Mass participatory photography and the critically-engaged practitioner: commissioning and exhibiting contemporary photography.

1 We'd like to begin with some reflections on a curatorial project from November 2011.

Eric Kessels was one of four curators invited to contribute to an exhibition at Foam Photography Museum in Amsterdam. Titled 'The future of the photography museum' the exhibition ran throughout November last year and was designed to provoke debate around the challenges facing photography institutions now and into the future, as the title of the exhibition itself suggests. Partly to mark the 10th anniversary year of the Amsterdam photography museum and partly to engage debate about the future of photography and the photography museum in the networked world of Web 2.0, each guest curator was invited to curate a separate section of the exhibition.

2 *"During the entire month of November, Foam is offering its visitors a glimpse into the future of a photography museum… Foam explores not only how photography can be shown in the form of an exhibition, but also how audiences can be made partners in numerous activities. Presenting, informing and participating; the exhibition offers a unique visual experience on every level as well as a great deal of material for thought."* (http://www.foam.org/press/2011/whatsnext)

In our wider research, we are particularly interested in the 'participatory' agendas raised here by Foam: specifically, we are concerned to examine the ways in which contemporary photography institutions seek to involve audiences as participants in different ways and at different levels: for instance, involving audiences in photographic activities as part of educational and audience development programmes; and, on the other hand, working with contemporary photographic artists to devise and to deliver new photographic projects that

involve participation as a central part of the process and conceptualisation of the work.

By photographic institutions, we mean museums – like Foam – but also galleries, exhibitions, and festivals which have photography and/or contemporary lens-based art practices as their focus. And through this research we aim to understand and contextualise current strategies for commissioning, curating and exhibiting contemporary photography. These strategies are often complex ones, requiring a delicate balancing act between support for artists and art-form development, on the one hand, alongside responsibility for widening audience participation and developing new audiences on the other. In all of this complex matrix, photography's interface with online platforms and social media is often a key factor, one which we would like to focus on here.

To return to Kessels's installation at Foam last year: Titled 'Photography in abundance' Kessels's curatorial contribution reflected on photography's supposed 'new democratisation', which is something we will need to consider more fully throughout this paper. In an interview about the project, Kessels outlined his curatorial concept, which builds on his long-standing interest, as a curator and publisher, in vernacular photography: '*Because Flickr or other similar sites are amateur forums, most institutions would be hard pressed to exhibit the work. Which is precisely why I chose it…I wanted to illustrate the sheer vastness of the digital era we live in now.'*[1] Thanks to the power of social networking sites such as Facebook and photo-sharing sites like Flickr , photography today is apparently ubiquitous, connected and potentially immediate. As more and more people take more and more photographs, countless images circulate across the screens of our computers, i-pads and phones. Kessels gives this virtual world of networked photography a very material, a very physical presence. By printing off all the images that were uploaded onto Flickr and other sites in a 24 hour period and tipping them into the gallery, Kessels invited visitors to walk through piles of paper, to kneel down among the photos and rummage through them, a bit like 19th century rag-pickers: as Kessels puts it in another interview: *"I visualize the feeling of drowning in representations of other peoples' experiences."* [2]

In the context of this paper, 'your' photographs are not only on our walls, but are also all over the floor and piled in the corners.

Kessels offers us a critical and enquiring perspective on photography's new abundance and its new democratisation: on the one hand, in 'dumping' the prints into the gallery space (Kessels's own term), his installation suggests there is a

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[1] Erik Kessels (interview) in *What's Next*, Foam Magazine no 29, winter 11/12, p. 84-5.

[2] http://www.creativereview.co.uk/cr-blog/2011/november/24-hours-in-photos)

correlation between abundance and detritus. Other critics too have pointed to this new ecology of photographic wastefulness, whereby the ease of photographic image making, coupled with an equal ease of transmission, results in steady accumulations of stuff and clutter (all be it, usually virtual clutter). So much stuff, in fact, that we don't quite know how to comprehend it or what to do with it. Yet, Kessels's installation also redeems this clutter, suggesting its possibilities for enjoyment. As visitors individually and randomly sifting the mass, we may encounter accidental instances of pleasure and recognition. Curatorially, Kessel suggests a complex picture of photography's new abundance: it threatens to drown us, but maybe we can survive if we just learn to swim better with it, if we can learn how to filter and select from the mass.

