

**Museums and the Digital Public Space: Researching digital engagement practice
at the Whitworth Art Gallery**

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Abstract

Since the 1990s, a trend in the UK museum sector for developing community partnerships has witnessed a 'participatory drive' that aims to embrace social diversity by engaging communities in the co-creation of exhibitions and other museum work. In this context, the Internet broadly, and social media in particular, are seen as complementary to museum processes of reciprocal exchange and public access. However, as this thesis stresses, treating the Internet and social media as complementary and convergent with the participatory drive in museums is assumptive and has been under-analysed, and its difficulties and complexities understated.

In this context, this practice-based research carefully unpicks and critically analyses naturalised assumptions about online resources and social media practices in museums by tracing the cultural history through which the participatory museum has developed and contrasting it with the much later sociology of the Internet. The participatory drive is seen to be mediated through society's agencies for local governance, healthcare and education services, as well as neighbourhood groups and families. These structures act then as a bridge organising people in space and time. In turn, museums' digital practices often assume similar social organisation in their approach towards public engagement. However, the distributed architecture of the Internet has the effect of compressing time with space, enabling group organisation and public spaces to bypass society's structures and instead place the individual at the centre of a network of relationships that self-organises according to the social capital displayed in online behaviour. Accordingly, the thesis argues, there is an apparent mis-match between museums on the Web and the online public, which affects negatively public engagement online.

By bringing Bourdieu's theories of social space and social capital into the realm of the Internet, drawing on cultural historical activity theory and reflecting on a research residency at the Whitworth Art Gallery, this thesis goes on to examine why museums find it challenging to engage with online publics. Its research practice aimed to 'open' the digital collections of the participating museum into the same time and space as the online public. This included triggering, following, documenting and critically reflecting upon processes, challenges and actions of digital engagement and the people involved in them. The thesis reflects on the research practice's organisational and cultural challenges, which relate to the fact that it contradicted the museum's existing departmental organisation and symbolic representation of public access and engagement. It goes on to argue that when digital practices of museums are attuned to the ecology and spatial structure of the online public, the outcomes are misrecognised as unrelated to museums' core practices of social inclusivity. Instead, the argument continues, museums need to open up to emerging concepts of digital public space and publicness, in order for their digital practices to be relevant to online publics.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The seeds of the participatory museum have been with us since the 1970s (Vergo 1989) and from this time, communities are not only consulted but often empowered to take an active role in decision making within the museum. No longer necessarily at the centre, broadcasting knowledge outwards, the museum can be seen as a node in a network of interactive relations between cultural institutions and people. In this context, Charlie Gere drew in 1997 an analogy between contemporary museum practice and the Internet. Although connections are to be drawn between museums, the Internet and the Web of social media platforms its distributed architecture supports, there are also many technological, cultural and spatial differences between them. The importance of these differences to museology are argued here to have been under-researched and their significance mis-recognised, particularly in the area of public visibility and online access to digital collections.

To address this gap in current research, the naturalised assumptions about online resources and social media practices in museums will be unpicked and critically analysed by first tracing the cultural history through which the participatory museum has developed and then contrasting it with the much later sociology of the Internet. When traced through its cultural history the development of public participation in museum processes is seen to have nothing to do with the Internet. Rather, it is a product of 1970s thought and culture, meaning the museum as social medium and distributed network pre-dates the Internet as we know it. The hypothesis explored here is that the work museums do to engage the public online and offline has a history and symbolism that is blind to the social patterns people generate using digital and social technologies. As a result, the thesis will argue, this public engagement work excludes online publics.

The significance of this research trajectory is to begin to establish an understanding of online social exclusion, by which I mean the online public being socially excluded from museums' online resources. Current museological discourse on issues relating to exclusion and inclusion has given little attention to the Internet's structure as a social space; at the same time, there is a growing literature drawing attention to the problems museums have in engaging online publics. Writers such as Pratty (2006), Cameron (2003), Russo and Peacock (2009), Thompson (2010) and Kidd (2011) have queried the

digital practices of museums for the way these relate to the social ecology of online spaces. Jenny Kidd's (2011) recent paper uses 'frame analysis' to call into question the naturalised discourse surrounding social media use by museums, whereas Russo and Peacock (2009) argue for new theoretical models of user behaviour in social media spaces that explore and explain more effectively this medium's ecologies of practice and qualities of space.

Furthermore, sociologists such as Manuel Castells (1996, 2002), Barry Wellman (2002), Felix Stalder (2006, 2013) and Clay Shirky (2008, 2010), who draw their research from the social data of online behaviour, are discovering forms of digital solidarity and network qualities of public space that are particular to the Internet's medium. They argue the case that, in networked space, the relationship between 'individuality' and 'collectivity' changes nature as, when we act as individuals online, this expression of individuality is what attracts connections and relationships. In other words, people construct their individuality through sociability rather than through privacy, that is, through positioning themselves within communicative networks.

These social theorists write about networked individualism as a transition from the predominance of primary relationships, embodied in families, communities and neighbourhoods, to secondary relationships, embodied in associations, to tertiary relationships embodied in 'me centered networks' (Castells 2002: 129). Whereas individuality and collectivity once distinguished private and public spheres, i.e. the difference between an individual and group member, this distinction should no longer be assumed. As Stalder (2013) puts it, the foundation of individuality is shifting from the private realm to the network. Online, it is individual or private actions that make the collective visible, that is, actors create their collective (re)presentation through expressive individual acts of communication. Or as Juan Mateos Garcia (2014) says, 'just consider the "data trail" each of us leaves in our wake every day simply by carrying and using a mobile phone, participating in a social network, or shopping online. The Web is like a vast mirror that reflects our actions, and it can provide insights into our behaviour, and even our desires'. It can reveal the way individually motivated action can be seen in a crowd or network of others who share their social capital.

As will be argued, a sociology of the Internet's social structure compares favourably to Bourdieu's (1984) influential concept of 'social space' where spatial distances represent social distances. For Bourdieu, social space is a set of distinct and coexisting positions that are exterior to one another and are defined in relation to one-another. At the core of this conception of space is the notion of individual subjectivity in the way we perceive ourselves as different to others, and the way this positioning is displayed in lifestyle

choices that indicate social distances between different classes of people. He writes 'It is this sense of one's place which, in interactions, leads people whom we call in French "les gens modestes," "common folks," to keep to their common place, and the others to "keep their distance," to "maintain their rank", and to "not get familiar." These strategies, it should be noted in passing, may be perfectly unconscious and take the form of what is called timidity or arrogance. In effect, social distances are inscribed in bodies or, more precisely, into the relation to the body, to language and to time.' (Bourdieu 1989: 17) A 'sense of one's place' is for Bourdieu an expression of one's position within space and, as a result, this sense appears 'self-evident', natural.

Through Bourdieu we learn that our individual choice to be a museum visitor, or non-visitor, is dependent on the way we perceive ourselves relative to others, i.e the protocols that keep spatial relationships stable. However, important to the way this thesis understands the Internet's sociology is a distinction separating Bourdieu's 'social space' from the way 'public space' is currently discussed and used in museum practices. In Bourdieu's model of space the individuals that make up the distinct groups and networks he maps are neither social nor public. The lifestyle data he used to identify the spatial position of distinct classes was taken from individuals in the 1960s, who were geographically distributed throughout France and, interestingly, unknown to one another. This approach to data collection meant he was able to map commonalities between disconnected individuals and theorise the way those commonalities are reproduced through society's structures and cultures, such as the way educational attainment acts on self-perception to reproduce class distinctions.

In contrast, the contemporary discourse of museums as public space and social space often concern notions of participation, dialogue or exchange between different communities, whose members are known to one another and where the museum acts as the medium organising these distinct community groups into the same time and space, thus facilitating engagement between them. Comparisons are often drawn between museums as public fora or spaces of discourse as well as being connected to Habermas's notion of the public sphere (Barrett 2011, Bennett 1998, Clifford 1997, Manchester Museum 2010).

However, evidence that the social conditions stemming from the Internet's sociology map against Bourdieu's modelling of social space would mean that the current discourse of museums as public and social space would exclude many online publics. Bourdieu did not intend the social patterns he plotted to be read as real communities, networks or public spaces, however the sociology of the Internet changes his assumption and, therefore, also changes the way we can consider inclusion and

exclusion to museums. If, as this thesis will argue, Bourdieu's model of the structure of social space is a representation of online people and public spaces, it can also be argued that depending on the digital publics position in this social structure, they stand to be excluded from the online resources and social media activities of museums. Consequently, neither online museum collections nor invitations for the public to join museums on social media are socially inclusive; a distinction can thus be made between being on the Web and being of the Web.

It is exactly the consideration of those online social patterns and social diversity that this thesis aims to draw on to examine both their impact on public engagement online in museums and the extent to which museum practice around public engagement considers the particular characteristics of the 'online public'. Thus it is rationalised that by working from within the institutionalised contexts of a museum, with the aim of opening their digital collections into the same time and space as the online public, a good understanding of the organisational and cultural issues that this practice produces can be developed. As it will be explained below, this practice-based research will draw on the real life context of a museum, the Whitworth Art Gallery,¹ and on the way online behaviour has led sociologists to identify distinct patterns in social organisation and new structures of public space, in order to explore how these patterns and spaces can inform approaches to open access to WAG's digital collections.

1.2 Cultural historical context to this study: public policy and museum reform

Hooper-Greenhill argues that, 'museums have always had to modify how they worked, and what they did, according to the context, the plays of power, and the social, economic, and political imperatives that surrounded them' (1992: 1). From her perspective, in order to understand museums in the contemporary age, it is necessary to consider the societal context and culture within which museums are located. Accordingly, we find that both the most stable and the most disruptive beliefs shaping museum development into new forms are contained or, more precisely, coined in whatever notion of being 'public' currently has traction.

The developmental history at Manchester Museum (hereinafter MM)² tells us the story of this dialectic. For the public to be granted unhindered 'street access' to the MM would have been unimaginable in the 1800s. Rather, ivory admission tickets to the early

¹ Hereinafter WAG

² A sister organisation to the WAG. Although this thesis' research practice focuses on WAG, MM will be referred to in various instances to inform the policy and organisational context within which WAG operates (e.g. both being University of Manchester Museums). See more about the use of MM in this thesis in Chapter 4.

collections were issued to those designated as 'members' by virtue of belonging to the prestigious Manchester Natural History Society. 'Short of cash', the society needed to raise additional finances and made the decision to open the museum to the paying public on 14th February 1840 (Lynch 2001). On this occasion the police were asked to be present in order to protect the 'Property of the Society'. The Chief Constable and his officers were officially thanked for keeping all in order by allowing admission to 'no more than ten at a time' (Manchester Natural History Society', unpublished minutes of February, 1840 *cited* in Lynch 2001). That MM's first concept of being 'open' and 'public' is unrecognisable compared to today tells us that museum culture is neither absolute nor neutral but the result of the way performances and decisions of museums are actively producing cultural meaning; this in turn is influencing the image the public hold of them. As can be seen through museums' developmental histories, any changes in the way they open to the public are produced or mediated via a full range of cultural influences. These include the political climate for the funding, perceived public interest, the social agency of museums as vehicles for education and public policy and latterly the Internet (Bennett 1995, Barrett 2011).

