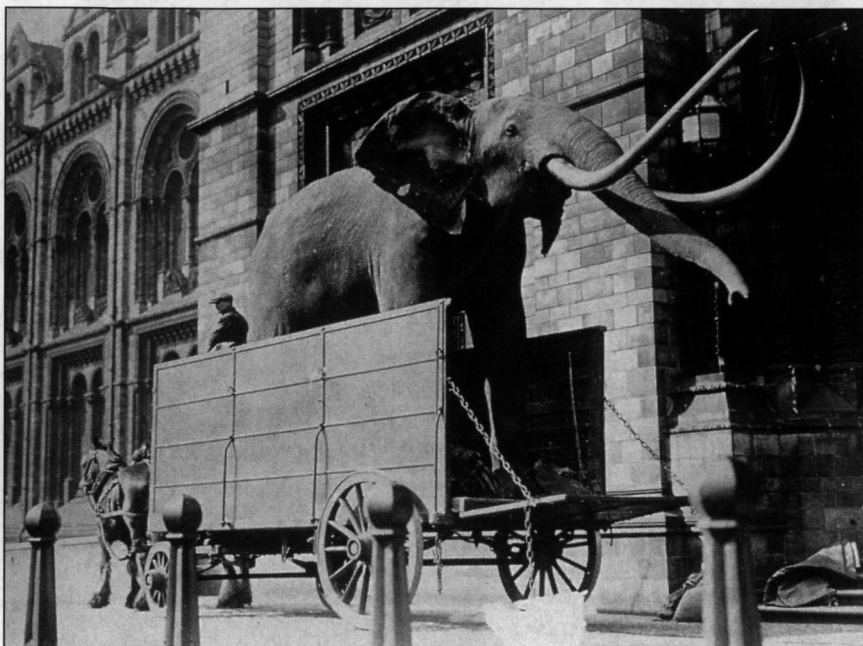


FIGURE 3 Copy of 1927 photograph of 'Elephant being removed for renovation', trans. no. B52 (Photographer: Rowland Ward)

Reproduced by courtesy of The Natural History Museum, London

in indexical illusionism at its starkest (Haraway, 1992). Iconic techniques include the building of sets and backgrounds for the dioramas, the manufacture of lifelike human and animal models and sculptures. I argued just now for an *encompassing* reading of the museum's representational practices as symbolic, due to the arbitrary and 'artificial' labours and techniques that produce and underpin its iconic and indexical realisms.

The museum photographs thus constitute a second order alchemy, one operating through an iconic/indexical/symbolic⁶ representation of a collective, institutionalized museum labour that is at once iconic, indexical and symbolic. Perhaps it is the distilled density of semiotic procedure immanent in these photographs – a realist meditation on/mediation of a realist mediation; 'realism squared', so to speak – which flips them over into another order of representation, making them carriers of what Barthes (1977) calls the 'third (or obtuse) meaning'. Barthes proposes his term to convey a level of meaning that exceeds both the literal, denoted message of an image and the connoted meaning, the level of cultural and ideological association. He writes of it as a meaning "too many", [as a] supplement that my intellection cannot succeed in absorbing, at once persistent and fleeting' (1977: 54). It is ambiguously

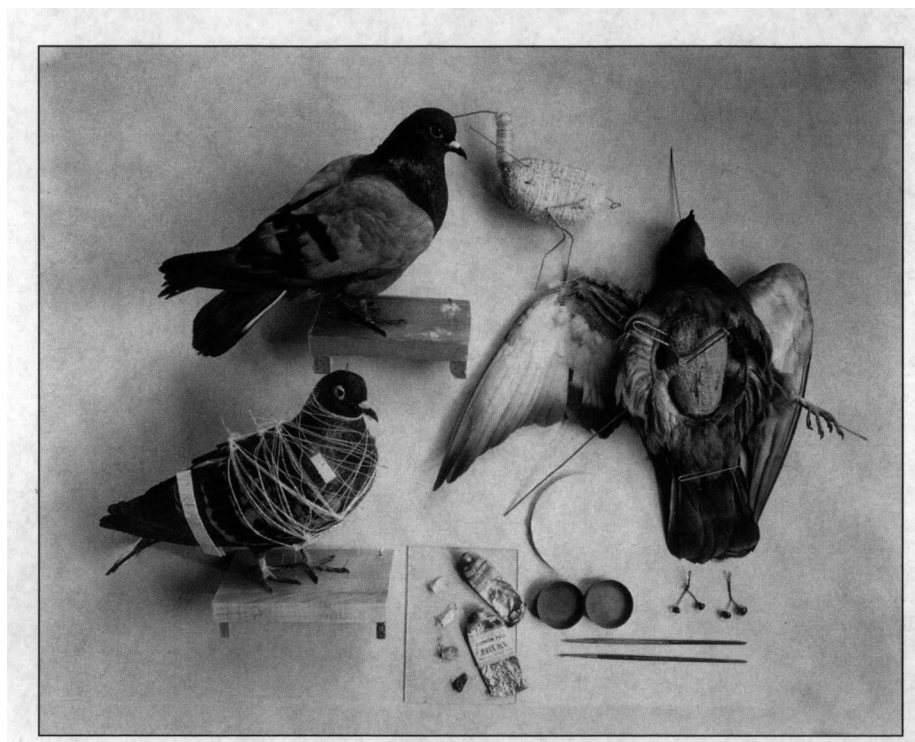


FIGURE 4 Document of display, 'How birds are mounted', 1935, trans. no. 314625 (Photographer: Julius Kirschner)

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intentional and dissociated from obvious meaning: '[T]his dissociation has a de-naturing or at least a distancing effect with regard to the referent (to 'reality' as nature, the realist instance)' (1977: 61).

IV INFESTED IMAGINATIONS: SURREALISM AND CINEMA

My purpose in referring to the third meaning is to capture how the museum photographs *exceed* both their routine documentary function, and their complex realism. They do this in three ways. First, and most strikingly, many of the photographs are beautiful and evocative images in their own right; they are aesthetically highly charged. Second, many images recall other visual genres of the early and mid-20th century; in particular, surrealist photography, and the *mise-en-scène* of Hollywood cinema. The exhibition thus invites us to consider the relation, aesthetically and generically, between museum photography and these other



FIGURE 5 Working on Flying Bird Group in Sanford Hall, 1947, trans. no. 319918 (Photographer: Alex J. Rota)

Reproduced by courtesy of the Department of Library Services, The American Museum of Natural History, New York

contemporary image-sources. Third, and most tenuously, we may speculate whether some images indicate that the photographer was engaged in implicit social commentary on the institutional life of the museum.⁷ This characteristic is the most ambiguous, and I will return to it later.