Foam's exhibition, of which Kessels's installation was just one part, is relevant to our concerns here in a number of ways. Firstly, the exhibition was part of a year-long programme of events, commissions, talks and seminars, all asking questions about the future of photography and the photography institution. This year-long programme in turn points to a certain sense of 'photographic anxiety' or unease we have been hinting at: the sense that photography is undergoing a profound and rapid shift, both in its nature and in its cultural status. The immense changes in the wake of the digitalization of the media, coupled with the seamless integration of photographic devices with the networked computer, are prompting photography curators to ask questions about how a photography institution should respond, so as to function effectively and relevantly within this rapidly changing visual culture. Indeed, this rapidly changing visual culture is one in which classic curatorial duties such as collecting, conserving and exhibiting are being called into question.[3]

Before turning to explore more fully this sense of a challenge to photography institutions and curatorial practices, we'd like first to consider some specific responses on the part of artists and photographers. This in turn enables us to identify some key features of current photographic debate, in particular the much repeated notion that photography has entered a new phase in its democratisation so that, thanks to the prevalence of digital cameras and the easy usefulness of mobile phones, we are more than ever 'all photographers now'. As Brett Rogers, director of the Photographer's Gallery in London recently put it in an interview for the Guardian: "photography is the most democratic of all the art forms and people are not intimidated by it. With the rise of digital technology and camera phones, everyone feels they're a photographer now."[4] If we take such an observation for granted just for a moment, then we can begin to explore some questions about what this means for contemporary 'critically engaged' or professional practice: if we are 'all photographers now', how are we to recognise or draw distinctions among the mass of photography produced? If we are all

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[3] Marloes Krijned, 'Curating the Future' in *What's Next*, Foam Magazine no 29, winter 11/12, p. 5.

[4] http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2012/jan/30/photographers-gallery-london-reopening \

photographers now, how does the professional photographer operate within the field, developing strategies for his or her practice, so as to ensure an ongoing level of creativity and criticality, a continued integrity, value and worth within our radically transforming visual culture? There are many possible answers to this question and we can only suggest a few here.

3 Ekke Vasli's online 'experiment' *real-time Flickr* (2010) demonstrates none of the anxiety we referred to previously. Like much new media art, it appropriates networked data traffic (photographs uploaded onto Flickr in real-time) so as to construct a new digital installation that sits on the artist's web-site.[5] This is an artist who confidently and actively embraces photography's new democratisation and who, through his work, points to one of its essential characteristics: that is, its shared or distributed nature. This, like many of the projects we look at here, responds not so much to the supposed 'newness' of photography's democratisation (after all, Kodak was already claiming that 'you push the button, we do the rest' back in 1889, as a means of encouraging the first wave of photographic democracy). Instead, this piece draws our attention to the distributed nature of photography, shared as it is through social media networks like Flickr. Rather than sitting in private albums or institutional collections, photographs today are easily distributed across space and time, in turn generating new forms of connectivity.

The term 'distributed' as we are using it here also implies a second characteristic of this photography: that is, its immaterial or virtual presence. So many of the photographs we make and share today never have or are intended to have a material substrata. They are accumulations of pixels distributed over virtual networks, and it this distributable nature that characterises them. Vasli's piece intercepts anonymous photographs as they are in the process of being uploaded. It is not so much the photographs that we engage with when we view them broadcast from the artist's own web-site, but rather this dematerialised process: we are viewers of an intriguing, ever-changing and fleeting pattern of visual exchange. The criticality of this work, then, derives from the sense of being both part of and *apart from* the mass of photographs that it presents.

However, and again, like a number of current new media artists, Vasli is also concerned to bridge the gap between on-line and off-line public worlds.

4 So this second piece *hold your breath* is a collection of photographs of people holding their breath with their hand. The collection was generated by crowd-sourcing, with participants invited to email him their photographic self-portraits. Photographic quality isn't a concern, though the process and concept clearly are: ('web-cam is ok, real camera even better'). As viewers, we can access 351 of these collected photographs on a Flickr set, or we might also encounter a selection printed in 'real-life' as a billboard, part of a recent festival of billboard

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[5] For further discussion of such new media strategies of appropriation, see B. Graham and S. Cook, *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media*, MIT Press, London, Cambridge Mass., 2010 pp. 67-8

art in Sunderland.[6] This is one incarnation then of the artist's interest in moving between process-led, immaterial and networked sites of photographic production, on the one hand, and sites of photographic exhibition which are material, contextualised and located in the physical world. This work exists across two different public worlds: on the virtual realm of Flickr and the real-world public realm of Billboard installation: different sites of photographic making, connectivity and exchange. In both instances, though, we might find ourselves asking what *is* this practice?: it is certainly *about* photography, but it is more difficult to pin it down *as* photography. And perhaps that is where its interest and intrigue resides.