Since 2004, a growing number of experimental museum projects have explored the way online networked space changes the organisational relationship between publics and collections and considered how this digital mediation can influence museum approaches to their onsite exhibition spaces (Bernstein 2008, Bernstein 2012, Chan 2006, Cameron 2008, Proctor 2014). However, the literature often reveals such projects as bound within the museums' established social media networks and community definitions and thereby disconnected from the culturally diverse social space that is the Internet. The extent to which digital innovation is seen to be contained within established institutional frames indicates that digital practices that explore and experiment with the theory of networked space are often detached from the diversity of the online public. In this respect, institutionalised mediation of digital innovation implies that the organisational culture of museums towards digital technology does not respond to the cultural characteristics and rules of the Web as a public and social space of interaction. There is thus a case to be made for museum reform.

This argument borrows from the analysis of museum historian and social theorist Tony Bennett of the distinction between the way public policy structures museums, which are at the same time culturally bound by their public remit and democratic ethic. For instance, it will be seen that WAG's practices in public engagement, in line with other UK university museums, intersect with Government policy at the local/city level of governance; arguably this influence is structuring the museum's fundamental values for social responsibility. The way museums rationalise resourcing digital practices is

informed by these values, yet their relevance to the networked publics is unknown. Accordingly, there is potential disjuncture or contradiction lying between the public policy that structures museums and the democratic ethic that defines them, which Bennett (1995) argues produces an insatiable discourse for museum reform. As an instrument of governing a civil society, museums function as 'a powerful means for differentiating populations rather than addressing an undifferentiated democratic public' (Bennett 1995: 90). He adds that the public remit of museums is founded on a contradictory logic 'characterized by two principles: first the principle of public rights sustaining the demand that museums should be equally open and accessible to all; and second, the principle of representational adequacy sustaining the demand that museums should adequately represent cultures and values of different sections of the public' (Bennett 1995: 90). These aims are embodied in the 'democratic rhetoric governing the conception of public museums as vehicles for popular education'. However, these aims are mismatched with the museums 'actual functioning as instruments for the reform of public manners'; calls for museum reform are thus most pronounced where there is a mis-match between the democratic rhetoric 'govern[ing] the stated aims of the museum and the political rationality embodied in the actual modes of their functioning' (Bennett 1995: 90). Yet, calls for museums to reform their online resources and digital practices are muted, concealing a contradiction in the ways museums think about 'the online public' and 'inclusion'.

When the current museum discourse in digital innovation is juxtaposed against the sociology of the Internet it seems to be missing any understanding of the way social exclusion manifests online or a useable definition of networked publics against which to evaluate its digital practices. As things stand, the networked individual and networked space are mostly excluded from museum online processes. In *Recoding the Museum*, Ross Parry highlights the key challenges facing museums 'when confronted with the exponential growth of the web, to reshape and redistribute themselves to accommodate this new workflow and this new ontology'. For Parry, such a 'recoding' requires a fundamental paradigmatic shift that may prove impossible (Parry 2007: 95). In this thesis, the established organisational systems and behavioural norm of the museum prove major barriers in opening their digital collections to the online public.

1.3 Research Questions

In context of the above, the research space identified is between the institutionalisation of museums' digital practices and online resources and sociology's particular understandings of online structures and organisation. If, as this thesis will argue, museums are neither open to, nor inclusive of, networked publics, and therefore not

evenly distributed in the digital social space, they would not be publicly accessible; this would seemingly contradict both the museums' public remit and their democratic ethic. In other words, there is a disjuncture between online publics and the public museum. Evidence that many museums are persisting in their rationale for investing in digital practices, based on conceptions of public unrelated to the social data stemming from online behaviour, is indicative of an institutionalised culture that is blinded to the relevance of the Internet as a social space. This perspective is situated in Castells' and Cardoso's argument (2005: 20):

In this early 21st century we are at the crossroads of the development of the network society. We are witnessing an increasing contradiction between current social relationships of production and the potential expansion of formidable productive forces. This may be the only lasting contribution from the classical Marxist theory. The human potential embedded in new communication and genetic technologies, in networking, in the new forms of social organization and cultural invention, is truly extraordinary. Yet, existing social systems stall the dynamics of creativity, and, if challenged with competition, tend to implode.

However, while Castells' and Cardoso's theorisation of a 'networked society' is convincing in its articulation of new modes of social organisation, it will be argued that their evolutionary approach to the emergence of human networks tends to ignore the fact that public institutions like museums, embedded in their own history of organisational development, offer a tough and frequently intelligent resistance to embracing notions of public and publicness based on a networked society.

Accordingly, the thesis' research questions concern the cultural differences separating networked publics from public museums and relate to a practice-led research residency at WAG that involved activities and projects which aimed to 'open up' their digital cultural resources, enabling them to be visible to and usable by networked publics. This practice included 'triggering' or following, documenting and critically reflecting upon processes, challenges and actions and the people involved in them. On this basis, the core research question of this thesis is: 'What are the organisational and institutional limitations, opportunities and outcomes that arise when the museum's digital practices are informed by and address the qualities of the digital public space?'

The premise of this question is that museums largely fail to follow and materialise their principle of social inclusion in their interaction with online publics, because they ignore the complex and socially diverse social space of the Internet. In this respect, the core question of this thesis breaks into the following sub questions: Firstly, what are the digital practices that allow museums to adapt to and address the Internet's social structure? Secondly, in what way would museums need to reform culturally and

organisationally in order to open into 'digital flows'? And thirdly, what challenges would this reform face against established organisational structures and practices of museums?

All these lines of enquiry are intended to open a new research space based on the premise that the democratic principle of social inclusion structuring all public museums is contradicted by social data from online behaviour. This data implies a mismatch between the democratic rhetoric of museums' mission statements on the one hand, and the political rationality embodied in their function on the other. In this respect, the rationale informing museums' digital practices is currently in the interstices of politics and policy governing museum processes which are elsewhere than the digital social space and associated public networks.

In this context, the core research question provides a foundation from which to build various lines of enquiry that use a practice-based research methodology. For instance, how would a practice to close distances separating museums on the Web from the public online be evaluated within the existing value frameworks of the museum profession? And what form of practice would open the museum to be inclusive of networked publics? When a research practice is novel and counter to the established norms of an institution's culture and organisational procedures, the way it pushes to expand those parameters and is at the same time constrained by them proves a rich source of qualitative research data on the institutionalised mediation of museum digital practices.

1.4 Practical scope of the research

To approach these questions the research draws on a practice-led research residency that was based on a broad agreement with the WAG to explore opportunities in digital engagement informed by the theory of networked public space. This practice (whose remit and methodology are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4) had the intention of producing two-way engagement between WAG and the networked public space, as if they were complexly, mutually and causally related; the idea being that it would produce a 'contact zone' between digital publics and gallery communication.

The research practice opened the core collections metadata of the WAG to be public in the same social space as the online public, therefore enabling their digital collections to travel in the same digital flows as the online public. For the institution to re-configure as hub from which to open its data, even on a small and experimental scale, necessitated it negotiating certain kinds of cultural and organisational disturbances which highlighted

the tension between digital innovation and established organisational and workplace culture. This research intervened digital practices that were novel to the organisation, disrupting its established workflows, but was itself mediated by the institution's processes and organisational cultures.

In this context, the methods of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) provide the tools for analysing mediation in workplace processes by using the principle of contradiction, i.e. a dialectical movement where participants in the activity of opening collections data began to question and deviate from established norms. As will be argued here, practices that open digital collections by making them visible online in personalised, networked and public spaces are in juxtaposition with the fundamental properties or values networking museums in society. The arguments supporting this point of view thus facilitate discussion on the organisational and institutional limitations, opportunities and outcomes that arise when the museum's delivery of its public remit is informed by the qualities of the digital public space. In this respect it will be seen that opening collections data into digital flows at WAG did not symbolise 'public engagement' or 'social inclusion' in the same way that these ideals are legitimised via its existing system of dispositions to certain practices in public access, public engagement and social responsibility. The symbolic, in Bourdieu's view, is a formidable but highly elusive type of power, one that affects a 'mysterious alchemy' (1991: 233). For instance, WAG staff expressed difficulty in seeing how the approach taken to opening collections data related to resolving a problem of social exclusion. Moreover, in the time spent as a researcher in residence in the organisation, I struggled to convince colleagues that an increasingly networked public required different concepts of public and audience to those they used.

1.5 Research as practice and a 'theory of practice'

Bourdieu's (1977) 'theory of practice' contributes the concept of 'habitus' as the mediating link or feedback loop between theory and practice. Following this logic, the 'digital social space' shifts from theory to 'habitus', reflecting a set of beliefs guiding the researcher's thinking and behaviour. The concept of habitus as the bridge between theory and practice is a 'thinking tool' for the researcher to reflect on the way they are engaged in practical action by taking into account the duality of personal theory in social practice. This helpful concept is useful in research practice due to the fact that it combines room for individual reason-based action and social determination, thus helping to conceptualize the relation between structure and agency in a particular social eco-system such as that of a museum's working environment.

In this respect, the interaction between those who work in museums and the culture they operate in has the potential to cause contradictions between structure and agency. Recently, Park (2014) has argued the case that the methods of CHAT provide an analytical method where the practice or activity of the researcher is structured within dynamic dialectical units. The methods of CHAT closely align with Bourdieu's (1977) 'theory of practice' in the way it brings together the subject/agent of the activity, the tools/environment that mediate the action and the past, present and potential future forms of the activity.

CHAT is a philosophical and cross-disciplinary framework that aims to examine the actions of people on both an individual and social level and supplies this thesis with a conceptual tool for analysing digital practices in the social systems of museums and galleries. As Kuutti (1996) and Vygotsky (1978) suggest, human activity should be understood by analysing the role of tools or artefacts in everyday existence, maintaining that the mind emerges through interaction with the environment. In short, the use of activity theory enables the researcher to investigate and understand their practice at the personal and social level, which produces a feedback loop between the researcher and their research environment. Through this reflection it is possible to explore how and why museum practitioners employ digital technology (Tools) and which stakeholders (Community) in a society impact and mediate their activity.