In each of these ways, the exhibition shows the potential of museum photography to exceed its own generic boundaries, bleeding into its opposites, problematizing the distinctions that uphold its difference. Just as the images' contents threaten to destabilize the boundary between curatorial and artistic practices, so the images themselves work to destabilize the boundaries between documentary and art/aesthetic photography, between realism and surrealism, between a functional, technical, empirical labour and a critical, interpretive, intellectual labour. Some of these instabilities are highlighted in comparison with anthropological photography, a genre which in its positivist realism is defined at least in part by the determined attempt to evacuate 'aesthetic response'.⁸ By contrast, the museum photography images seem markedly freer and



FIGURE 6 Artist Frederick Blaschke putting finishing touches on Neolithic Sun Worship diorama figure, c. 1930, trans. no. A77746 (Photographer: Charles Carpenter)

Reproduced by courtesy of The Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago

less constrained in their aesthetic play and inter-generic allusions.⁹ It is as though they bear less heavily than anthropological photography the burden of representing an empirical, *an-aesthetic* objectivity. Moreover, by exceeding the aesthetic and epistemological character of scientific photography, and revealing the effortful illusionism and spectacularization of the museum, the images threaten also to efface the boundary separating public museums from their close others, the carnivalesque and entertaining popular fairs and exhibitions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Bennett, 1995).

A surrealist imagination haunts many of the photographs, in their 'realism squared'. Arguing that '[T]hroughout Europe in the 1920s there was the experience of something supplemental added to reality', Rosalind Krauss sums up her analysis of the photographic conditions of surrealism thus: 'what the surrealists in particular added to that reality was the vision of it as representation or sign' (Krauss, 1985: 118). In this light,

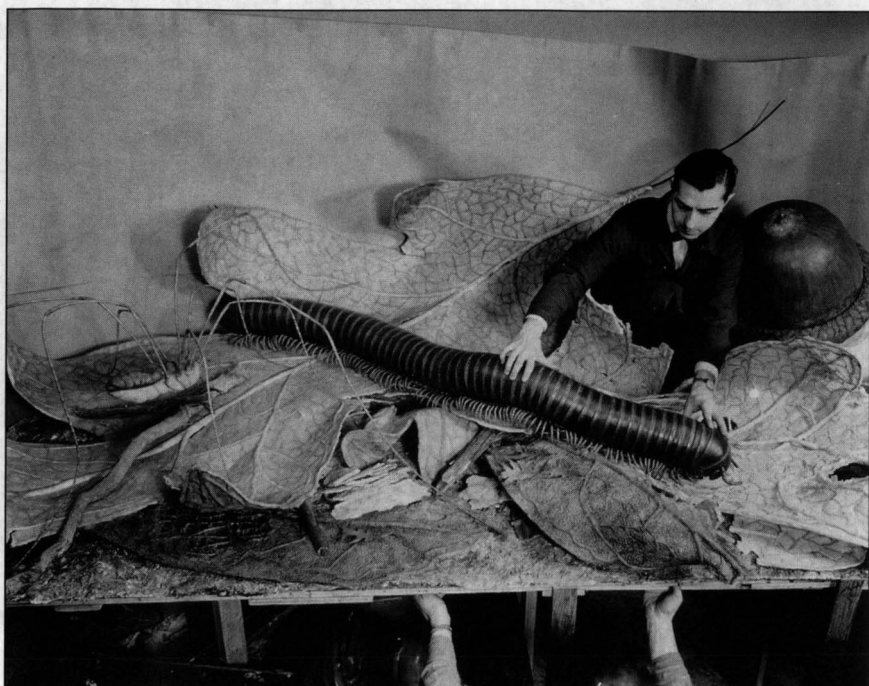


FIGURE 7 Ray de Lucia installing models, *The Forest Floor* in Hall of Forests, 1958, trans. no. 325494 (Photographer: Alex J. Rota)

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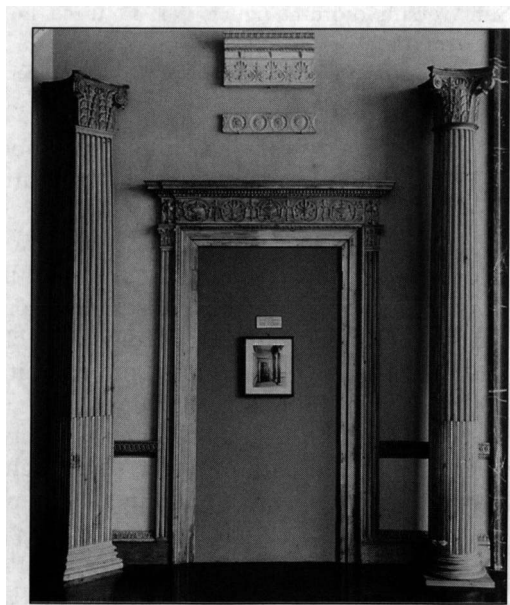


FIGURE 8 Architectural fragments in museum with photograph of their original site, 1914, trans. no. 37817 (Photographer not recorded)

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a strong case can be made for a common condition between surrealist photographers and museum photographers, with one key difference: that while surrealists were engaged in using the photographic medium to *produce* 'the paradox of reality constituted as sign' (Krauss, 1985: 112), museum photographers were faced with an ambiguous task of 'realist' *documentation* of signs-constituting-reality.

Three characteristic devices of surrealist photography are particularly evident in some of the museum images. In their original surrealist form they are: above all, a play with *scale* through techniques such as close-up; the juxtaposition of unlike matters or categories of object, and a strangeness of perspective or camera-angle; and the controlling presence of the frame, allied to a continued cleaving to the 'seamless unity of the print' (Krauss, 1985: 87–119; 107). In museum photography, the effortful artifice behind the museum's public illusions becomes a vaudeville of bizarre scales and incongruous juxtapositions. A museum worker nestling among giant leaves composes a giant millipede on a staged set, while arms reach up from below and out-of-frame (Figure 7). An 'artist' puts the finishing touches to a model man in a 'Neolithic Sun Worship diorama'; the 'artist' has a white lab coat, dark suit and tie, and stiffly pokes with his brush the 'Neolithic man', who is slightly larger, naked, and somehow more human than the 'artist' (Figure 6). Above all, it is the diorama photographs that exemplify a surrealist play with scale, artifice and construction, although others echo them (see again Figures 1 to 5). These images span the 1920s to late 1950s. Yet far earlier images prefigure the genre, for example a mirror within a mirror image of 1870 which is strongly reminiscent of later surrealist compositions, an effect that could not have been knowingly achieved. Another image, from 1914, shows (or frames) similarly the framing of a photograph of 'architectural fragments' by the fragments themselves – a visual analogue of this essay's endless regress of representation (Figure 8). Is the surrealism therefore a feature of the *museum* in its bizarre experiments with and manipulations of scales and relations and contexts, its staging and theatricality, all subsumed within the high seriousness of a realist aesthetic/epistemology? Or is the effect of all this to produce within the museum photographer, in whichever era, a surreal sensibility, to which many of these images testify? Is this a surrealism of object or authorial intent?

