

Institution: London South Bank University		
Unit of Assessment: 34: Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management		
Title of case study: The networked image in photographic culture: research as the practice of digital curating at The Photographers' Gallery London		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012–19		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Andrew Dewdney Katrina Sluis	Co-director CSNI Senior Lecturer and Curator, Digital Programme	2000 – present 2004 – 2019
Nicolas Maleve Geoff Cox	Researcher TPG Co-director CSNI	2015 – 2021 2019 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013 – 2019		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) This research, led by the Centre for the Study of the Networked Image (CSNI) at London South Bank University (LSBU) in partnership with The Photographers' Gallery (TPG) London, enabled TPG to address the aesthetic, cultural and socio-technical challenges posed by born-digital and networked photography. The research established TPG's international reputation for driving public discourse on the cultural ramifications of the radical technological changes taking place in image production. The research directly shaped TPG's programming strategy and changed curatorial practices and the approaches of its education programmes: the digital programme encompassed 36 curated projects, with 15 new works commissioned, with an approximate Gallery audience of 1,800,000 and several million online; further, over 45 talks were delivered to audiences of 40 – 60 that included arts policy and industry professionals, artists, photographers and educators. Through these activities, the research engaged practitioners, funders and the public in new knowledge and understanding, achieving international impact: the research has influenced the thinking and practices of cultural institutions including the Arts Council of England, Fotomuseum Winterthur and the <i>Post Photography Research Project</i> at Lucerne College of the Arts in Switzerland. In addition, due to the research, the TPG has received requests for advice, support and consultancy on digital infrastructure from organisations including the V&A, Royal Photographic Society, National Trust, South Bank Centre and the Royal Academy of Arts.		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) The research, undertaken by the Centre for the Study of the Networked Image (CSNI) at London South Bank University (LSBU), set out to understand the changing conditions of photography in networked culture, investigating how developments in digital image technologies, particularly in computing, have established not only new systems for the production and circulation of images, but also new modes of attention to and ways of seeing images. The research focused upon the increasing involvement of mobile devices, digital platforms, software and algorithms in how the photographic image is circulated and used, in contrast to the curation and exhibition of photography in public museums and galleries. The underpinning research combined scholarly enquiry and research-as-curatorial practice in close collaboration with TPG, which created a unique opportunity for an embedded, action-orientated research-led experimental digital exhibition programme. From 2012 practice-led research was carried out by Katrina Sluis, an LSBU academic, taking up a part-time position as the first curator of digital programmes at The Photographers' Gallery (TPG), working in collaboration with Professor Dewdney, the Director of CSNI at LSBU. The research was initially funded at TPG by the Esmeé Fairbairn foundation and by LSBU, with QR funds supporting teaching relief for Sluis. This was complemented by a parallel strand of research by Geoff Cox whose research practice in software studies and contemporary aesthetics		

significantly overlapped with the aims of the research to explore the agency of technologies in human interaction, particularly his thinking and writing about machine ways of seeing. Cox joined LSBU as an associate professor in 2019 and is a CSNI co-director.

The curatorial research had two key strands: i) developing new theoretical understandings of the ways in which computer programming and software were shaping the limits and possibilities of ways of seeing and how the photographic image continued to be entailed; and ii) developing new exhibition and programming approaches capable of critically engaging a public audience with issues of the networked image at TPG. The two strands of research complemented each other in producing a practice of theory and a theory of practice. As an outcome, new knowledge and understanding of how the computational and algorithmic image has transformed the photographic image were disseminated across books, journals, exhibitions and the *Unthinking Photography* platform, with the key examples referenced below. The 30 media wall exhibitions over six years at the TPG, together with a dedicated programme of talks and events, allowed greater collaboration in the investigation through seminars and commissioning original work from practitioners in relevant fields. The key findings of the research were:

- That the photographic image in networked culture is essentially a post-photographic hybrid object, entailed in and driven by data and attention economies [R3]
- That the post-photographic image is the product of computation and a co-creation of humans and algorithms operating independently of humans [R3]
- That computer vision algorithms are contributing to the increasing automation of culture and machine ways of seeing [R4, R6]
- That paradoxically, the analogue photographic image remains the default of public understanding of visual representation [R1, R2]
- That galleries and museums find it hard to engage with, curate and exhibit the new contemporary condition of image culture, because they do not have the knowledge, understanding nor expertise [R2]
- That the persistence of art historical and theoretical investment in aesthetic modernism, leads to a continual purification of image hybrids [R1, R5]