The application of CHAT in research design and analysis has meant that museum culture is now open to analytical scrutiny, bringing transparency into play to show the rules, roles and expectations that shape their digital practices. It is a method that supports analysis of how people think and act in museum contexts. According to Edward's (2011), CHAT researchers attempt to identify the cultural conditions which give rise to language and the way the history of language creates those conditions.

Overall, this thesis contributes to the fields of museology, digital heritage, arts management and sociology. As already mentioned, this research adds to existing and growing literature that aims to examine theoretical approaches and practical applications of the so-called 'digital engagement' in the museum and heritage sector. Even more, by drawing on a practice-based research, it offers a situated, close and informed examination on how museums understand social inclusion/exclusion of their online resources and digital practices and the aims, scope, challenges and outcomes of their digital engagement practices. The thesis makes also a significant and innovative contribution to the use of CHAT as appropriate conceptual framework and research methodology in practice-based reflective research in museology and related fields.

1.6 Chapter outline

This introductory chapter has presented the broad context within which this study is located, articulating the intent and focus of this inquiry. The thesis contains a further six chapters including the Conclusion. Chapter 2 informs this study by positioning further the research within a theoretical, cultural and historical framework. It will undertake a critical review of literature in the field of museology (broadly defined), looking at the relation between museums and public media, the technology of public media and public policy, and the role of social theory in cultural concepts of public. It concludes with a discussion on recent literature where attention is drawn to cultural distances separating museums on the Web from the public online.

Chapter 3 expands the literature analysis but this time in the field of Internet studies and with particular emphasis on sociologists whose research draws from the social data of online behaviour. Through the process of analysis it maps the particular modes of social, cultural and symbolic capital unique to the Internet as a digital public space. Participating in a digital culture is treated as reflecting a 'competence' learnt through socialization and time invested online that cannot be separated from the person and how they interpret and act in the world around them. In this respect, the chapter aims to rationalise research that investigates institutionalised mediation of digital practices in order to better understand the organisational and cultural barriers inhibiting museums from opening into and engaging with the digital public space. It concludes with an analysis of the way concepts of public stemming from the Internet are translated and evaluated via museum processes.

Chapter 4 outlines the research methodology used by explaining how CHAT has been applied as a conceptual framework in this practice- or activity-based research. It will provide the definition and the components of this methodology as well as the way in which it is employed to investigate social systems surrounding museums and their workers. Data collection methods and data analysis strategies are described with an explanation of the approaches used. The chapter concludes with a description and justification of the data analysis techniques employed.

Chapter 5 provides a detailed analysis of WAG's practices in public engagement and online presence in order to illustrate the earlier chapters' arguments and bring what has thus far been a largely theoretical set of ideas into a real world context. It will map how the WAG, structured by external agencies in the form of funders and policy makers, has evolved an ideology of public space which is contrary to the digital public space.

From an activity theory perspective, Chapter 6 follows a research intervention at the WAG and presents an analysis of findings emerging from the interpretation of the qualitative data this practice produced. It consists of three related practices to open digital collections into the same space and time as the online public, each cycle of practice producing a set of key findings. These are examined in relation to the CHAT concepts of object orientation, making sense of the learning object, and the division of labour within the museum's organisation of labour. In addition, a brief cross-case analysis is provided. The chapter concludes that, when digital practices of a public museum are attuned to the ecology and spatial structure of the online public, the outcomes are misrecognised as unrelated to the gallery's core practices in social inclusivity, an effect that is argued to be a form of symbolic power holding back digital innovation.

Chapter 7, the final chapter, provides a summary of the thesis' key findings, identifying a number of implications emerging and highlighting limitations and future directions for research. An understanding of online social exclusion in digital public space is developed by exposing and exploiting a conundrum in the way Bourdieu's concept of social space can both rationalise and criticise museums' use of social media and the management of their digital and online resources.

Chapter 2. Museums and the Web as public media

2.1 Introduction

Charlie Gere (1997) observed that similarities between the museum as a distributed network and the Internet tie the public's museum experience to the influence of technology. This, he argues, implies that the changing technology of public media relates to the way museums have developed their remit as public institutions. His 1997 conference paper 'Museums, Contact Zones and the Internet' makes an analogy between contemporary museum practice and the Internet, the latter acting as the paradigm for the former. 'No longer at the centre, broadcasting knowledge outwards, the museum can be seen as a node in a network of interactive relations, where culture, communities and people can meet and exchange ideas' (Gere 1997: 63). Thus, the museum as public forum or contact zone is considered indicative of the way information flows in distributed networks.³ However, in making this analogy, Gere's concern was to promote a note of caution and he goes on to lay out the case that "the Internet brings

³ In 2005 the Museums Association (MA) acknowledged that museums 'are starting to harness new technologies and the huge potential they have to reach new audiences and change the ways collections can be used' (Museums Association 2005: 8).

with it issues in relation to power as complex as those found in the traditional model of the museum” (1997: 65). Since the early 2000s museum theorists have progressed Gere’s analogy, adapting it to accommodate the growth of social media and smart mobile Web services, which are collapsing any spatial distinction and distance between the museum on the one hand and the Internet on the other (Cameron 2008, Parry 2007, Bernstein 2008, Proctor 2010). However, what is interesting to this chapter is that this progression of Gere’s analogy does not also carry forward his concerns about asymmetric power relations in networked space or the issue of social exclusion this implies.

Gere’s argument borrows heavily from the museum historian and social theorist Tony Bennett (1995) and centres on his subtle and complex analysis of the way power manifests through technologies that mediate public or social space. For Bennett, the technology of public media produces culture by mediating the way people come to know themselves in relation to others. In this chapter it will be seen that, following Bennett, implicit power is exercised by excluding those publics that fall outside the cultural parameters and variables of the medium of the Web.

Accordingly and drawing on the analysis of Gere’s and Bennett’s views, this chapter will lay out the case that, while museums often display qualities of a distributed network of relationships, they do not engage with the socially diverse, complex and self-organising public of the Internet. This discussion relates to as yet unanswered research questions, such as, whether putting collections’ databases online really fulfils the information and pedagogic needs of an emerging community of online users originally raised in the 1990s by Sarasan & Donovan (1998). This vein of questioning has been further developed by Russo and Peacock (2009) and Kidd (2011) who argue for new theoretical models of user behaviour in online spaces that explore and explain more effectively the Internet’s ecologies of practice and qualities of space. Their research is interpreted here as implying that the digital practices in museums, more often than not, do not recognise the structure of social space online which suggests, an institutionalised blindness on the part of the museum.

This analysis aims to distinguish the difference between being *on* the Internet and being *of* the Internet. It will be argued that the democratic ethic of museum’s social inclusivity is contradicted in the museum’s adoption of the Internet and, as such, there is an argument for museum reform. Following in the footsteps of Tony Bennett (1995), who argues that calls for museum reform are most pronounced where there is a mis-match between the democratic rhetoric ‘govern[ing] the stated aims of the museum and the political rationality embodied in the actual modes of their functioning’ (Bennett 1995: 90),

this chapter identifies a mis-match between museums on the Web and the public online. For Bennett, an insatiable discourse for museum reform is due to the fact that although museums remain defined by their democratic ethic of social inclusivity, publicness and public diversity are unstable concepts. The bodies that fund museums and galleries, as well as government policy, cultural theory and communications technology, consistently generate new definitions of 'public' with destabilising effects on the way museums translate their public remit. In this respect, it will be seen that there is growing evidence in the literature that museums on the Web and digital collections are excluding the public online. In this respect, Gere's argument will be reimagined for its current relevance to museum discourse.

One significant departure, however, is that the synchronous development of museums and the Internet which Gere assumes (1997) is shown to be untrue. Rather, it will be seen that the development of public museums from a broadcast and mass medium to a distributed and social medium has been written about from two distinct perspectives that give the false impression of being converged and related to one another. On the one hand, the changing technology of public media, first mass and then social, is assumed to be synchronous with changes in museum communication; this is Gere's assumption. On the other hand, the museum as social and distributed medium has a historic and ongoing correspondence with sociology and cultural theory (Merriman 1991, Barrett 2011). For instance, in 'Sociology and the Social Aspects of Museums' Gordon Fyfe (2006) traces a synchronous development between museum practice and sociology, showing a convergence between them. Moreover, sociology's contemporary interest in museums and vice versa is traced as an outcome of a broad theoretical turn in the 1970s towards cultural forms of understanding social organisation (Bourdieu, 1977, de Certeau 1974, Foucault 1977).

Consequently, the networked space and distributed information flows that Gere identified to the Museum, and the reason he built his analogy between Museums and the Internet, is argued here to have nothing to do with it. Instead, the appearance of similarity is simply an uncanny, yet unconnected, effect of sociology's influence on the institutionalisation and professionalisation of the way museums approach and practise their public remit on, and off-line.

When Gere (1997) argued that the Internet brings with it issues in relation to power as complex as those found in the traditional model of the museum, he did not have in mind that the online version of the museum would exclude the online public. Yet, this will be the conclusion that this chapter will come to and the research questions and methodology will be rationalised against this cultural historical reading of the museum.

2.2 An uncanny association: Museums, Contact Zones and the Internet

The evidence on which Gere drew his analogy between museums and the Internet came from James Clifford's (1997) notion of 'Museums as Contact Zones', a term Clifford had taken from the writings of the anthropologist Mary Louise Pratt (1992). Pratt used it in the context of colonial history to distinguish between two types of encounter, the first being where the relationship between colonial power and 'other' is within a binary opposition and where the information flows one way, from centre to periphery. The second, a contact zone, is a de-centred space through which communication flows two ways, or even many ways. Illustrating this notion of de-centred space in the museum context, Clifford's research traced the nuance of the social dialectics where the collection acted to interface museum workers with the communities they collected from, and through this mediation networked two distinct perspectives.

To make the connection to the Internet, Gere draws on Clifford's example of a process of consultation undertaken at the Portland Museum with members of the Tlingit tribe, a group of Northwest Coast Natives. Here, Clifford notes that "The Tlingit history did not illustrate or contextualise the object of the collection, but provoked ongoing voices of struggle' (1997:193), which reflected their continual conflict over land rights. From the position of the collecting museum this was a disruptive history that could not be confined to the museum's contexts of historicity. Through this, Clifford is alerting us to the two-way real time nature of the ongoing relations of use and meaning with collections and the difficulties and tensions these can generate.

Seen from Clifford's perspective, museums are institutions that manage the travel of objects between different cultural contexts 'as a result of political and economic, and intellectual relations that are not permanent' (Clifford 1997, cited in Bennett 1998:189). Accordingly, 'when museums are seen as contact zones, their organising structure as a collection becomes an ongoing historical, political, moral relationship - a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull' (Clifford 1997:192). However, when seen from Gere's perspective, these exchanges delineate a networked space held together by the interdependence of its constituent parts or nodes. In this respect, Gere's reading of Clifford is alert to his use of language in describing processes of communication and exchange within socio-historical networks (Gere 1997:63).