Donna Haraway (1992: 29) has noted in passing the echoes of Hollywood movie set art in the diorama paintings of the American Natural History Museum. In this way she points to strong parallels between two worlds – the Hollywood studios, the large public museums – dealing in the routine manoeuvres of large-scale theatrical illusionism. Certainly, some images in *Camera Obscured* illuminate these parallels. Figure 3, an external shot of a stuffed elephant being wheeled along on a



FIGURE 9 Entrance Hall, The Deutsches Museum, 1939, trans. no. 10202
(Photographer not recorded)

Reproduced by courtesy of The Deutsches Museum, Munich

FIGURE 10 Visitors walking through dirt fields towards the newly constructed Field Museum of Natural History, Grant Park, Chicago, c.1921, trans. no. GN44679 (Photographer: Charles Carpenter)

Reproduced by courtesy of The Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago



purpose-designed cart, recalls shots of large film props and sets in process of construction and transportation.¹⁰ Other images imply Haraway's parallel imaginations, but embodied architecturally. A photograph of the entrance foyer of the Deutsches Museum in Munich in 1939 is uncannily redolent of the visual imagery and atmosphere of the films of director Fritz Lang (Figure 9). One could say that the museum photographers' 'capturing' of these qualities in dioramas, techniques or architecture is simply a realist reflection. But other such resonances are less simple. They point to 'supplements to meaning' deriving not only from the content of images, but from framing and perspective – from the intervention of the photographer. Two images suggest this. One portrays the opening ceremony in 1937 of the anti-semitic exhibition 'Der Ewige Jude' ('The Eternal Jew') staged in the front courtyard of the Deutsches Museum. In its composition, and in its portrayal of the ordered corralling of the masses before grand civic architecture, the image evokes similar crowd scenes from epic movies of the period.

The second image (Figure 10), dating from 1921 and characteristically given by Ingelevics only the barest denotative legend, unleashes a chain of inter-generic and inter-aesthetic association. The foreground portrays an endless line, a semi-orderly queue, of a mass of besuited citizens trudging dutifully through a near-empty landscape. Flat mud fields extend all around them. They are walking towards a large, heroic building which rises in the distance – the new Field Museum of Natural History, the civic palace of culture with its grand, neo-classical architecture. Highly perspectival, the shot is taken from the back of the line, those furthest from their goal; it speaks of an effortful teleology of civic purpose. The connotation is plain: from (human) disorder to (architectural) order; from human ignorance, patiently, the long march to expert knowledge. The image seethes with excess. At one level it recalls any number of contemporary epic cinematic compositions of the semi-orderly masses. But it is also grey, joyless, grim. By another strange, arbitrary generic jump-cut, it brings to mind documentary images of the long walks of refugees or armies; it prefigures those later images of the masses walking resignedly towards death camps. The knowingness of composition in these shots suggests that they cannot be reduced to a realist 'capturing'; they hint at experimentation with other visual genres. The supplements derive not only from a 'found' content, but decisively from photographic practice.

Overall, the importance of the signs of surrealist intent or of a Fritz-Langian *mise-en-scène* suggest an aesthetic self-consciousness and intentionality in the photographic 'documents' from this period. It is as though the museum photographers' visual imaginations were fed by contemporary image sources which, given a certain vocational freedom to experiment, found mediated expression in their work.

It is significant in this regard that Simon Watney (1982) has

hypothesized a strong 'unity' across different photographic practices in the early decades of the 20th century. He identifies 'a substantial unity of photo-aesthetic values' (1982: 154) imbuing the work of many photographers in the 1920s and 1930s, in terms of both subject-matter and the 'look' or formal character of the images. He argues that 'throughout this period there existed a coherent, though locally flexible, model of photographic practice from the Soviet Union to France, [Britain] and the USA', one based on shared suppositions about the relations between seeing, representing and knowing, and one 'which denied . . . any crude distinction between aesthetics and politics' (1982:155). Watney traces this 'coherence' as a ranging genealogy from its earliest theorization in Russia before the First World War, in the concept of *ostranenie* or 'making strange', through Russian futurism and constructivism, by way of German Dada, through the writings of Brecht and Benjamin, through surrealism, to its eventual aestheticization and draining of political intent when, from the mid-1930s, surrealist 'taste' was imported into the USA. A common theme through this history was the aim of using photography to show familiar objects in unfamiliar ways, 'through such Swiftian devices as extreme close-ups' (1982: 164), sometimes for powerful aesthetic effect, sometimes with the primary aim of revealing the conditions of alienated life and consciousness. Whatever the pitfalls of such an encompassing genealogy, it makes it plausible that museum photographers in the early part of the century were indeed in touch with this wider, common visual discourse, a discourse in which photographic 'defamiliarization' and its potential politicization were critical preoccupations.