5 Photographer Simon Roberts's *Election Project* allows us to consider the complex relationship between professional, authored photographic work and the 'new democracy' of photographic practice from a rather different perspective.[7] *Election Project* was commissioned by the Speakers Advisory Committee on works of Art to document the 2010 General Election Campaigns. The resulting work would become part of the House of Commons collection. Roberts is no stranger to social media, recognising its significance for artists as a tool for publicity and distribution, and also using blogging as a means to share aspects of his creative experimentation. At the outset of his earlier *We English* project in which he set out to make a photographic record of the English at play, he set up a blog inviting members of the public to suggest photo-locations and events appropriate to his theme, thus inviting the public into the creative practice at the level of planning and, potentially at least, as subjects.[8] For this new commission he extended his embrace of social media to develop a participatory element that seems particularly appropriate to the context and concept of the work: after all, this is a photographic project *about* the democratic process.

Play video

According to his own account, Roberts's project entailed travelling around the country in a motor home, photographing local landscapes and scenes connected to the General Election, and focussing on the relationship between canvassing politicians and the voting public: his aim was to capture locations of political encounter, from the battle-bus to the village green, to polling stations and shopping centres. Choosing to photograph such democratic encounters with a traditional 5x4 camera from the roof of a campervan is a particular photographic strategy, one that ensures a certain solemnity, perhaps an aura of authenticity and patina of historical worth. It also singles out Roberts as a photographer whose practice evolves over time, requiring patience, considerable reflection and much editing.

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[6] 'Civic: the first international festival of billboard art', Sunderland 27 oct – 13 Nov 2011 http://www.ngca.co.uk/home/default.asp?id=175

[7] http://theelectionproject.co.uk/

[8] http://www.simoncroberts.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/The_Election_Project-Greg_Hobson_Essay.pdf

However, as a photographer and project manager, he is also responsible for devising and curating the strategically planned participatory element of the commission. This was envisaged from the start and entailed inviting members of the public to submit their own photographs of political activity in their own area. Photographs from digital cameras or mobile phones would help "*create an alternative vision alongside my own and will add a collaborative and democratic dimension to the overall work*".[9] Roberts's description of the commission process clearly highlights hierarchical demarcations: his work is singly-authored and anchored in traditional photographic process, whilst the democratic element comes via the alignment of grass-roots photographic activity ('we are all photographer's now) with networked digital and mobile phone cameras.

6 This demarcation is replicated in the Election Project website, where Roberts' work is presented in a single gallery. Each photograph is individually titled, and the physical size and materiality of the corresponding print identified (they are all printed at 122x 102 cm on Fuji Crystal Archive Paper). The public gallery on the other hand, comprises a digital repository of all images submitted. The photographs are presented as a dataset of over 1600 thumb-nail images. We can click on them one at a time. The copyright of individual photographers is acknowledged, and a certain individual perspective conveyed by the captioning: but in all this the hierarchies of attainment and presentation are clear.

7 While all of the photographs submitted are accessible on the Election Project web-site, a smaller curated selection became part of a large-scale photographic installation at the House of Commons, shown alongside Roberts' own work. Again, we can begin to identify particular curatorial and exhibition strategies typical for the presentation of publically generated work. The grid-like format of relatively small-scale, anonymous images that we identified in the web-site gallery is replicated here. In comparison, the presentation of Roberts' large-format prints reinforces the weightiness and value of his work.

8 To coincide with the exhibition opening, a specially designed Election Project Newspaper was also published, this in turn containing a series of commissioned essays, one by photography curator Greg Hobson focussing on Roberts' photographic work; another by the Guardian art critic and columnist Sean O'Hagan focussing on the Election Project Public Gallery, and the third by Peter Wilby, media columnist on the New Statesman.