Indeed, in order to delineate his ideas, Clifford uses words and terms connected more with communication, than with the collecting objects. He talks of reciprocal communication with 'communities', of 'interactive processes' and of 'interaction and

performative improvisation'. He also invokes powerful metaphors of networks. Indeed the idea of the contact zone itself is suggestive of a de-centered space of networks, as opposed to the centre/periphery model more traditionally associated with museums.

Clifford's observation of museum function as a distributed communication medium has exercised a great deal of influence on museum theory and practice. Key works have been Sharon Macdonald's *The Politics of Display* (1998), Tony Bennett's *Culture, A Reformer's Science* (1998), Andrea Witcomb's *Re-imagining the Museum* (2003), Bernadette Lynch's 'If the Museum is the Gateway, who is the Gatekeeper' (2001), Ruth Phillip's *Re-placing Objects* (2005), Anthony Shelton's *Museums and Anthropologies* (2006) and Rhiannon Mason's *Culture Theory and Museum Studies* (2006). As Dibley (2005) makes clear, characterizing all of these works is their engagement with the idea of a new collaborative or participatory approach to representation in museums.

Furthermore, Gere's 1997 comparison of the similarities between museum practice and the Internet was predictive of the type of literature to follow (e.g. Cameron 2008, Chan 2010, Parry 2007, Proctor 2010, Hodgson and Poulter 2012, Simon 2010). For example, in 'Contact Networks for Digital Reciprocity' Hodgson and Poulter (2012) give simultaneous attention to museum practices that use physical in-reach to bring communities together to have small scale, intensive, object-based engagements and 'digital contact networks'. These digitally mediated engagements are argued to assume many of the characteristics of physical in-reach. They write (Hodgson and Poulter 2012:82):

in representing collections the accessible web museum could become the social web museum; poly-vocal, participative and representative. Just as museum in-reach programs throughout the 1990s had transformed how visitors physically engage directly with museums, now, with the facility to move from broadcast to omni-directional communication, so too could the social web museum transform museum representation of collections and the ways in which their online visitors engage with object-based information. Museum web in-reach could be a possibility.

In this vein Adair (2011) suggests, user-created content matters because it has the potential to redefine visitor perceptions of historical authority and authenticity.

Similarly Kidd (2014) makes clear that when talking about democratisation and dialogue, or the museum as a 'contact zone' it has become common to refer to digital media. She argues that we should think of the contemporary museum as a transmedia text involving

forms of interlinked storytelling extending across multiple platforms. Kidd draws on the work of Kelly L.(2013) and Giaccardi (2012) to make the point that the 'tools' often tasked with facilitating such storytelling are various social media. Especially relevant to comparisons between the museum as contact zone and the Internet is Kidd's suggestion that a more fragmentary approach to narrative in museums might result in 'serendipity, losing one's way, encountering conflicting versions of events and not expecting them to be reconciled, even unexpected surprise' (Kidd 2014: 36). Kidd's broader proposition is to see the museum as a form of media, and to call for museum professionals to critique their own role as media content producers.

As a public medium, Drotner and Schrøder (2013) argue social media fundamentally invite museums to re-orchestrate their communicative models from a mass medium (one to many) to a user perspective (many-to-many). From their perspective, this re-orchestration lets museums begin to find new answers to what they communicate, how and to whom they communicate, where and when their communication takes place, and, importantly, for what ends. Yet, it is the work of Nina Simon (2010), a designer of participatory museum spaces, that most clearly articulates Gere's analogy. Her work produces open platforms in the museum that explore the implications and opportunities in engaging with a public increasingly familiar with new modes of interaction as a result of nearly two decades of online participatory media. As Gere suggested the Internet in particular offers the possibility of interactive engagement due to the fact it is 'a space of exchange, negotiation and communication' (1997: 1).

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Alternatively, Parry's (2007) book *Re-coding the Museum* uses Manovich's (1999) exploration of the Internet as a medium of connectivity, mobility and personalisation, observing that these properties are analogous to low-tech museum practices. He gives examples of practices that give the audience the opportunity to participate and express themselves in the museum, making both their view and responses known to others: 'people's shows, community galleries, visitor books, comment boards, gallery tours, participatory workshops' (Parry 2007: 108).

In all these examples there is engagement with the idea of a collaborative or participatory approach to representation in museums which is familiar to the language of the Internet and social media but not necessarily reliant on its technology. However, when technology is added to the mix it is seen to augment an already established culture which frames museum practice. In this respect, an interesting example of the use of mobile technologies is Halsey Burgund's (2010) audio installation 'Scapes', which uses open source platforms and GPS technology in mobile applications so that visitors can use their iPhones to both record and leave their comments on the artworks as they move around the park. An algorithm then blends these voices with each other and plays them back to visitors' iPhones at the locations at which they were recorded. This interaction creates a two-way audio experience for museum visitors, influenced significantly by their physical location on the deCordova grounds, which collapses any spatial distinction between the museum on the one hand and the Internet on the other. With the growing number of museum practices which harness smart mobile technologies it is unsurprising that, in the language of leading museum professionals, we now find a tendency to converge the Internet and the museum as the same public space (Proctor 2010, Chan 2010).

Nancy Proctor, who is 'Deputy Director for Digital Experience and Communications at Baltimore Museum of Art', for instance, traces a shift towards a distributed 'Network Model' which she illustrates by drawing a loose comparison with Internet search engines. In her words (Proctor 2010):

Every time you perform a Google search, you have tapped into a distributed network. The original content that forms the results page – itself a 'mash-up' – exists on a number of different computers, physical and virtual, each potentially in its own network or grid. It is delivered to you in an entirely new and personalized context on the basis of your search interests and terms at that precise moment in time; yet the original digital assets are completely untouched in their original form, and you can easily trace the results content back to discover its full context and original publication environment.

By analogising the museum with the way Google search returns content, Proctor is illustrating a distributed museum in which original content that exists in various locations is re-organised or recontextualized relative to the visitor in real time via their physical location and mobile interface. In her model the value and authority of the 'museum object' is not diminished but rather increased by being placed in new contexts alongside content from other sources. Museum information, rather than being disseminated outwards from a centre point, is discovered in its intersections and interstices, through the juxtapositions that can happen when human action and museum information are facilitated to self organise relative to one another. Proctor's concept of a distributed

museum collapses any spatial distinction between the museum on site and the social environment online. And this apparent opening out of the museum experience through the everyday use of mobile media fits well conceptually with the narratives of 'new museology' (Vergo 1989, Hooper-Greenhill 2000).

Distinguishing itself from an 'old museology', which was about museum methods of administration, education or conservation that, according to Vergo (1989), had little to do with the cultural, conceptual and contextual underpinnings of museum practice, 'new museology' considers museums and the meanings of their collections to be 'not as fixed and bounded but as contextual and contingent' (McDonald 2011: 24). For instance, in *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* Hooper-Greenhill writes, 'by introducing strategies to make the Museum more inclusive and relevant, the closed space of the museum has begun to open, and the division between the private and the public has begun to close' (2000: 92). Here, a de-centering of the flow of information between museums and the public is implied. The museum online and onsite has developed as a networked space facilitating and fostering communities of interest around its concepts, objects and events; it is thus no longer simply curating exhibitions and collections but also conversations.

However, what we do not learn from the language that is currently comparing and collapsing the museum and the Internet into the same distributed space is the risk that certain constituencies of public are external to the network and thus at risk of social exclusion from the network. In other words, to go back to Gere's warning, 'the Internet brings with it issues in relation to power as complex as those found in the traditional model of the museum' (1997: 65).

2.3 Museums and other public media as 'cultural technologies'

Gere raised and questioned the possibility of asymmetric power relations in the distributed architecture of the Internet to support reciprocal communication networks. In this section we will look at how Gere constructs this argument and its critical relevance to the way museums approach their digital practices. The point that will be made here is that public media, which we can include both museums and the Internet, are culturally biased and complicit in producing the way public and publicness takes form. From this perspective, media are seen to be excluding as many publics as they include or produce.

Gere's argument draws on Tony Bennett's essay 'The Exhibitionary Complex' (1995) and balances on the idea that the technology of public media carries with it cultural

biases and power relations. Bennett's argument follows in the footsteps of Douglas Crimp (1993) in applying Michel Foucault's (1979, 1977) cultural theories about the way the technology of prisons relates to the museum as public space and public medium. Thus Bennett provides Gere with a Foucauldian perspective that re-conceptualizes the exhibitionary practices of the 19th century museum in context of the government's use of panoptic 'all seeing' (Foucault, 1979: 217) technologies as mediators of both prisoner and public behaviour. The panopticon was a prison model proposed by Jeremy Bentham in which every prisoner can be seen at all times from a central observation point; as they are never certain whether they are being watched they regulate their own behaviour. Foucault (1979) suggests that, under the panoptic gaze, the crowd was replaced by a collection of separated individualities through instruments of disciplinary power. He argues that this effect transcends the prison walls by withdrawing the spectacle of punishment away from the public gaze and thereby recasting criminality as a social issue of order that can be corrected within society.

Bennett's (1995) essay thus maps a simultaneous development between the exhibitionary practices of the 19th century and Bentham's enlightened prison. He argues that, while the 'carceral archipelago' of the penitentiary was developed to produce public space within its walls and to be simultaneously bounded from the rest of society, the exhibitionary complex manipulated public space/ vision in a different way. It became 'a set of cultural technologies with the aim of organising a voluntary self-regulating citizenry' (Bennett, 1995 cited in Gere 1997: 65).

In Bennett's analysis, the museum's medium manipulates public space by enabling visitors to see themselves in relation to representations of nationhood. His argument overlaps with Duncan's and Wallach's (1980) account of a visit to the museum in the 19th century as a 'right of citizenship'; in their reading, a modern population, despite divisions of class, gender and ethnicity, came to share a commonality of one nation through the museum's visual representations as a public space. As Bennett notes, the technology of museums encouraged visitors to view each other from different perspectives; from a chronological regime to a taxonomic, categorical order, the ways in which people were divided were rhetorical strategies of power that turned the museum into an instrument of nation state. In Bennett's words (1995: 64):

through the provision of object lessons in power - the power to command and arrange things and bodies for public display [...] to allow the people, and en masse rather than individually, to know rather than be known, to become the subjects rather than the objects of knowledge. Yet, ideally, they sought also to allow the people to know and thence to regulate themselves; to become, in seeing themselves from the side of power, both the subjects and objects of knowledge, knowing power and what power knows, and knowing themselves as

(ideally) known by power, interiorizing its gaze as a principle of self-surveillance and, hence, self-regulation.