V AUTHORSHIP AND HIERARCHY: READING THE SOCIAL RELATIONS OF THE MUSEUM

Among the 28 dioramas in the [African] Hall [of the American Museum of Natural History], all the major geographic areas of the African continent and most of the large mammals are represented. . . . The principles of organicism . . . rule the composition. . . . Each [animal] group forms a community structured by a natural division of function. . . . The physiological division of labour . . . is embodied in these habitat groups which tell of communities and families, peacefully and hierarchically ordered. . . . Akeley's original plan for African Hall included bas-relief sculptures of all the 'primitive' tribes of Africa complementing other stories of natural wild life in the Hall. Organic hierarchies are embodied in every organ in the articulation of natural order in the Museum. (Haraway, 1992: 30)

Woven into the details of museum objects and their attending labour in the museum photographs are the scattered but definite signs of the museum's sociality. To read these signs adequately requires a focus also

on the captions accompanying the images, a supplement to meaning designed by Ingelevics but drawn from museum sources. Ingelevics wrote the captions according to the information he was sent about each image by the museums, drawn from the museums' historical records.¹¹ Here again we touch on a productive tension in Ingelevics' exhibitionary technique. While he wants to disrupt any assumed, easy identity between image and comment, yet he uses the captions to code, implicitly, a defining feature of the museum's sociality. The captions tell of named and unnamed categories of museum workers, of the systematic institutional ascription of authorship, artistry and individual status to certain figures, and by contrast, the withholding of this status from others. This information, scattered throughout the exhibitionary sequence as a nagging provocation, has the cumulative effect of etching out a differential space of authorship and anonymity, a space which maps the museum's hierarchical division of labour.¹² While, according to Haraway, the museum's representations overwhelmingly code a vision of hierarchy as a peaceful, organic, natural and productive order, the quality of hierarchy within the museum appears from the images a tense and repressive structure, one imbued with dissociation and with differences of power, status and personhood.

The apex of the social hierarchy of the museum is barely made visible in the exhibition. Just one photograph portrays the social apex; it also shows its effects. In this image, Eleanor Roosevelt is shown visiting the Century of Progress Exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1933. A major public figure and a generous patron of the museum, she is surrounded by a crowd of acolytes facing the same direction as she, attracted around her by her exalted social status as if drawn into a magnetic field. In the upper strata of the museum hierarchy, the most commonly named category of worker in the photographs' captions are what are termed 'artists'. These 'artists' are seen working to arrange and paint the displays and dioramas (see Figures 1, 6, 7). Of course, this naming ascribes not only authorship of their work, but also individuality, an 'authorship' of the self.

By contrast, while those peopling the lower levels of the hierarchy are also rendered visible, they are systematically unnamed and in this sense denied the status of historical subjects or agents. One image from 1934, captioned 'Dr. James L. Clark and unidentified technician with lion group in preparation, Akeley African Hall', highlights the coexistence of these two social ontologies embodied in the difference between artist-curator and technician, the former named while the latter is not. Those 'without individuality' are often represented pictorially as grouped or massed, a quality reinforced in Ingelevics' captions. Three photographs convey this quality. In each, a category of worker – secretaries, cleaners (Figure 11), museum guards (Figure 12) – is shown posed *en groupe*; none



FIGURE 11 Wringer for mops with group of unidentified men, 1918, trans. no. 37170 (Photographer: Julius Kirschner)

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of those represented are endowed with individuality or named. The first two of these images aim apparently to show workers functioning in their characteristic environment; the images are as though unmediated in their organic realism. The caption of Figure 11, which Ingelevics took largely from his museum source, portrays the male cleaners as anonymous adjuncts to their domestic equipment. Figure 12, an image of the 'museum guards' winning shooting team', is unsettling in its combination of guns, the guards' militaristic demeanour, their sometimes menacing and dissociated expressions, and their repressed and disciplined pose as anonymous public servants. It is unsettling above all for its generic echo of the taxonomic, 'category' photographs of anthropological photography, and of that genre's ambiguous intentionality (see Pinney, 1992: 87–90).

Across the entire exhibition, it is striking how predictably gender operates within the museum division of labour. Women are almost completely absent. When visible, with the exception of two or three women named as educators or artists, they are represented in their capacity as

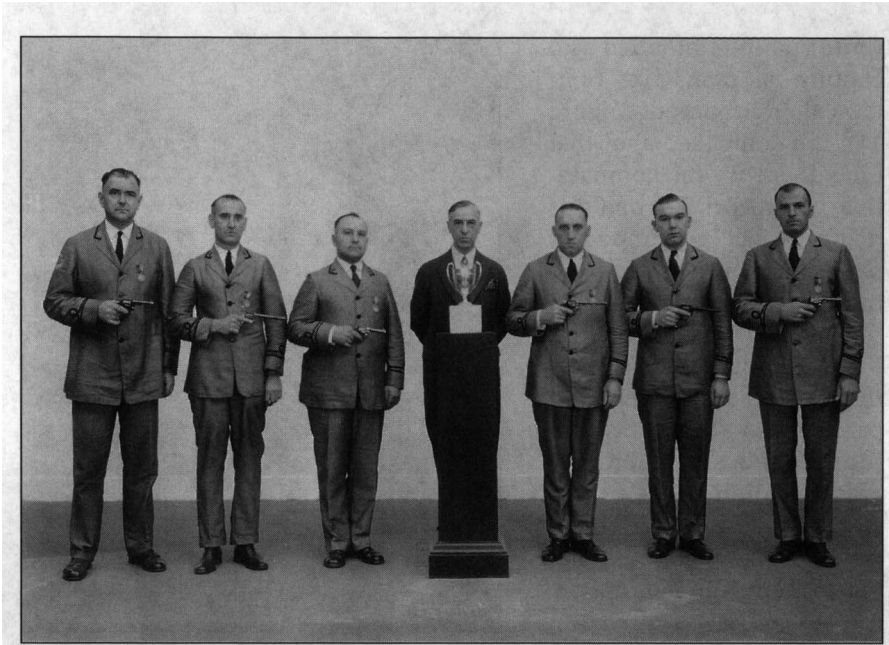


FIGURE 12 Museum guards' winning shooting team, 1930, trans. no. MM2930 (Photographer not recorded)

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anonymous secretarial staff. The subsumption of women's personhood by the institution is more totalized, less various, than men's.¹³

Hence the museum's 'other' within is marked visually by techniques of massing, of the elimination of individuality through numbers and repetition or 'spacing' (Krauss, 1985), thus embodying one pole of the discursive continuum between authorship and anonymity that is central to the museum's division of labour. The representation of the 'other' within in these images carries a *mundane* denigration notably unaccompanied by the binarist, split-off libidinal exoticism/eroticism which commonly marks the construction of non-western subjects as other and which attests to a ubiquitous unconscious structuring in their domination (Mercer, 1992; Young, 1995). The particular forms of domination at work within the museum, based on class and gender, are nevertheless as real.¹⁴ These images flesh out the museum photographers' visual anthropology. How do we interpret the relation of the museum photographers to these contents? As I have remarked, there is an ambiguity in the mode of address. In one light, the images seem as unsympathetic and objectifying as much anthropological photography. Similar techniques are used: the (posed)

verité shot intended to capture humans in their typical environment (Figure 11); the composed shot that lines them up for comparative categorical analysis (Figure 12). Personhood is denied twice: in the museum's practice and in the photographic practice. From another perspective, the images seem designed precisely to reveal, even to satirize, the alienation and objectification of these workers within the institution – an alienation that the museum photographers might well have shared.