Together the trilogy of essay demarcates the three key players in the commission: the photographer-artist; the election itself, and the public as photographic participants. O'Hagan's essay is particularly significant here, given his attempt to critically contextualise the participatory-element (he compares it -- not entirely convincingly -- to Mass Observation), and also the attention that he

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[9] The Election Project Press Release http://theelectionproject.co.uk/sites/default/files/images/Election%20Artist%202010%20Press%20Realease.pdf

pays to the specific nature of the photographic seeing presented here.[10] In other words, while the photographic exhibition on-line and in the House of Commons exhibition tends to subsume individual photographs in the larger collective mass, O'Hagan's essay goes some way towards redressing this by singling out and highlighting specific examples that, for him, say something about the political landscape in Britain in 2010. This is an unusual instance, then, where the participatory aspect of a newly commissioned project is deemed worthy of separate critical attention. Further to this, the relative success of the participatory project itself derives in part from the careful attention given to it, as it was planned and delivered by the artist-curator and the commissioning partners.

What we are suggesting here, then, is that a participatory photographic project can be successful when the context is appropriate, when all parties are in agreement to, and supportive of, the participatory element, and when it is planned as part of a commission from the outset. None of this, of course, necessarily requires the use of online or social media, as we will see in discussing our next example: Fiona Tan's current project in development with the Photographer's Gallery in London.

9 This is one of a number of participatory projects associated with the Photographer's Gallery that we would now like to discuss. As many of you will know, the Gallery is soon to reopen after a 2 year-long refit. In a recent interview in the lead up to its reopening, Director Brett Rogers has referred to an increasingly important new role for the gallery: as people are increasingly deluged with images, not least on their computers, the gallery's role is to act as a kind of filter, to help make sense of all this photographic stuff.[11] We will explore some of the implications of this idea of the gallery as 'filter' in the next section.[12]

10 While the Photographers' Gallery has been closed for business, a number of 'off-site' or 'on-line' participatory projects have been developed, with different degrees of curatorial and artistic input. In looking at these projects, we can begin to identify a dichotomy in the Gallery's activities: between, on the one hand, supporting photography as participatory practice -- as the *(art)-work*, devised and delivered in close collaboration with the selected photographic artist. And, on the other hand photography as *a tool* by which curators may seek to engage people in the *work* of the institution, through the exhibition and educational programme for instance. In this second case, we might consider photography more as a participatory apparatus for developing existing and new audiences.

11 Fiona Tan's work exemplifies the first of these: the photography curator here works to commission and support a specific kind of authored photographic practice, where participatory processes are integral to the project's concept and

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[10] http://www.simoncroberts.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/The_Election_Project-Sean_OHagan_Essay.pdf
[11] http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2012/jan/30/photographers-gallery-london-reopening
[12] See for instance Krijnen, op.cit., p. 6.

realisation.[13] Tan has been commissioned to make the final and fifth instalment of her V*ox Populi* series which began in 2003/4 with versions in Norway, Sydney, Tokyo, Switzerland and now London[14]. *Vox Populi* was originally commissioned by the Norwegian government and some telling comparisons can be drawn with Roberts's *Election* project, in that the participatory processes in both were linked with notions of (political) democracy. In Tan's case, however, the participatory processes are analogue and individualised, as she invites participants from all walks of life to share their family albums with her. In fact, her original Norwegian Vox Populi project was deliberately *not* advertised through newspaper or social media platforms: instead it was communicated by word of mouth, with the help of her assistant and curatorial networks.[15] Participants were invited to bring their photo-albums into various collecting points around the country, usually in a gallery or museum, and to leave them stored there safely for a short period of time. From this process of exchange, Tan then makes a selection of images from other people's photo-albums, curating them into her own work which in turn takes two forms: a gallery installation and a book-work. Tan never meets the owners of the photographs in person: she comes to the photographs at a remove, her access negotiated by others. From this, she bases her selections entirely on her subjective responses to -- and her visual infatuation with -- the anonymous photographic materials themselves.

As artist-curator, then, she orchestrates the wall installations, so as to publicly exhibit the previously private images, moments from ordinary's people's pasts. The vernacular photographs, once selected, are standardised by format and frame, and installed in such a way that the overall visual rhythm exerts some priority over the individual image. This prioritisation of the whole, visual effect over singular photograph, is something that we have seen in the work of both Vasli and Roberts. The loose, quite fluid grid of Tan's installation, however, is less severe, less regimented, the frames and gaps between the photographs allowing breathing space and acknowledgment of the uniqueness of each. This uniqueness, as Tan herself notes, derives in part from the visual aesthetic of historical materials selected: she is drawn to the particular qualities of 40 year old Polaroids, for instance. But this uniqueness is also a function of the near-history, the history in living memory, represented in the images; their poignancy derives also from the sense of a photographic era passing, as we move ever more rapidly into the digital.