With an emphasis on implicit as opposed to explicit power, we can see how Foucault's (1979) analysis of prison technology is Bennett's toolkit for unraveling the exhibitionary complex embodied in the architectural forms of the museum's public spaces. Yet, from Gere's perspective, Bennett's (1995) analysis also makes it possible to see museums as comparable to mass media, such as film, radio, and television, technologies which emerged out of the 19th century and, more to the point, manifest 19th century ideologies of the spectator (1997). In a similar vein to Gere, Duncan and Wallach (1980), like Bennett, also draw our attention to the museum exhibition as a medium and link its mediation within a particular cultural understanding of the public. Their research is particularly interested in the technologies of vision that were developed in the early 19th century and which codified and normalised the observer/subject within rigidly defined systems of visual consumption.

Through Bennett, Gere is able to make the case that the museum as a public medium imitates the technology of such media, making it complicit in producing and structuring the way the public come to know themselves and the way publicness manifests. This gives him the necessary historical context to argue that the technology of media is a form of implicit power in the sense that public and medium are flip sides of the same coin. It is also an asymmetrical power in the sense that media both include/produce publics and exclude those publics that are outside their mediation. Thus, Bennett provides Gere with the historical and analytical context with which to juxtapose Clifford's re-conception of the museum as a 'contact zone'.

Gere's reading of Bennett had already established the notion of the museum as a communication technology and brought to attention the potential for cultural bias in technological mediation. Bennett, therefore, supports Gere to critically question the way contemporary museum communication is being shaped in the form of the Internet, and to challenge the democratic assertions on which this development is being represented. This opens a critical space which means the museum can now be queried for being the technology that supports the distributed space of the network. Surely the duality of museums as both public and medium should not go unchecked.

2.4 A problem of duality; museums as both public and medium

With the benefit of hindsight, Gere's juxtaposition of Bennett's 'exhibitionary complex' with Clifford's contact zone is intriguing as a premonition of the argument that Bennett

mounted in his critique of Clifford's concept the year following Gere. In *Culture, A Reformer's Science* (1998) Bennett writes, 'I am particularly Interested in the role that arguments about community play in Clifford's essay 'Museums as Contact Zones' in view of the historical coordinates which organise his discussion' (1998: 188). In Bennett's analysis, Clifford's account of the contact relations oversimplifies museums in society. Instead, he makes the case that a cultural-historical reading of the relation between museums, government and communities implicates the museum as producer of the communities it is in contact with, i.e. implicit power is hidden in the notion of a contact zone.

Bennett's argument relies on being able to shift analytical emphasis onto the wider cultural forces that shape social organisation and thereby unravel community through its historic roots. He is keen to trace the social effect of government policy in producing community formations and identifies the museum as a 'cultural technology' deployed for this purpose. In this respect, Bennett is critical of Clifford's notion of contact zones as it 'exemplifies a community perspective which, he argues, posits false antinomies between 'the state' and 'the community' that fail to theorize the ways the two are necessarily mutually constitutive' (Dibley 2005: 14). From Bennett's perspective, Clifford is 'led astray' when he proposes that museums as contact zones come to understand themselves as interacting with specific communities 'across such borders, rather than just educating or edifying a public' (Clifford, 1997, cited in Bennett, 1998: 205). In this case, Bennett continues, 'the lateral forms of cross-cultural mediation which characterize the museum-as-contact zone and the vertical 'top-down' forms of communication implied by the notion of educating or edifying a public' are mis-matched (Bennett 1988: 205). Bennett's concern is that Clifford is misled by the rhetoric of 'community' which camouflages the actual mode of the programme's functioning because such a 'program is just as dependent on vertical forms of communication as those it seeks to displace, just as the "top-down" activities of government are equally necessary to the process of involving communities in the forms of dialogue he envisages' (1988: 205). In other words, Bennett is unraveling Clifford's programme by exposing how he fails to recognise the operations of culture and power which he argues are relations of government rather than of exchange. In this respect, Bennett (1998: 212–13) writes:

For what is the perspective of the museums-as-contact zones if not a proposal that, by tinkering with a range of practical arrangements, the inherited form of the museum might be refunctioned in a manner calculated to bring about a redirection – indeed, reversal of its reforming potential in accordance with a multicultural civics premised on a need for greater cross-cultural understanding and tolerance? What does this view of museums amount to if not a new discursive strategy for enlisting objects in the service of government as part of

programs of civic management aimed at promoting respect for, and tolerance of, cultural diversity? And, although the curator's role may be different, is this still not one performed in the service of government through the deployment of specific forms of expertise? And is it not also true that the communities that the museum is to involve in dialogue are often the artefacts of its own activities rather than autochthonous entities which come knocking at the museum's door seeking rights of equal expression and representation?

Bennett, like Gere before him, is querying Clifford's representation of the museum as a contact zone of independent entities, preferring to read the museums' medium as a technology of civic engagement that projects a seemingly inclusive, democratic and plural aesthetic. For him the museum is both public and medium and such duality produces an inter-relationship between structure and agency. Museums are therefore self-producing the networks in which they operate. This begs the question - who is excluded from the network?

As will be discussed in Chapter 3, for information to flow in network structures a shared culture or code is required, along with established protocols, without which the different communities and the museum would not be able to communicate with one another. Seen as cultural ecologies, networks are both inclusive of diversity and exclusive of those people and objects outside of the network. In this respect, a useful point to make is that the appearance of diversity in a museum's distributed structure can 'betray' the extent to which its common protocols support some networks and exclude others; in this respect, a network of networks can to some extent be mono cultural.

On the basis of Bennett's thinking, the museum's cultural historical mediation of a networked space is socially produced and that social production is culturally informed. It exists in and is itself mediated by a network of relations that make up the body politic. The layered complexity of this networked ecology of interrelationships is such that the culture of the producers of the museum (including government) shape this medium. In practice, this means that the way museums act to include the public is within an established structure of interrelationships, where a shared culture enables communication between network members.

The cybernetic sociologist Manuel Castells makes a very similar point about the Internet; 'systems are socially produced, social production is culturally informed and the Internet is no exception. The culture of the producers of the Internet shaped the medium' (Castells 2002:36). Castells has gone some way to map how the culture of the pioneers of the Internet now permeate in society. Seen through his perspective, the relationship between technology, public media and culture is subtle and complex, with the technology of media emerging through culture but also producing culture.

Building on this understanding, Castells traces out the confluence of four cultures, including government, that shaped the origins of the Internet's development and which remain immersed in the culture of Web developers and consumed into everyday digital practices. The first Castells calls the 'techno-meritocratic' culture; this believes in the inherent progressiveness of science and brings with it certain academic values, including the concept of peer review, openness and cooperative sharing of information. Castell's second category consists of 'virtual communitarians', such as individuals who begin to use digital networks to advance their own goals and in the process give shape and direction to the further development of the network itself. Thirdly are entrepreneurs, ready to modify their standard practices and adapt them to the new culture brought about by the Internet. I would suggest the museums' pragmatic investment in digital technologies and practices places them in this category. Lastly is the 'hacker ethic' in autonomous creative programming and the values of open source/free software and free distribution of knowledge, including the right to modify it. This is the culture of collaborative media production, of free and open source software, of reference works such as the Wikipedia Encyclopedia, of open access scientific journals and music that is made and remixed by the most talented of artists rather than those whose legal departments manage to clear all the necessary rights (Stalder 2005). The 'hack ethic' of open source/free software and free distribution of knowledge overlaps with the idea that public data should be freely available to everyone without restrictions from copyright, patents or other mechanisms of control (Open Knowledge Foundation 2012).

Using Castells we can imagine the Internet's product development in a similar fashion to Bennett's social history of the museum, as a technology evolving through the cultural bias of a particular historical context. As beliefs and values are seen by Castells to underpin the development of the Internet, these properties represent the structures that delimit a particular culture and consequently represent a way of knowing a particular public, one that is native to the medium of the Internet.

Furthermore, the fact that Government is opening access to its public data, as well as exploring how the school curriculum can develop core skills in data and data representation, implies a synergy between Internet culture and government policy (Computer Science: A Curriculum for Schools 2012). There is a familiarity or connection to be drawn here between the way Internet culture is shaping public practices from within the processes of government and Tony Bennett's unravelling of the public museums as relations of government. With analytical emphasis on the body politic, Bennett argues that museums shape and regulate the population in 'ways that reflect the genesis of cultural politics from within the processes of government' (Bennett 1998:

195). He is keen to draw our attention to the way government represents and shapes culture using the medium of museums. I suggest this is similar to the way Internet culture, when mediated through government policy, is also intended to shape and regulate the population with certain cultural values. Juxtaposing the 'sociology of the museum' with the later 'sociology of the Internet' demonstrates an analogy between them as cultural technologies and technologies of government. However, through juxtaposing Bennett's and Castell's analysis of the relations between culture, technology media and governance the case is also articulated that any convergence of social space mediated by both museums and the internet would seem contradictory; if media is cultural and concomitant with the public cultures they mediate then how can different media produce the same public space?

The idea of this analysis is to break away from the increasingly popular notion that museums and the Internet can be treated as converged media (Parry 2007, Proctor 2011) and instead to draw attention to the cultural differences that separate them, and the questions this difference raises relative to the notion of the inclusive museum.

2.5 Museums and the Web: a story of non-convergence

In his 1997 essay Gere pays a great deal of agency to what he assumes is the synchronous development linking museums and the Internet. Whether consciously or not on Clifford's part, this idea owes much to the model of distributed communication offered by the Internet and the Worldwide Web. The Internet and the Web offer powerful new paradigms of communication and media distribution. Instead of the unidirectional model of, for example, television, the Web in particular offers the possibility of interactive engagement with the media. Clifford's model of the museum like the Web is a space of exchange, negotiation and communication (Gere 1997:1).

This aspect of Gere's argument is well supported and developed in literature. Parry and Sawyer (2005), for instance, map a long history of museums being shaped by information and communication technologies, revealing a complex and reciprocal relationship between digital media and museum processes. Similar to Proctor's (2010) notion of the 'distributed museum', they conclude that the online and onsite collapses into a singular, innate, spatial environment (Parry and Sawyer 2005, Parry 2007). More recently, Parry (2013) has argued that the digital is now pervasive through all departments and initiatives of the museum. He puts forward the notion of a 'post digital normativity', a new normal that doesn't separate a digital experience into something different from the overall museum experience. For Parry, digital thinking is blended within the institutional mission statements of many museums that invite public

collaboration. He argues that digital has infused museums' core strategies and is a qualitatively different way of thinking and working.