And what of the museum photographers? A few photographs give insight into their varied work. These shots, of all the images the most simply reflexive, hum with a gentle humour that comments on the photographers' labours. We see the setting up of shots of objects and displays; the interior of the photographic studios. We see a kind of staged 'craft heroism' in those images illustrating the feats by which technical challenges have been overcome (Figure 13). The matter-of-factness and humour of the images supports a reading of them as self-representations that play on the photographers' ambiguous status. For reading the images with the captions, it becomes plain that the museum photographers themselves are suspended discursively in a liminal space somewhere between 'artists'/authors and anonymous technicians or functionaries, at some mid-point in the social hierarchy of the museum. Neither consistently accorded authorship of their own representations, nor consistently anonymous, it is as though the museum is not sure of the museum photographers' *place*. The liminal status attests to the museum photographer as a subordinate engaged in routine documentation of the spectacular activities of the museum and thus, crucially, as one who stands *outside* those primary activities; as reproductive (or secondarily productive) rather than productive labour.¹⁵ Occasionally a museum photographer

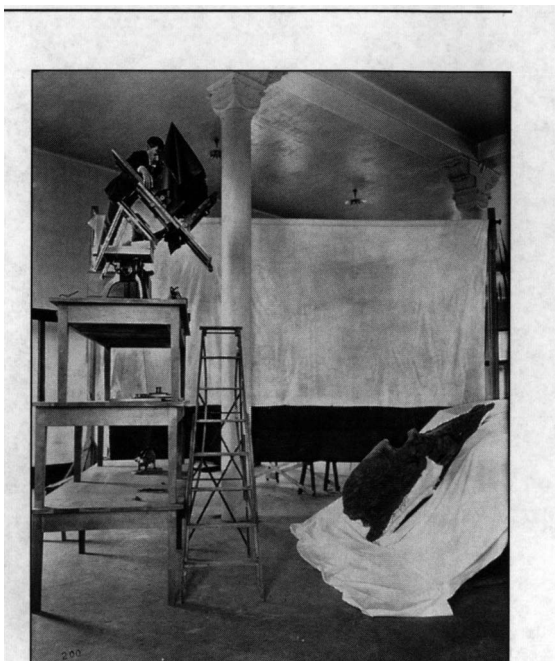


FIGURE 13 Photographing *Triceratops Serratus* from platform, no date, trans. no. 35067 (Photographer: A.E. Anderson)

Reproduced by courtesy of the Department of Library Services, The American Museum of Natural History, New York

is named in the captions, notably Roger Fenton himself; intermittently, the museum archive records not only the image, but the photographer. More often, the photographer is unnamed; the traces of authorship have been kicked over. Ingelevics makes the captions return repeatedly to the refrain, 'Photographer: not recorded'.¹⁶ There is a symptomatic carelessness of historical record here that sits oddly with the museum's obsessive archival functions; and that sits strangely also with these images' substantial value as reflexive historical documents and, as importantly, as aesthetic texts.

An additional productive tension is revealed by the different spheres of circulation characteristic of the two basic categories of museum photographic images. Photographs of the objects and artefacts in the collections were intended both for the archives and for sale to the public, in the guise of postcards, posters, catalogues and so on. They were readily published and were considered by museum administrators potential sources of commercial revenue. By contrast, photographs of staff and their activities, of museum practices and sociality, were intended to be consumed by a limited, internal public if they were circulated at all. Thus, although they were produced by professional photographers employed by the museums, these latter images have until this exhibition been intended only for internal use. As I have noted, some of these images embody the knowing, posed objectification of the scientific photography produced in the service of anthropology in the late 19th and early/mid-20th centuries. These texts emulate the evolutionist and morphological discourses in wider circulation among the rising scientific disciplines, as well as in the public sphere. But in most of the images there is little evidence of this mode of address. At base, whereas anthropological photography was directly tied to and part of a scientific practice, museum photography was neither of these things. Its *raison d'être* was the functional documentation of the collections and the scientific labours of the museum, or the enhancement of sales revenue: background activities. Because of these conditions, one senses that the burden of history for the photographers was relatively light. Perhaps it is this that generates a certain freedom, an aesthetic and generic self-consciousness, and a fleeting quality of socio-cultural critique. These images echo contemporary scientific and other visual discourses playfully or experimentally. As I have argued, more than in the contemporary scientific photography, many of the museum photographs are also extraordinary visual images in their own right and demand to be read for their aesthetic qualities – a paradox, given that their primary purposes were apparently instrumental ones within the museums. It is perhaps, then, the liminality of the museum photographer within the museum's pronounced hierarchy that, considered as the basis of their intentionality, renders some of their images liable to be read as implicit

and tenuous bearers of a socio-cultural critique of the museum. There is irony here; it is as though, by objectifying the practices of objectification, alienation and hierarchy immanent in the museum, the museum photographer cannot help but produce critique.

In one of his commentaries on the exhibition, Ingelevics writes: 'The idea that these photographs might constitute a collective body of work that allows us to see how the museums have "seen" themselves has not been explored.' Here, in an aside at odds with the thrust of his work with the images, Ingelevics risks eliding the museum-as-social-institution with the particular space of the museum photographer within that institution. Conceptually, such a move assumes an identity between institution and photographic practice. But this is an identity which cannot be assumed and which I have set out to dissolve, by arguing that the ambiguous status and the interpretive autonomy of the museum photographer may have generated a distancing effect; precisely, a *lack* of identification with the museum hierarchy. As Pinney implies (1992: 90), the imputation of intentionality is hazardous in relation to this kind of photography. It can perhaps be reconstructed through the cumulative 'syntagm' (1992: 87) of the collected images, or with the aid of linguistic captions (when they are provided by the photographer). Pinney argues that the meanings that matter finally reside in the images' present interpretations. I have suggested, however, that the excavation of intentionality matters greatly, even if the results are ultimately uncertain – in this case, the intentionality not only of photographers, but also that of the dominant archival culture of the museum. Only in this way can one attempt to read how museum photographers' positioning within the hierarchical sociality of the museum, and the quality of their social experience, may have conditioned their representational practices and politics.