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[13] The participatory turn in contemporary arts practice is much discussed. See for instance, C. Bishop, ed., *Participation*, London, Whitechapel, 2006; R. Frieling, ed., *the art of participation: 1950 to now*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2008

[14] *Vox Populi*, *London* will be exhibited at the Photographer's Gallery in late 2012; *Vox Populi, London* book work is scheduled for publication in summer 2012. http://www.photonet.org.uk/index.php?pid=599

[15] S. Cotter, 'Each and Everyone' in Fiona Tan, *Vox Populi: Norway* London, Bookworks, 2006.

This is a major commission on the part of the Photographers' Gallery and it operates within a well-established framework, whereby the professional roles of the artist-photographer and of the specialist photography curator are mutually enhancing. The curatorial choices give credence to the photographic practice (and vice-versa). The filtering role of the Gallery in this case is one in which high-end, high-value, work by an established artist is authored, enabled and represented through exhibition. The twist in this, of course, is that the photographic artist has in turn operated in a curatorial mode, as a selector or filter for other people's private photography which, in the end, materialises as a gallery installation: your photographs on our walls again.

Tan's *Vox Populi: London* is one of three 'off-site' artist's projects programmed during the two years when the Photographer's Gallery itself has been closed. These off-site projects have been devised to enable photographers to create new work in response to the city and its inhabitants. Tan's is the most current of these projects and will be exhibited 'on-site' later this year, as part of the Gallery's relaunch programme.

A final aspect of the Photographers' Gallery programme we would like to finish with: that is, their on-line 'public galleries'. These also sit behind the home page of the Gallery web-site, as part of their 'off-site' programme. In looking at two of

these projects, we return to consider more fully how photography has become a curatorial *tool* for engagement and audience development. We come back in fact to consider aspects of photography's new democracy: 'we are all photographers now'. At the same time, we will consider again this notion of 'filtering' and the different ways in which it might operate in on-line participatory projects like these.

12 *Street Photography Now* project was developed in collaboration with the authors of the newly published book of the same name.[16] It has its own Word Press site,[17] and *Flickr* galleries. Each week for 52 weeks, participants were invited to upload one image in response to a provocation or instruction issued by a leading street photographer (in other words, a photographer who featured in the book). Instruction 1, issued on 1st October 2010, invited responses to Bruce Gilden's observation that: '*If you can smell the street by looking at the photo, it's a street photograph*'. Participants then had 6 days to respond to the brief, to shoot, select and upload their best photograph. **13** This seems to have been an exemplary project, with some 20,000 images uploaded to the Flickr galleries over the year, and with an international profile of participants, many of whom stayed the course and were active participants throughout the course of the project. It helps of course that the project was carefully managed throughout, with an element of competition in it to ensure its momentum and sustain interest. **14** Filtering was also built into the process, as Haworth and Mclaren acted as judges and curators, choosing two over-all winners from the process and selecting a sample from the submitted entries for separate inclusion on the Photographers' Gallery web-site.

In some respects, the project was also riding a wave of fresh interest in street photography on the part of curators as well as practitioners. In part fuelled by the portability and flexibility of new digital camera technologies (especially the iphone), this interest in turn has been reflected in a number of key international photography festivals in the last year, such as Format Photo-Festival in Derby. **15** With Street Photography as its overall festival theme, Format, like the Photographers' Gallery, also developed a participatory street photography strand, inviting photographers and members of the public to 'Mob' them with their own street photography,[18] either by uploading their photographs onto the Format website, or by tagging their photographs on Flickr.