While their collective arguments are, I think, convincing, they reflect only one area of influence on museum development. In this section I will map out how the social sciences offer an alternative explanation as to why digital media with the Internet conceptually fits as a contemporary model of the museum that, importantly, will be seen to have nothing to do with it. This juxtaposition is to critically question the assumption first promoted by Gere (1997) and most recently promoted by Parry (2013) of a synchronous development between museums and the Internet, tracing instead how the social history and cultures of museum practice produce the museum online. The importance of this discussion for the thesis is to explore cultural and spatial distinctions between museums on the web, their digital practices, and the online public.

2.5.1 Synchronous development of museums and sociology's imagination

In 'Sociology and the Social Aspects of Museums', Gordon Fyfe (2006) maps the crystallisation in the 19th century of the birth of both the modern museum and sociology, a synchronous development. Sociology was then conceived as a science of social change 'investigating the problems of transition from agrarian estates to urban societies of markets and classes that gave the appearance of being nothing more than aggregates of individuals' (Fyfe 2006: 55). This is the period of the 'Great Exhibition' (1851) and Fyfe draws attention to Bennett's (1995) analysis of 'The Exhibitionary complex' for its Foucault-informed approach. After all, it was Foucault who helped museums and other cultural institutions to understand that ideas, cultures and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely, their configurations of power, also being studied.

Foucauldian conceptions of the social are, of course, different from sociological ones; indeed, they frame these as a part of a broader account of the emergence of modern forms of governmentality (Bennett 1995, 2005). Yet, via Foucault, Fyfe is provided with a way to illustrate that the origins of the modern museum, like the origins of sociology, is to do with problems of social order and a societal need for social cohesion. For instance, when Duncan and Wallach (1980) describe a visit to the museum in the 19th century as a right of citizenship, Fyfe identifies a Durkheimian argument in their approach about the social constitution of individuals as subjects via the museums' rituals of behaviour. Museums and sociology are in this respect responding to the same social, cultural and governmental forces and this commonality supports Fyfe's analysis of synchronous development between them. It also demonstrates, via Duncan and Wallach, a

sociological perspective in museum theory and writing. Durkheim's sociological thought concerns the collective character of rights and representations and Duncan and Wallach show us how a modern population, despite divisions of class, gender and ethnicity, come to share its culture of space, a commonality of one nation.

Sociology's contemporary interest in museums and vice versa is traced as an outcome of a broad theoretical turn in the 1970s towards cultural forms of understanding social organisation (Bourdieu, 1977, Certeau 1974, Foucault 1977). The 'cultural turn' is now a well worn and familiar term used to indicate a movement among scholars in the social sciences with key works such as Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Pierre Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) and *Distinction* (1984) being identified across various museum literature for the influence they have exercised on interpreting museums as cultural entities. In this respect, Fyfe (2006), Merriman (1989, 1991), Barrett (2011), Hooper-Greenhill (2000) and many others have drawn attention to the fact that museums are as cultural as the things they contain and that culture is a contested arena, creating and affirming social distinction.

The 1970s is written about as the period when 'culture' became broadly categorised as the structure whereby people communicate meanings, make sense of their world, construct their identities and define their beliefs and values. In this respect, Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1984) stressed the active role of subjects in the production and reproduction of the rules, habits, and dispositions of their lives whereas Michel de Certeau (1974) analyzed how individuals appropriate and subvert mass culture through tactics of consumption to claim their autonomy from social forces. The entire field and process of symbolic interaction, communication, and technologies/media through which people define and express themselves are argued to be contained within culture, so linking the actions of people with their attachments to distinct social groupings and their participation in social institutions. As Bourdieu suggests, to fully understand the 'symbolic' for its underlying powers, resources and assumptions, we would need to first plot the position that museums occupy in the structure of social space as a system of relations and differences instead of absolute attributes. His concept of social space is discussed further in Chapter 3 for its relevance as a model of the way social space is structured online and as an explanation for the ways in which museums on the Web exclude online publics. However, this chapter focuses on how Bourdieu's notion of social space is relevant to concepts of exclusion in museological discourse in a pre-digital age.

In this context the fact that museums are often free to enter does not mitigate the fact that free entry is also optional entry. Rather, the preference or choice to visit can only be

explained by the position the agent holds in social space. This understanding of social exclusion is why Bourdieu (1984) maintained that the museum, rather than welcoming public diversity, instead reinforced existing social and cultural distinctions and maintained inequality, where class difference often determined the capacity to be comfortable in the museum (Bourdieu 1984, Barrett 2011, Prior 2006). That in recent years museums have sought to become more closely stitched into the lives of the communities they seek to serve, more outward looking and exposed to the needs of audiences and other stakeholders can be seen to address the cultural reasons the public exclude themselves from public institutions. Moreover, through the 'sociology of the Internet' we learn that Bourdieu's contribution of a reflexive understanding of the position museums hold within the social structure is misaligned with the way digital publics organise online (more on this in Chapter 3).

As Fyfe puts it (2006: 66), 'the cultural turn has established the museum's significance for sociology' and vice versa, drawing attention to sociology for its influence as a feed into the global professionalisation of museum practice, and mapping the way social research is servicing an expansion in the training of museum staff. Moreover, Fyfe is explicit on the point that 'the museum has internalised social research' and, he tells us repeatedly, has developed a 'sociological imagination' to consider how the personal and public spheres of people are interwoven (2006: 66). He highlights the interplay between the personal, social and physical context of the museum visitor, not only drawing attention to the situation of the museum visit but also instantiating the visitor as an actor with personal interests, knowledge, and preferences. In this respect, Fyfe is emphasising the ongoing influence of Charles Mills who queried 'how the trouble of people and their milieu are related to the public issues of changing social structures; how are structure, biography and history related?' (Mills 1959 cited in Fyfe 2006: 66). His sociological imagination raises the issue of motivation; what do people bring to the situation and how does this affect and become shaped during the museum visit.

Unbeknown to Mills, the language he used to describe the 'sociological imagination' has a ring of familiarity with descriptions of the Internet as a contextualising medium which distributes 'personal' activity online to people and things that share an association, history or language. The nature of this digital mediation means that the way we act as individuals online produces public space by networking us within our cultural parameters. Shirky (2007) thus traces the way the Internet can facilitate the ability of individuals to form relations that were previously inaccessible and that make it increasingly possible to seek out social ties based on biography, history and mutual identification. In other words, our cultural capital. The theory and practice of networked individualism is increasingly well established and will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

While the Internet does not have an imagination as such, it does enable the flow of information between the personal and the public sphere. This comparison provides one way of conceptualizing Mills' (1959) 'sociological imagination' as a type of contextualizing medium where the informational flow between people and the patterns of association this forms are significant for the cultures they both produce and reveal. In their social structure, these relations imply the biographical and historical forces and conditions that de-limit and constrain the nature of human relationships, while also revealing the Internet as the technology and medium that facilitates their connectivity.

In contrast, Fyfe's use of the 'sociological imagination' refers to a contemporary culture of museum practice that conceptually fits with sociology's focus on the patterns of association between people. Referring to Bourdieu's (1977) concept of cultural dispositions Fyfe describes sociology's imagination as the museum's 'habitus'; the schema through which they make sense of the world without explicit rules or coordination, without presupposing a conscious aiming. Habitus operates unconsciously and the unconscious, Bourdieu tells us, 'is never anything other than the forgetting of history: it is history turned into nature, i.e. denied as such' (Bourdieu 1977: 78).

In this respect, habitus is neither a result of free will, nor determined by structures, but created by a kind of interplay between the two over time: dispositions that are both shaped by past events and structures, and that shape current practices and structures and also, importantly, that condition our very perceptions of these. In this sense, habitus is created and reproduced unconsciously, without any deliberate pursuit of coherence, 'without any conscious concentration' (Bourdieu 1984: 170).

The concept of habitus applied to Clifford's (1997) study of 'contact relations' in contemporary museum practice, and his concern to relativise museums in relation to communities external to it, reflects a culture of practice which emerged out of the cultural turn of the 1970s. The evidence for this is everywhere. For instance, in 1977 the Council for Museums and Galleries in Scotland called for a curatorship of social responsibility: 'for museums to see themselves in a new place "in the total social environment" [...] more outward looking, seeking to serve their public' (cited in Parry 2007: 110). Since the 1970s and 1980s the pragmatic effects of sociology on museum practice have run deep; for example, Lang and Wilkinson (1999), Barrett (2010) and Hooper Greenhill (2012) trace structural and organisational transformation affecting the division of labour in the way museums approach their public remit.

This recent literature usefully maps the complex, fluid and debated ways in which museums struggle to define how publics fit within community contexts Barrett (2011), for instance, interprets 'community' as a process and not as a fixed state or, to put it another way, as a shifting model of social organisation. Her mapping of the way museums serve as public space reveals how audience research has become an obligation with which museums are charged; they are to research as much as possible about visitors and potential visitors, including their learning needs. Through Barrett's research we find documentation of the recent growth in 'learning' and public 'engagement' as disciplines within the departmental structures of museums that trace back to sociology's broad contribution of an 'imagination'. We also see that Clifford's concept of the contemporary museum as 'contact zone' offers both an illustration of how a sociological imagination might be interpreted in the context of museum practice and provides a cultural understanding of the contemporary museum as a communications medium; that, in Bennett's analysis, is also complicit in the co-production of the communities that are in contact with it.

From Bennett's (1995) perspective, structural changes in the museum's departmental organisation and workplace culture reflect its contemporary functioning as an instrument of governance. As already discussed, a consistent theme in Bennett's writing is the political rationality of museums as cultural technologies for governing a civil society. Moreover, his emphasis on museum instrumentalisation as cultural technologies gained greater relevance in literature following the general elections in 1997, which brought New Labour to power (Belfiore 2012, Gray 2002, 2008, Sandells 1988, 2002). With this government came the promise of additional resources aimed at widening access to UK museums and galleries in recognition of 'their potential for education, combating social exclusion and promoting urban regeneration' (Thomas, 1998 cited in Sandell 1998: 406).

In the late 1990s the museum was again positioned as an instrument of social reform, echoing interpretations of nineteenth century museums' roles as civilizing technologies of the state. Clive Gray identifies this positioning of the museum as the result of a strategy of 'policy attachment', whereby cultural institutions have progressively attached themselves to economic and social agendas of government, thus benefiting from the larger budgets and greater political influence of those areas of public policy. Following Gray's argument, it is seen that the New Labour government imposed an instrumental agenda for museums through the introduction of prescriptive targets and clear expectations. In his analysis financial investment in the cultural industries was conditioned on the premise that museums and art practices contribute to the 'joined-up' delivery of social and economic agendas to contribute to the combating of exclusion and the promotion of inclusion. Such 'policy attachment' has prompted a debate around

museums' potential to not only enhance access for those groups identified as at risk of social exclusion, but also to play a more direct role in combating the disadvantage and discrimination that those groups experience.