VI ON THE INCOMMENSURABILITY OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE MUSEUM

For the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the 'authentic' print makes no sense. But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics. (Benjamin, 1973: 218)

If the public museum is the institutionalized form of those arts associated by Walter Benjamin with ritual, 'aura' and 'cult value', and if photography was the original artform based on mechanical reproduction, a form which, in his account, is antithetical to those ritual, cultish

functions, then we may be less surprised to discover an inherent tension in the relationship between museum photography and its institutional progenitor. From this perspective, the museum photographer is set up, socio-technically, to illuminate politically the ritualized, en-charmed culture of the museum. This prompts further lessons to be drawn from my speculations on museum photography, lessons concerning the immanent differences between photography and the museum as modes of representation and as semiotic, material and social regimes. They can be sketched through a series of ideal-typical contrasts.

As the exhibition has testified, the public museum is a socially and materially large-scale, collective, institutionalized, immobile, architecturally embodied and therefore heavily financed labour of representation. It is a centralized, public practice, and necessarily involves an intense investment in a reading of history which becomes canonic and normative; it is unavoidably a machine for the production of legitimacy and authority. In these senses the museum is at once a centripetal and a centrifugal cultural technology, drawing in the mess of history, classifying and organizing it, and then imperialistically sending out this reordered representation from the museum-as-centre (cf. Born, 1995). Given an inevitable degree of ongoing dissensus and contestation of its canonic doctrines, the museum is programmed to constantly absorb dissent so as to re-establish and stabilize its normative claims (ironically, even if they are pluralized). The point is that there is an *inertial effect* by virtue of the museum's institutional – that is, its large-scale social and material – embodiment. For all these reasons, the museum is a cultural technology that tends to resist reflexivity, or, more accurately, to produce only certain kinds of reflexivity.

By contrast, photography is often an individual practice, not dependent on an institutional base, mobile, decentralized, not architecturally embodied, generally unsubsidized, and requiring relatively little financial investment. Photography is relatively instantaneous, and requires little preparation. It can be practised, developed and consumed covertly or in private, and need not be 'public' in this sense. It does not necessarily require sanction from a hierarchical authority in terms of production or consumption. It is a cultural technology with permeable boundaries between its various constituencies of practice; that is, where there is little amateur museum practice, photography embraces a spectrum of professional and amateur practices, themselves with complex internal differentiations (Bourdieu, 1990). Because of these characteristics of photography, its default 'language' of realism is Janus-like; *pace* Benjamin, it is suitable *both* for the purposes of ideology, and of ideology critique. The power of photographic realism is labile. It can be used in support of artifice, construction, and in the promulgation of a dominant discourse (as with much anthropological photography). But as I

have argued in relation to museum photography, it can also serve to deconstruct discourse, to uncover mechanisms of illusion and ideology, to reveal obscured social relations, and to destabilize the aesthetic and perceptual codes of realism. Again, from the vantage point of the present, the 'anti-auratic' tendencies that Benjamin took as immanent in photography, while certainly one form of photographic practice, are matched by the renewed auratic status of photography in its collusive partnership with such dominant media as the popular press. It is of course these contradictory potentials of photography that render it particularly unstable and opaque to interpretation.

All of this undermines any easy assumption of parallels in the semi-otic regimes of the museum and of photography – parallels which could facily be drawn if the focus is exclusively on the complicity of their textual representations, for example in the scientific and realist objectifications of nature and of other cultures evident both in anthropological photography and in evolutionist and comparativist museology.¹⁷ I have tried to indicate that if semiotic analysis is broadened to include the social and material forms of these distinct media, forms which have effects on the character of the representations they may produce, then their abiding differences come into focus.¹⁸ Only with such a grasp of their immanent differences can we understand the disjoint, uncomfortable relations between museum photography and the museum. It is the potential for deconstruction by photography as a medium, as well as the barely suppressed aestheticism, generic instability and excess of museum photography, that may underlie the museum's sense of vulnerability towards the labours of the museum photographer. This in turn may explain the museum's desired *denial* of museum photography, as suggested by the following material.

VII THE PUBLIC MUSEUM, DENIAL, AND THE LIMITS OF REFLEXIVITY

The academic revisiting of historic images in the museum's photo archives has been limited almost exclusively to the category of expedition photography. It is primarily anthropologists (and, occasionally, contemporary artists) who are re-examining and re-evaluating the photographic documentation of the museum field trips of the 19th and early 20th centuries. . . . Anthropologists are . . . finding in [these] same photographs abundant historical evidence of the complexities and contradictions of the anthropological enterprise itself. The photographs make available a rich vehicle for self-reflection, one that contributes to a more profound historicisation of the profession.

(From a text panel in *Camera Obscured*, by Vid Ingelevics)

The history of Ingelevics' exhibition project points to a fascinating closure, highlighted by him through a comparison with the important

role played by the analysis of anthropological photography in the growing reflexivity of anthropology as a discipline. By contrast, Ingelevics stresses in a text panel that 'a similar level of attention has not been paid to the museum archive photographs that concentrate on the space of the museum itself and [its] activities'. He draws attention to an extreme physical neglect of the museum photographic archives, quoting recent curatorial reports and comments such as the following, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1995: 'The negative collection [of the museum photographic archives] has been continuously housed over the last 90 years in what may be the worst possible conditions for the stability of photographic materials'.

Ingelevics describes a splitting in the treatment of different photographs. Photographs from the main museum collection have been kept in good conditions, as valuable artistic or scientific texts; while the museum photographic archive images have been treated carelessly, stored inadequately and poorly captioned. Information about the archive images was often assumed to be stored in memory; the photographs readily became the objects of oral history. The dual and unequal existence of photography within the museum is encapsulated, for Ingelevics, in the place of Roger Fenton's photographs at the Victoria and Albert Museum. They are primarily found in the 'guard books' (the books that record the collections) as documents of museum objects, fulfilling a functional role. Yet 'some of the same images can also be found upstairs in the photo collection – and the ultimate irony is . . . seeing some of Fenton's Crimean photographs *re-photographed*, accession-numbered, and pasted into the "guard books" as images of museum artefacts' (Ingelevics, personal communication, Dec. 1997).