The success of both *Street Photography Now* and *Mob format* then is partly down to their timeliness. But both also gain from a strong sense of audience recognition: both projects are aimed at a specific audience, one where participants recognise themselves *as* members of the photographic community, not necessarily in a professional sense, but certainly in the sense of being actively engaged in the practice. It seems relevant in fact that both projects sit successfully on the photo-sharing platform *Flickr*. Along with Youtube, Flickr is a key Web 2.0 platform for amateur creativity. The central model of social

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[16] S. Haworth and S. McClaren, *Street Photography Now*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2010.
[17] http://streetphotographynowproject.wordpress.com/
[18] http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/derby/hi/people_and_places/arts_and_culture/newsid_9407000/9407376.stm

interaction here is that of autonomous participation and peer learning, with the amateur camera club in particular flourishing on *Flickr*. As Jean Burgess has argued in her recent study of 'Vernacular Creativity and New Media', *Flickr* can be regarded as both a showcase and a learning space for photography, and there is evidence that many users develop "a deep or intense engagement" with the creative literacy of photography through their experiences on it.[19] Coming full circle perhaps, the association between *Flickr* users and established photography institution is mutually beneficial, serving to validate the practices of one and to extend audiences for the other.

16 But the success of such participatory projects is not of course a foregone conclusion. *Oldnewborrowedblue* also directly addressed the Photographer's Gallery audiences, inviting them (us) to participate in a project launched on Royal Wedding Day (29th April 2011). A collaboration with 'Magic Me' participatory arts organisation, the online project invited participants to share their wedding photographs from across the decades, from the earliest history of photography through to today, the aim being to establish the 'largest wedding album in the world'. This online platform was designed for sharing a particular form of vernacular photography (wedding photography). One of the abiding characteristics of this genre of family photography, historically, is its function as an aide-memoire, as a visual record and remembrance of a key moment in family connections, histories and narratives. The project acknowledges this relation to memory and story-telling, as the curatorial brief invites participants to team up with someone older or younger than you and pass on the story behind the images: '*what photo will you choose and what story will you tell? Upload your photo and your story to our web-site*'.[20]

17 But –almost a year later - there is very little actual content on the public gallery: very little has been up-loaded and for some decades there is nothing at all.[21] What might we take from this relative failure? One conclusion might be that the potential audience for such a project has been misconstrued. Where *Street Photography Now* successfully engaged audiences *as* practitioners, *oldnewborrowedblue* tries – and fails really -- to engage people as *owners* or keepers of photographs. More, where *Street Photography Now* sustained its momentum, and was project-managed so as to create a certain 'buzz' around the concept and the year of activities, the curatorial context for *oldnewborrowedblue* has been much less secure and the filtering role of the gallery much less visible.

As our discussion of Fiona Tan's *Vox Populi* suggests, it *is* possible to engage people as owners or keepers of photographs, though in Tan's case the process of engagement was individualised – encouraging a sense of shared value and investment in the process. Value also accrues to the participants through being associated with a recognised artist, whose status within the art and photography

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[19] Jean Burgess, 'Vernacular Creativity and New Media', Ph.D. thesis, 2007, Queensland University of Technology, http://eprints.qut.edu.au/16378/1/Jean_Burgess_Thesis.pdf

[20] http://oldnewborrowedblue.photonet.org.uk/

[21] This despite the fact that a selection of the photographs 'from around the world and across the generations' opened at 'Rich Mix' in Bethnal Green in Valentine's Day this year.

worlds is already assured. None of this incitement to participate is present in *oldnewborrowedblue*. As a traditional participatory arts project, involving face-to-face interaction and group dynamic, it *does* have considerable merit – and this is one aspect of the project we should acknowledge.[22] Translated into an online format, however, it simply doesn't gain momentum and fails to engage an audience effectively.

In summary:

18 Our focus for this paper then has been on the increasing prevalence of 'user-generated' photographic content in photography institutions, and also the emphasis given to 'participatory' practices in the commissioning of new photographic projects and art works. We have considered some of the ways in which photographers are responding to these changing curatorial and commissioning agendas, and what tensions emerge in the process. These new commissioning and curatorial agendas impact on photographers in more complicated ways, perhaps, than on other forms of contemporary visual art practice. The participatory aspects of contemporary exhibition-making mean, for instance, that user-generated or 'amateur' photography can occupy the same 'cultural sphere' as specially commissioned or curated photographic imagery. New relationships are established – spatial, institutional and conceptual – that potentially blur the boundaries between 'amateur' and 'professional', artist and audience. Much can be said positively about the significance of such blurring, especially in terms of audience development, and – perhaps more controversially – the potential for 'democratizing' art. Yet, the examples we have looked at also suggest that photographic hierarchies and demarcations remain in place, though complexly articulated through the filtering practices of artists, curators and institutions.

[22] http://www.flickr.com/photos/thephotographersgallery/sets/72157626614945224/