As Gray (2008) has identified, the cultural/museums sector strives to demonstrate its 'usefulness' in socioeconomic terms, seeing in the claim for social and economic impact a route to secure better funding levels. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, WAG's recent language and approach to funding keenly articulates the way investment in its public engagement programmes can be translated for its societal impact. In this funding/policy context Belfiore's (2012) informatively titled paper 'Defensive instrumentalism and the legacy of New Labour's cultural policies' maps out an argument in which museums that articulate cultural value in terms of socio-economic impact fail to recognise the way culture is experienced in everyday contexts.

For Belfiore the post-New Labour, post-recession defence of instrumentalism is proof of the extent to which the British cultural sector has been unable to articulate the case for cultural value in an effective and meaningful way. As she makes apparent, research focused on collecting qualitative data on cultural experiences that analyses their ethereal and philosophical value relative to local contexts and personalised experiences does not fit the established discourse of instrumental funding streams. Revenues tend to be more geared to questions concerning the capability of museums to contribute directly towards the combating of the causes and symptoms social exclusion. Back in the 1990s, Sandell identified relevant questions: (Sandell 1998:14)

Can museums play some part in directly tackling the symptoms of social exclusion which are manifest in contemporary social problems such as unemployment, crime, homelessness, poverty, racism and poor health? Are such goals appropriate for museums? To what extent might this approach require the reinvention, or at least the repositioning, of museums in relation to their role in society?

Questions of this type assume for museums a role in society relevant to the symptoms of social exclusion, which situates them within the political discourse defining and articulating the way exclusion is understood and the symbols that identify it, i.e, cultural productions. Such instrumentalisation of museum practices drives much of the development of digital engagement in the hope that they may reach publics in participatory ways as part of the social inclusion agenda. However, a question concerning this thesis is whether the current instrumentalism of museum practices is impacting negatively on the digital practices of museums by failing to recognise the value of cultural experiences in online spaces.

2.5.2 Manchester Museum's imagination as public medium

When Bennett describes Clifford's notion of the museum as contact zone, he draws our attention to the principle that 'on the borderlands between different worlds, histories and cosmologies, museums must decenter themselves, accepting that their objects and display are entangled in "unfinished historical processes of travel" just as they themselves are traversed by political negotiations that are out of any imagined communicative control' (1998: 195). Albeit critical of Clifford's notion of community, Bennett (1988) is broadly sympathetic to the model of museum Clifford proposes, a point well made by Dibley who eloquently draws the similarities and difference between these social theorists. (Dibley 2005: 13)

Despite different historical and theoretical coordinates, Clifford and Bennett's political programmes are sympathetic. Clifford's advocacy of democratic relations of 'reciprocity' as those that ought to guide contemporary museums can be read as an attempt to articulate 'the new principle' that Bennett sees as necessary for museums to operate as 'instrument[s] for the self-display of democratic and pluralist societies' (1995: 102). Clifford writes: 'By thinking of their work as contact work – decentred and traversed by cultural and political negotiations that are out of any imagined community's control – museums may begin to grapple with the real difficulties of dialogues, alliance, inequality, and translation' (1997: 213). Clifford envisions a museum politics that is not simply about holding the museum to task for its representational inadequacies. Rather, it is a politics that pluralizes and relativizes museum activities with a particular eye on, as Bennett writes, 'their consequences for the relations [...] between museum exhibits, their organizers and the museum visitor' (1995: 102). Similarly, Clifford is in accord with the revisions that Bennett derived from the demands based on the principle of public rights.

In this literature review context, reading Manchester Museum's 'Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan 2009 - 2010'⁴ is interesting because it echoes the positioning of the museum as distributed medium that Bennett, like Gere, identifies in Clifford's contact relations, but is also sympathetic to Bennett's focus on the exercise of social policy via the museum as a public medium. For example, Manchester Museum's

⁴ The use of the Manchester Museum's Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan here is useful as it also provides additional contextualisation and information about similar policies and practices of the Whitworth Art Gallery. Since 2010, the two museums have been sharing resources and staff and there has been an effort to create shared approaches to engagement and communication. Therefore, the focus on this document and related views and practices of the Manchester Museum is explained further, and I think justified, by this organisational and professional merge of the two institutions

strategy states that it should be a fundamental place of reciprocal engagement, to create understanding between cultures: 'to collaborate with communities to provide different perspectives on the world and world histories that will enrich the Museum's and visitors' understanding of the collection.' Hence, it accommodates an understanding of the difficulty in defining community, which is described as 'not straightforward [and] in a state of flux' (Manchester Museum 2010). This rhetorical document proposes to answer its own question, '*What do we mean by Engagement?*', identifying various different routes between the Museum and members of the public, including consultation, collaboration and outreach. The approach to engagement is, arguably, an orientation of the museum as both a social media and distributed public space. As the current director maintains: (Nick Merriman, Director, The Manchester Museum 2010)

Engagement has to be two-way and we are clear we want to engage, for example, with under-represented groups in local wards, so their voices are heard as we plan the Museum's activities. We want to recognise that there are wide varieties of perspectives on all the issues that the Museum works with and reflect that diversity in what we do. This strategy is aimed at providing us with a clear structure and process to achieve this.

Merriman is describing the development and process of a sociological imagination. However, that public diversity is significant to representation in the museum may seem obvious but, as this strategy document acknowledges, public diversity is cultural and thus, by nature, museums are exclusive. In the wider discourse of the cultural sector there is recognition that publics are more complex and unstable than museum methods (Barrett 2011). This difficulty is compounded in context of Bennett's (1988) argument, which draws attention to the extent to which museums, unbeknown to themselves, construct the communities they engage with. Yet similar to other UK museums and galleries the Manchester Museum engages with Tony Bennett's notion that it becomes an instrument of public debate and, in this respect, the Museum has built a culture of practice in public engagement that positions it 'towards that of the possessor of a technical competence whose function is to assist groups outside the museum to use its resources to make authored statements within it' (Bennett 1995 cited in Alberti and Lynch 2010: 104).

As can be seen below (Figure 2.1), the Manchester Museum illustrates its public medium with an 'idea of engagement' and an offer to bring together people from all backgrounds to provoke debate and reflection about the past, present and future of the earth and its inhabitants' (Manchester Museum 2010: 2).

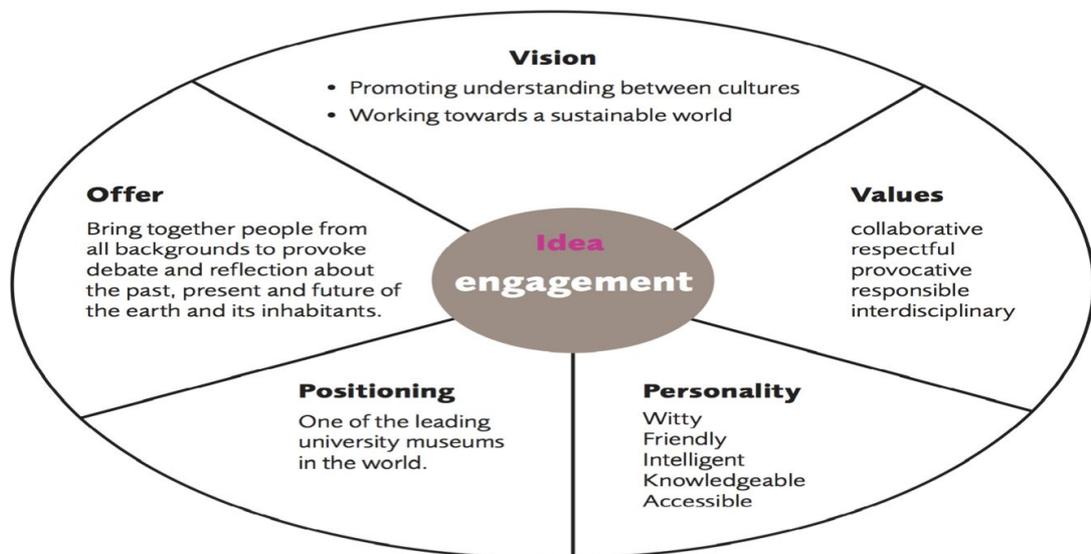


Fig 2.1: Manchester Museum Tone of Voice Guidelines (2010)

Seen in this graphic context the Museum represents itself as a communications technology managing a complex system or ecology of interrelationships and conveying an image of the museum as network of networks. When a sociological imagination conflates with the museum as a communication medium, the result is an network or Internet of possible relationships and connections that intersects people's private and public identities. As Bennett's discussion on Clifford makes clear 'if museums are to function effectively as clearing houses, as transit centres managing the intersecting semiotic projects of different communities, [...] curators will have to "recon" with the fact that the objects and interpretations they display "belong" to others as well as the museum' (Bennett 1988: 12).

However, this contemporary form of museum or gallery is not the Internet. It is a medium that emerged in context of engagement with sociology's cultural turn and, in this sense, is a product of 1970's thought and culture. That it pre-dates the Internet is significant to understanding these distinct media in context of one another. The Web as we know it today is a 1990s' invention, a period when services like email became popular and reached wider audiences. For this reason alone I disagree with Gere's (1997) observation that it is possible to claim a synchronous development between museum practice and the Internet, the latter acting as the paradigm for the former. Rather, I suggest there is a need to depart from the analogy he draws and instead unpack the cultural historical differences between these public media for the questions this difference raises in the context of the museum's public remit.

2.6 Framing social distances; why museums on the Web are distanced from the online public

This departure becomes important in the context of analysis by Bennett (1988) and Castells (2002) that the technologies of public media are complicit in structuring the culture and organisation of those publics they mediate. From their combined perspectives, public media are cultural technologies with social agency to shape community organisation, i.e. different media equals different publics. Accordingly, the online public, whose organisation and culture is structured by the Internet's mediation, is likely to be socially distant to museums on the Web which are the product of a different cultural technology. In other words, the distinction is between 'being on the Web and being of the Web'.