In one of the text panels Ingelevics cites a letter written to him in 1996 by the head of exhibit programming at a large public museum regarding the possible exhibition of *Camera Obscured* at this museum. The letter uses a narrow technical-aesthetic argument as the basis on which to turn down the proposal to exhibit *Camera Obscured*: 'Our reading of the synopsis is that the [proposed] exhibit does not contain original photographs but rather later copies of original photographs. As I am sure you will appreciate, we strive to exhibit original objects rather than reproductions or copies'. The interest of this statement is twofold. First, it seems that the head of exhibit programming is unaware, in this post-Benjaminian era, of the questionable ontological and ideological nature of this argument – as though the category of 'the original' was not materially in doubt in a medium such as photography, in line with all modern media of mass reproduction; and as though 'copies' had no exhibitionary or cultural value. Either he is unaware, or he is using what amounts to a spurious argument. But above all, the statement is striking for its blatant refusal of reflexivity, its denial of the value to the museum

of this reflexive project. I have mentioned the complete absence of previous public exposure of the non-artefact elements of the museum photographic archives. I have analysed the ambiguous, low status accorded to museum photographers, and the splitting by which their work is devalued in contrast to photography from the main collection. Cumulatively, all of these point to the limits of reflexivity on the part of the public museum. They are symptomatic of the museum's uninterest in and denial of its own changing forms, its own hierarchies of expertise and labour, its own socio-cultural history.

In terms of the real, internal historical time of the museum, we have seen how Camera Obscured 'records' a process of forgetting: of the individuality and personhood of the museum photographers and other low status workers. This stands in interesting tension with the museum's public function as a mausoleum dedicated to memory and to the piecing together from fragmentary objects and narratives of a totalizing history. Andreas Huyssen has argued recently that the post-modern museum has transformed the previous modernist project of the museum: 'The museum's role as site of an elitist conservation, a bastion of tradition and high culture, [has given] way to the museum as mass medium, as a site of spectacular *mise-en-scène* and operatic exuberance' (Huyssen, 1995: 14). He proposes that the museum is increasingly democratized 'at least in terms of accessibility. . . . There has been slow but important progress in . . . the tracings of hidden and repressed pasts, the reclaiming of underrepresented or falsely represented traditions for the purposes of current political struggles' (1995: 20–2).

Huyssen proposes that contemporary culture is characterized by a hybrid structure of temporality marked on the one hand by an ever-expanding 'jumble of the non-synchronous', a waning of the sense of temporality and of historical consciousness; and on the other by a 'memory boom' evident in the museum's entry into the culture industry, and in the proliferation of technologies for 'self-musealization', for capturing experience and time (the video-recorder, memoir writing, confessional literature) (1995: 8–9). He stresses rightly that 'the difficulty of the current conjuncture is to think memory and amnesia together rather than simply to oppose them' (1995: 7). For Huyssen, in this context the contemporary museum, with its focus on the materiality of objects, its object fetishism, acts finally as an 'anamnesic' space; that is, it works against amnesia and yields a 'kind of memory value' (1995: 33). 'This gaze at museal things . . . resists the progressive dematerialization of the world which is driven by television and the virtual realities of computer networking. . . . Via the activity of memory, set in motion and nurtured by the contemporary museum . . . , the museal gaze expands the ever-shrinking space of the (real) present in a culture of amnesia' (1995: 34).

I find much of this persuasive and sympathetic. And yet my reading

of *Camera Obscured* suggests that it is also too idealizing (and ideological) a view of the museum's functions in relation to social memory. What does it portend that the public museum wants, even now, to eviscerate its *own* sociality, its social grounding, in the representation of its own functions in and actions on the past and present? There is a complex synergy of amnesia and memory here, but it is one located not so much in the contradictory dynamics of contemporary culture, with the museum simply as repository of memory against an external swelling of social amnesia, as *within the museum*. As I have argued, the museum's amnesia or denial of its own sociality defines the limits of its capacity for self-reflection. Previously, I have proposed a term – antidiscourse – to describe the phenomenon of a hegemonic historical discourse (or cultural system) that is produced in the process of simultaneously acting to deny or absent another, coexistent or rival discourse (Born, 1995: 38–9). The interpretation I have given suggests that the museum's public historical narratives, however complexified and pluralized in the present, may act as an antidiscourse in as much as their production operates simultaneously to deny the contingency and artifice of the museum's own production of history, its own hierarchical sociality, its hidden labours and symbolic violences.

It is precisely the kind of illumination of the museum as socio-semiotic apparatus evident in the images of *Camera Obscured* that provides the potential basis for an enhanced historical and contemporary reflexivity on the part of the public museum. These materials and the insights they proffer provide the means for a more fruitful and, ironically, 'real' reflexivity than the destructive disowning of museal forms of authority and expertise, the auto-critique of museum knowledge as domination, that seems at least partly to underlie the drive to supersede the centrality of this expertise by recourse to the recent discourses of 'interactivity' and consumer-orientation. Concretely, the implication is that public museums should embrace the exhibition of their museum photographic archives, that these should form part of the permanent display. If this can help bring about an undefensive attitude towards public study of museums' internal dynamics and their epistemological status in the present, so much the better. An enhanced public and professional debate would ensue. In the face of these images, it is no longer sufficient to write of democratizing the museum in terms of 'the right to make active use of museum resources' and 'on the basis of public rights principles' (Bennett, 1995: 104) without attending to the social relations and the practices of the institution. The project of universality at the heart of museum modernity, which many commentators see as increasingly realized today in the museum's responses to plural external demands, remains compromised as long as the public museum will not acknowledge the question of its sociality within.

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Notes

1. What follows is not intended as a survey of the entirety of recent museum studies; it aims simply to clarify different dimensions of critique within museum studies, in relation to the critical project of this essay.
2. It is symptomatic of this approach within museum studies that Bennett (1995, Ch. 3), while he touches on the importance of the production of museum knowledge in the analysis of the social functions of the public museum, remains wedded to an abstract, non-sociological account of this production. He treats the museum, in Foucauldian manner, as a technology of modern government, focusing partly on the changing character of museum representations, but mainly on its results: the creation of a new kind of public.
3. In recent museum studies, Fyfe (1996) comes closest to calling for an analysis of the social relations of the museum, and writes of the need for analyses of 'how the macro and the micro are to be theorized as they intersect at the museum', of 'the internal dynamics of the museum as they might be interwoven with the structuration of the dominant class', and of 'museums as places of conflict' (all 1996: 206). Criticizing Bourdieu, he advocates specific historical case studies of the complex organizational forms and dynamics of museums, to counter reductive structural theorizing. Yet the analysis he provides of the Tate Gallery's organizational dynamics in the 19th century ignores internal social differences and focuses exclusively on its elite social strata, as they interrelate with wider circles of cultural power and the state.
4. For reasons of space and unity, I have not attended in this essay to other important sub-themes of the exhibition. These include the changing techniques and technologies of museum photography; the museum's collusive relations with the state in times of war; the museum's role in propagating and staging evolutionist discourses; the changing forms and aesthetics of museum display; and the museum's relations with the public, and its educational role.
5. Haraway (1992) gives the classic account of taxidermy as a practice and of the artistic and theatrical procedures in the production of dioramas as they developed in the work of Carl Akeley, designer of the African Hall of the American Museum of Natural History. She analyses both as central to the museum's sacral, organic realism - a realism at once epistemological, aesthetic and ideological.
6. Wright (1992: 27) conceives of the photographic 'symbolic' in terms of the non-realist pictorial elements in an image. But this neglects the key symbolic

technique in all photographic representation: framing as an arbitrary, and yet highly self-concealing and in this sense realist, technique.