Much of this work is reflected on CSNI website

(<http://www.centreforthehistoryof.net/category/research/>) and TPG's Discursive Platform (<http://unthinkingphotography> and its website: <https://thephotographersgallery.org.uk/research>).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[R1] Dewdney A. (2013) "Curating the photographic image in networked culture" in *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture*, Lister, M. (Ed) London. Routledge

[R2] Dewdney A. (2019) "The Networked Image: the flight of cultural authority and the multiple times and spaces of the art museum". (Chapter pages 68-80) in *Routledge International Handbook of New Digital Practices in Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums and Heritage Sites*. Ed. Hannah Lewi et al. New York. Routledge

[R3] Rubinstein, D. and Sluis, K. (2013) "The Digital image in photographic culture: algorithmic photography and the crisis of representation" in *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture*, Lister, M. (Ed) London. Routledge

[R4] Rubinstein, D, and Sluis, K (March 2008) "A Life More Photographic: Mapping the Networked Image." *Photographies*, vol. 1, no. 1: 9–28.

[R5] Sluis, K. (2018) "All I Know is What is on the Internet" curated exhibition. (26 Oct 2018 -24 Feb 2019) The Photographers' Gallery. <https://thephotographersgallery.org.uk/whats-on/exhibition/all-i-know-is-whats-on-the-internet>

[R6] Cox, G, Nolan, R and Prior, A (2019) *The Crackle of Contemporaneity*. in: de Assis, P and Schwab, M (ed.) *Futures of the Contemporary: Contemporaneity, Untimeliness, and Artistic Research* Ghent Leuven University Press. pp. 97-114.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Given the embedded nature of the research, the primary beneficiary is TPG and its audiences: the research has led directly to an integrated and ongoing curated digital programme, continuing to co-fund ongoing research on the networked image and expand the visibility of the online digital programme through the *Unthinking Photography* platform. A new media artist and academic whose work was commissioned for the first *Media Wall* exhibition, based upon the GIF

entitled *Born in 1987* (2012), highlighted the impact of the embedded research in saying, “*It was clear at this point, that new media practices were not being shown in traditional galleries and the curation of so-called new media works was still in its infancy in the UK. Whilst there were several groups which supported and promoted innovation in this field at this time, these tended to be small organizations with limited resources to disseminate the exciting ideas that were being developed by artists interested in digitality in all of its guises. Katrina Sluis’s collaboration between the Centre for the Study of the Networked Image & TPG has led to innovative programming for the Media Wall which was also supported and extended by the related writing and thinking on the projects published on Unthinking Photography*” [S1].

The period covered by the research included 36 curated projects, with 15 new works commissioned and with an approximate Gallery audience of 1,800,000, based upon TPG’s annual audience figures. The exhibitions were accompanied by a public programme of 45 events, including talks by curators and artists, expert panel sessions and weekend workshops. This practice-based research has allowed TPG to position itself as an international pioneer in new forms of exhibiting the network image and a critical contributor to public understanding of the increasing automation of culture and vision [R6]. Beyond TPG, the research has influenced the thinking and practices of cultural institutions including the Arts Council of England, Fotomuseum Winterthur and the *Post Photography Research Project* at Lucerne College of the Arts in Switzerland.

Shaping digital strategy and engagement at TPG

The research has directly informed changes to TPG’s institutional strategies, evidenced by TPG’s decision to continue to fund the digital programme for the foreseeable future, with the appointment of a new curator of digital programmes in 2019. Strategically, Dewdney provided TPG’s Director with an initial outline of the potential for a *Media Wall*, which he had experimented with previously at LSBU in establishing a digital gallery. His specification for TPG also outlined an approach to digital programming that combined the curatorial with the computational, producing a job specification for a digital curator emphasising a hybrid skill set. With Sluis’s appointment in 2012, she participated in the TPG management team and regularly discussed issues from the research findings with the director, as well as presentations to the Trustees. The Director and senior staff attended workshops and symposia led by Katrina Sluis in which key findings of the research were discussed. The Director of TPG stated that: “*The impact of the research collaboration upon our programme and thinking across the organisation has been highly significant. The collaboration created the conditions for TPG to be at the forefront of the public exploration of digital and networked photography and to my knowledge we are the only UK public art*”. He also stated that: “*The digital programme also influenced the ways in which TPG used online media, with the creation of the Unthinking Photography platform for publication and debate as well as the practice of making archival material available online, the value of which has been especially demonstrated over the period of the COVID pandemic when the Gallery has been closed for extended periods. In conclusion, the research collaboration between TPG and CSNI has led to new ways of thinking and working. The value of the research collaboration with the digital programme is underlined by our commitment to an active research element in our programme, with a second collaborative PhD now underway*” [S2].