7. Edwards (1992b: 8–9), after Kolodny (1978), equates the concept of 'documentary' with those representations intended to convey social and political commentary. However, I have purposefully used the term 'documentary' in its mundane functional sense, rather than implying that it necessarily carries these meanings. My point is that documentary *variably* carries these additional political motivations.
8. Edwards (1992b: 9) argues that positivist realism and sometimes intentional aestheticism *can* co-exist in anthropological photography, but that mostly they do not, and that the genre of scientific realism is predicated on a negation of the aesthetic appeal of coexistent photographic forms. I would respond that, while anthropological photography may be characterized in general by intended negation of 'aesthetic' response in the service of pure scientism, that is, while the 'negation of the aesthetic' may exist as a discursive principle, it is one inevitably undermined in practice. Thus, as a genre, anthropological photography cannot help but develop its *own* generic-aesthetic qualities (qualities that might paradoxically be termed *an-aesthetic*).
9. These properties could be addressed by a rubric of intertextuality or, better, Pinney's 'inter-ocularity' (1997: 190). I prefer to use Barthes' third meaning to stress how the generic and aesthetic properties of the image that I describe exist in strong tension with overt meanings and ideological purposes. All of these terms, however, allow for the ambiguity of the reference and of its intentionality. Edwards (1992b: 9) points to a limited form of intertextuality also in anthropological photography, for example, in those posed anthropological portraits that recall 'the exotic conventions of orientalist painting and Western male erotic fantasy'.
10. Robin Boast (personal communication, Jan. 1998) confirms the existence of a network of skilled set painters and designers in the US who moved between and worked for both the main film production centres and for museums as diorama artists and designers. This suggests that the 'parallel imaginations' and similar aesthetics were grounded, at least in part, in personnel common to the film industry and the public museums. Ingelevics, who interviewed a number of museum photographers in research for the exhibition, notes that many had earlier experience as commercial photographers or, in England only, a connection with the military (personal communication, Dec. 1997).
11. Asked to clarify his approach to writing the captions, Ingelevics responded thus: 'The captions were all based on the information that we received from [the museums] on a form we asked them to fill out along with each photo that they printed for us. . . . I then constructed a caption/credit that was placed on the gallery wall below each image that focused attention on what information was known about the images by the museum. . . . I made a point of highlighting the *lack* of conferring of identity on individuals who were clearly in the lower echelons of the hierarchy of labour at the museum. I used the captions given to me by the museums as fully as possible, often adding that an individual was "unidentified" by the museum to make the preceding point. The museums themselves rarely if ever pointed out that fact. For example, the "Wringer for mops" caption [see Figure 11] that we received from the museum indicated that the picture was to be understood as being of the *technical apparatus* for mopping the floor only. The men were clearly considered inconsequential and were not named. So I simply added

the fact that the men were unidentified to the existing caption. . . . I have made an "intervention" in the captions to bring out these curious absences' (personal communication, emphases added, Nov. 1997).

12. Haraway (1992: 39–40) gives an account of the extended division of labour, structured by differences of race, sex and class, both within and beyond the museum that lay behind the production of dioramas for the American Museum of Natural History in the mid-century. 'The production of a modern diorama involved the work of hundreds of people in a social system embracing structures of skill and authority on a worldwide scale' (1992: 39–40). My analysis of the internal division of labour thus supplements Haraway's.
13. Clearly, the gendering of the museum's own sociality is microcosmic of the wider gender division of labour. On other dimensions of gender in the museum, see Bennett, 1995: 201–8 in which he analyses the gendered nature of the contents of 19th-century museums, and the gendering of professional access to these contents.
14. My stress here on the need to analyse the centrality in the functioning of the public museum of subordinations based on class and gender, as a supplement to an analysis of the museum's subordination of and appropriation of the cultures of its non-western others, echoes criticisms levelled at some post-colonial theory. For example Moore-Gilbert (1997: 129) argues that, by focusing exclusively on how modernity constitutes itself in terms of non-western Others, post-colonial theorists such as Bhabha have risked ignoring 'parallel processes of Othering of women and subordinate classes in the domestic sphere within the discourses of the Enlightenment'.
15. This liminal status of the museum photographer recalls Bourdieu's analysis of photography as a 'middle-brow art' (Bourdieu, 1990), and suggests that – manifest differences of cultural historical context aside – this problematic status may be inherent in the nature of the photographic medium. Indeed, the status of museum photography within the museum embodies precisely Bourdieu's analysis of photography's status as mid-way in the 'hierarchy of legitimacies', and as therefore provoking ambivalence 'among the members of the privileged classes' (1990: 96–7), i.e. proponents of the fully legitimate arts (such as museum elites).
16. Ingelevics (personal communication, Dec. 1997) notes that the question of acknowledging authorship remains contentious in the present. Museum photographers are increasingly asking for recognition, in the form of a written credit when their work is published or used. 'Once a credit only noted the institution [but] more and more one sees a combination of institution and individual, although, overwhelmingly, the balance is still tipped in favour of anonymity for the photographer'. He notes also the historical lack of professional organizations for this group, symptomatic of their isolation and professional devaluation, although such organizations are now developing.
17. This is perhaps a tendency in Haraway's insistent reading of photography's closeness to taxidermy as a realist practice of domination. Her argument is that taxidermy is a precursor to photography and later visual technologies which provide ever more perfect virtual images of nature (1992: 42). She thus implies that photography, like taxidermy, is profoundly collusive with museal practices of domination.
18. A similar critique could be made in relation to Pinney's (1992: 74) initial proposal concerning 'the nearly identical semiotic procedures' underlying the representational power of photography and anthropology, I think.

Starting with a refutation of this presumed semiotic 'identity' on the basis I have outlined, such a critique would also overturn the assumption that photography's collusion in the imperialistic project of some early anthropology was somehow inevitable.

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