In 2018, in a feedback letter provided to TPG, the Arts Council described the TPG’s digital work as “exemplary” and “pioneering new thinking around the future of photography”. TPG’s Head of Exhibitions has stated: “*The significance of the programme of research is also reflected in the number of requests for advice, support and consultancy TPG has received from other organisations on digital infrastructure, including the V&A, Royal Photographic Society, Brighton Photo Biennale, National Trust, South Bank Centre, Royal Academy [of Arts] and contributions to digital policy round tables by the DCMS. We have shared the programme’s outcomes through over 30 presentations at events organised by Arts Council England, Google Cultural Institute, Royal College of Art and the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, and through articles in the wider photography press (Aperture NYC, Source, BJP)*” [S3].

Influencing public debate through exhibition

One of TPG's most popular and thought-provoking exhibitions, *All I Know is What is on the Internet* (AIKIWOTI, October 2018 – February 2019 [S4]), was co-curated by Sluis. AIKIWOTI presented the work of 11 artists examining the cultural dynamics of the 21st century image culture. The exhibition was featured in top titles such as *The Observer*, *Frieze* and *Wired Magazine*. Acclaimed art critics in these publications each weighed in on the topic with extensive opinion pieces, while Time Out awarded the exhibition 4* and Dazed Digital picked it as "an art show to leave home for". The Frieze review picked up on its cultural relevance, "For The Photographers' Gallery – an institution hitherto dedicated to images transmitting the vision of one human eye to another – these enquiries are pressing. They carry in their wake deeper questions about who a "photographer" is, and what their role might be in an increasingly automated image culture". (Frieze Online, 8 November 2018 [S5]). The impact and significance of the research upon exhibition is underlined by TPG's Head of Exhibitions, who has said: "In my role as Head of Exhibitions I experienced first-hand the organisational impact of having a research active curator of digital programmes as part of the team, placing questions of technological change and the future of photography on organisational planning and strategy agendas. The Gallery is proud to have become a leader, nationally and internationally, in the photography field, in the debate around digital practice, offering artists and photographers the tools and support to work with new technologies. This is evidenced by a 2018 feedback letter from the Arts Council which stated: 'In 16/17, as in 15/16, TPG's digital work was exemplary. It is pioneering new thinking around the future of photography'" [S3].

Influencing public debate through events

The public talks and events that accompanied each media wall exhibition [S6] provided a platform to specifically address issues raised by the research. Over 45 talks of between 40-60 people were delivered to audiences that included arts policy and industry professionals, artists, photographers and educators. For example, the sold out symposium "Post-Capitalist Photography Now!" organised alongside AIKIWOTI extended and developed the underlying ideas of the exhibition. Attending on the day were 75 academics, photo students, archivists, researchers, gallery assistants, lecturer, artists, sociologists, psychotherapists and interested members of the public, with a further 1,146 people viewing its YouTube archive. The impact of research in the specialist talks and events is further underlined by the Head of Exhibitions in saying: "Founded in 2012, the digital programme has added a significant and original new dimension to our exhibition programme and has supported us to experiment and develop new curatorial practices, informed by cutting-edge research through our collaboration with the Centre for the Study of the Networked Image at London South Bank University. In addition to our Media Wall – a dedicated space for screen media and new commissioning – the programme has expanded to include public talks and symposia, online commissions, a discursive platform (*Unthinking Photography* – nominated for an ICP Infinity Award in 2016), an experimental photo school, *Geekenders* as well as major exhibitions such as *All I Know Is What's On the Internet* (2018) and *Jonas Lund: Operation Earnest Voice* (2019). In 2012-2019 the programme generated 36 Media Wall projects, 45 public talks and symposia in addition to 2 exhibition projects, reaching an audience of 1,800,000 in the Gallery and several million online." [S3].

Influencing education and online resources

The research has also had an impact on the content of TPG's approach to photography education. The programme now integrates the *Unthinking Photography* platform and digital exhibition programme as part of its work as well as running an experimental photo-school on machine learning. This impact was primarily achieved through the collaborative doctoral research on machine vision conducted by Nicolas Maleve, supervised by Dewdney and Sluis at LSBU, who led a series of educational workshops examining the ways in which photographic images are seen by humans and machines. TPG's Head of Education and Projects, has stated that: "The key findings of the research have influenced my thinking and opened up a new and innovative strand for our educational programme. I would draw your attention to two aspects of the research which have had a profound impact upon the ways in which TPG staff consider photography and have supported the development of our educational outlook and approach. The first example is focused upon the position of the photographic image in machine vision and its

applications, which formed a sustained strand of TPG's Media Wall exhibition programme. Importantly this strand was supported by a highly innovative collaborative PhD project based at the Gallery, investigating algorithms of vision" [S7].

Influencing other cultural institutions' reflections on digital photography

TPG's international standing as one of Europe's foremost photography institutions has meant that the impact of the LSBU embedded research carried out at TPG has extended to other cultural institutions. Fotomuseum Winterthur in Switzerland followed TPG in appointing a digital curator in 2015 and Foto Colectania Barcelona established its programme in 2017. Fotomuseum Winterthur, founded in 1993, is Switzerland's foremost centre for photographic expertise. The impact of the research on Fotomuseum has been recognised by Fotomuseum curator, who says, "The work by Katrina Sluis at The Photographers' Gallery, as well as her writing on the networked image, have been a great source of inspiration and a fundamental help in guiding the vision of the exploration of so called post-photographic practices undertaken by Fotomuseum. On top of the strengthening of the institutional relationship, the Centre for the Study of the Networked Image has become an intellectual home for my curatorial research. Given the unique network of scholars and practitioners that the centre constitutes, I have been able to reflect on and critically extend my practice at the museum through the support and inspiration provided by scholars including Andrew Dewdney and Geoff Cox" [S8].

The research has led to the recent collaboration between the two institutions in the "Screen Walks" public programme. Screen Walks, which commenced in March 2020, is a series of live streamed artist/researcher-led explorations of online spaces and artistic strategies designed to illuminate digital culture. The Fotomuseum curator commented that: "This collaborative programme between Fotomuseum Winterthur and The Photographers' Gallery is a unique form of institutional cooperation that was only possible as a result of the continuous exchange and knowledge transfer between the curators over the years. This work has informed the Swiss National Science Foundation Funded "Curating Photography in the Networked Image Economy": an 18 month project led by Dr Wolfgang Bruckle and Katrina Sluis which draws on the history of digital curating in European photo institutions, focusing on the programmes of Fotomuseum and The Photographers' Gallery as key case studies" [S8].

Influencing and supporting new forms of art practice

Very few opportunities exist for artists and practitioners working in experimental ways with computational media to develop their work for public exhibition. Over the duration of the research Sluis commissioned 15 digitally generated new works. Sluis's collaborative research-based curatorial approach has meant that artists have been able develop experimental work with technical and curatorial support to a wider public and to gain critical feedback. An artist who was commissioned by Sluis to produce the exhibition *Spherical Harmonics* (17 Jan- 09 April 2015) has said: "The visibility afforded to me by this prestigious commission has played a large part in the subsequent trajectory of my career, and the calibre of subsequent commissions for the Media Wall have only reinforced it as an important public-facing site of critical and engaging new media work" [S9]. Likewise, the artist who Sluis commissioned to produce *Indeterminate Objects* (2017), said: "Working at native resolution for the large-scale media wall allowed me to realize my ideas in a way that simply would not have been possible elsewhere. Crucially, the expertise of Katrina Sluis, Sam Mercer and the supporting staff at TPG allowed me the time and tools needed to really extend and develop these ideas." [S1].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[S1] Testimonial from Artist 1

[S2] Testimonial from Director of The Photographers' Gallery

[S3] Testimonial from Head of Exhibitions, The Photographers' Gallery

[S4] All I Know is What is one the Internet <https://thephotographersgallery.org.uk/whats-on/exhibition/all-i-know-is-whats-on-the-internet>

[S5] "What Role Do Photographers Play in an Increasingly Automated Image Culture?" Frieze, November 2018

[S6] Media Wall Archive: <https://thephotographersgallery.org.uk/search/node/media%20wall>

[S7] Testimonial from Head of Education and Projects, The Photographers' Gallery

[S8] Testimonial from Curator, Fotomuseum Winterthur

[S9] Testimonial from Artist 2