As already mentioned, according to Fiona Cameron (2003), the difficulties museums have in engaging digital publics relates to a question, originally raised in the 1990s by Sarasan & Donovan (1998), about whether collections databases which were put online for the public to search really fulfil the information and pedagogic needs of an emerging community of online users. Similarly, Thomas & Mintz (1998) query if the way objects are initially interpreted by museum staff for the purposes of documentation will also engage the needs of the online public. These questions resonate with recent research papers and reports concerning museum communication with social media and online resources. A 2013 report for Manchester Museums and Galleries Partnership (Manchester Museum, Manchester Art Gallery, Whitworth Gallery) draws attention to the research that museum digital practices often fail to meet the needs of the online public and are of limited success, particularly when they have been technology-driven opposed to user-driven. (Palmer, et al., 2013: 15)

It is clear that understanding what 'the user' wants or needs in terms of a 'digital' experience with the museum is needed, particularly if users are to participate in the meaning-making process. Museums know that online resources need to be 'user centred' but lack enough knowledge about their users and how to reach them in order to remedy the situation. Gammon and Burch (2008) for example, indicate that many information technologies implemented in museum and field trips fail to meet the real needs of their users and may in fact appear to isolate visitors and inhibit social interaction. Other areas where significant challenges as well as opportunities remain include the discoverability and usability of online digital collections, "crowdsourcing" curation, social media and the reuse of content. It is clear that adoption of these technologies and channels needs to be grounded in pedagogical strategy and approaches that considers the content, context and purpose of the interaction for a particular audience, and not simply implemented for its own sake.

In the same vein Russo and Peacock (2009) argue for new theoretical models of user behaviour online that explore and explain more effectively ecologies of practice and forms of group organisation in social media produced spaces . Moreover, Kidd draws our attention to the idea that ‘even as “the museum” covets and articulates a move from a broadcast model of communications to a social media model, the current use of such media more often than not neutralise, contain and flatten its promise’ (2011: 68). From their perspective, museums have been overly focused on what they themselves might get from social media as opposed to understanding and engaging the cultures of practice found online. In light of the above literature it can seem that museums on the Web and the online public occupy different social positions, which would imply a source of contradiction in the museums’ public remit. An interesting question is therefore how to decipher the institutionalised cultures of practice framing the digital/social media practices of museums.

For this purpose, Kidd’s 2011 paper ‘enacting engagement online: framing social media use for the museum’ is particularly useful in the way she borrows Erving Goffman’s method of ‘frame analysis’ as a means of deciphering and articulating the current use of social media by museums. To explain frame analysis Kidd uses Greg Smith, who writes ‘the frame supplies the sense [or context] in which a strip of interaction is to be taken’ (cited in Kidd 2011: 66). As Goffman first suggested, frames are ‘clusters of rules which help to constitute and regulate activities, defining them as activities of a certain sort and as subject to a given range of sanctions’. (Giddens 1984: 87) Frames are necessary for agents to feel ontological security, the trust that everyday actions have some degree of predictability. Framing is the practice by which agents make sense of what they are doing’

‘Frame analysis’ thus provides Kidd with the means to establish the prevailing, institutionalised, logic which underlies the use of social media in the museum. However, as museums have long adopted technology in innovative and diverse ways, from digitization and online search of collections to online exhibitions, personalisation tools, and the integration of mobile devices, frame analysis would also seem to fit exploration of museum digital practices other than social media. Accordingly, Kidd’s approach is reconsidered here in relation to the range of museums digital/online practices.

From both Goffman’s and Kidd’s perspectives, ‘frames’ can be considered to constitute the collective identities through which museum professionals come to know themselves and others. So, ‘frames’ provide museum practitioners with both the necessary schema to make sense of their place in the world and the ontological security that their workplace practices have some degree of predictability. In this respect, frame analysis is

used to garner an understanding of the organisational logics of the social and political fields in which these digital practices are formulated (Goffman 1974, Kidd 2011). This enables Kidd to detach the museum online from the social space that emerges through the crowd of digital activity, by drawing attention to the culture of museum practice as a frame influencing its online engagement. Analysis of the 'frames' helps Kidd to unpack the assumptions inherent in museum discourse and reveal the schema through which museum professionals engage social media and, with that, the hidden power relationships at work in these exchanges.

This application means we can begin to read the digital practices of museums within the symbolic schemes in which they are acted out and their displays of underlying power, resources and assumptions. Frames are in this respect one aspect of Bourdieu's broader concept of 'habitus': a system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception and action common to all members of the same group or class. When museums frame social inclusivity from this perspective, communities are not only consulted but empowered to take an active role in decision-making within the museum, mediating partnerships for the co-creation of exhibitions and other processes of co-production related to personal and collective identity. In this respect, there is an inescapable familiarity linking the habitus of museums with social media; independent of any Internet the museum is a social medium.

As we discussed in the introduction to this Chapter it was as far back as 1997 that Charlie Gere suggested it was possible to make an analogy between contemporary museum practice and the Internet, the latter acting as the paradigm for the former. The Internet in general and social media in particular seem an attractive fit with the recent drive in museums to be socially inclusive. The frame of 'inclusivity' and 'collaboration' are the schemes that displace the museum from occupying a fixed social and cultural position, putting distance between it and people who occupy a different position. In other words, rather than occupying a particular position in social space, the museum's approach is to be distributed across social space.

By being distributed rather than occupying a fixed position in social space museums aim to close the cultural distance between them and public diversity. This positioning has the effect of attracting interrelationships between people and collections, fostering discourse between them and supporting discursive networks; in this sense, the museum distributes the informational flow in social space. In other words, the museum is, in this model, a distributed thus networked space.

When Gere first made the analogy between museums and the Internet his aim was to promote a note of caution about museums imitating the Internet's distributed properties as a space of encounter and exchange. As already mentioned, he argues that 'the Internet brings with it issues in relation to power as complex as those found in the traditional model of the museum' (Gere 1997: 65). As we have already seen, an emerging literature is now questioning why museums find it problematic to attract and engage audiences online (Cameron 2003, Russo and Peacock 2009, Kidd 2011, Palmer, et al., 2013). It appears that museums realise that online resources need to be user-centered but lack sufficient knowledge about the digital public and how to reach them in order to remedy this situation.

However, in the context of the digital public being invisible to museum processes, a barrier to their engagement remains. The museum's framing of its digital practices and social media space seems to be having the opposite effect to its intended aim, i.e. to be in the total social environment. Rather than interfacing museum communication in the digital public space, the 'inclusivity' and 'collaborative' frame appears to fix the museum's position, putting social distance between it and online publics. For this reason, this thesis argues that the museum mis-recognises the way social exclusion manifests when social space is structured by the Internet's medium.

This argument follows in the footsteps of Tony Bennett's analysis of the way public policy structures museums, which are at the same time culturally bound by their public remit and democratic ethic. He argues that government policy, cultural theory and communications technology consistently generate new definitions of 'public' with destabilising effects on the museum's organisation, its departmental structure and workflows as it reconvenes to fit the new understanding of public. For Bennett, an insatiable discourse for museum reform is due to the fact that although museums are defined by their democratic ethic of social inclusivity, public diversity and publicness are unstable concepts. Bennett's consideration shows up the nature of contradiction between the public museum, public policy and the public which will be further discussed and analysed in following chapters with reference to this thesis' research practice at the Whitworth Art Gallery.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the technological development from mass media to social media is often written about as being synchronous with the way UK museums and galleries have developed as public media and public space (e.g. Gere 1997, Parry 2007, Proctor 2010, Simon 2010). Since the 1990s, a trend in the UK heritage sector for

developing community partnerships in the co-creation of exhibitions and other museum processes has meant that the Internet broadly, and social media in particular, are now largely accepted as complementing or converging with museum processes. The 'participatory' drive is exhibiting an ethic of democracy with an ideal of openness, which embraces social diversity by engaging communities in the development of the museum, producing a complex ecology of interrelationships (Bennett 1995, Manchester Museum 2012, Alberti and Lynch 2010). However, the broadly accepted assumption of museums, the Internet and social media as complementary and convergent cultural technologies is problematic. This chapter has made the case that, when attention is drawn to their distinct cultural-historical development, this history produces social distances separating museums on the Web and the online public.

For this analysis, Tony Bennett (1995, 1998), Charlie Gere (1997) and Gordon Fyfe (2006) were used to make the case that, unrelated to Internet technologies, the participatory museum came into existence as a result of disjuncture between the museum's democratic rhetoric and its political rationale. It emerged most clearly in the 1970s when the cultural turn disrupted museum authority. This challenging period was to criticise museum practices for excluding large segments of the population. As Bourdieu (1984) demonstrated, class differences often determined the extent to which the openness of museums was restricted to those visitors culturally equipped to feel comfortable in museum contexts; i.e. a contradictory state was triggered between their democratic rhetoric and their political rationale. As a result, since the 1970s a dialectic movement has been traceable in the development of the museum's institutional form for co-creation of exhibitions and other processes related to personal and collective identity. Arguably, therefore, the birth of the participatory museum is found in the historical conditions rooted in 1970s thought, which pre-dates the Internet as we know it.

In relation to this modern, more inclusive, museum, Bennett asks if it is not 'true that the communities that the museum is to involve in dialogues are often the artefacts of its own activities rather than autochthonous entities which come knocking at the museum's door seeking rights of equal expression and representation?' (1998: 212-21.) Moreover, maintaining his rhetorical tone, he queries 'are museums not still concerned to beam their improving messages of cultural tolerance and diversity as deeply into civil society as they can in order to carry that message to those whom the museum can only hope to address as citizens, publics and audiences? And do we not, through a battery of access policies, wish - indeed require - that they do so?' (Bennett 1998: 212-213.)

Bennett's questions are descriptive, indeed indicative, of the same cultural conditions that Jenny Kidd (2011) deciphered as producing the frames or schemes structuring the

way many museums today approach their digital practices, thus establishing the prevailing institutionalised logic to co-produce the museum relative to public diversity. Yet this is the same institutionalised logic which, we also learn from Kidd, does not translate to, or is non convergent with, user behaviour in online spaces. In this respect, the political rationality for the participatory museum and the nature of public space produced through the Internet's medium are mis-matched. Kidd's analysis thus prompts criticism of the prevailing assumption that museums and the Web are ideologically complementary and instead draws attention to the cultural differences that separate them. The problem of social exclusion this situation produces helps to rationalise the core research question: What are the organisational and institutional limitations, opportunities and outcomes that arise when the museum's digital practices are informed by and address the qualities of the digital public space?

We might also consider that, as museums and the Internet have both developed as social media and distributed networks through distinctly separate social and cultural histories, in what way are the cultural distances that separate them impacting public engagement with digital collections? Or, with a different emphasis, in what way is the relation between 1970s' cultural theory and museum workflows and cultures of practice in public engagement influencing museums' development of online resources and digital practices?

Following this chapter's argument and underlying these questions, is the idea that the culture of museum practice excludes or mis-recognises the digital public, the concern being that the museum's cultural framing of issues around social exclusion and public engagement is a source of social distance, disenfranchising them from the museum's online resources. In this respect, the chapter frames critical questions about the established everyday practices, workflows and departmental responsibilities, not only of the WAG but also other museums and galleries in Manchester as well as the museum sector more broadly, for their relevance to the online public.

Chapter 3. The Digital Public Space and Museums

3.1 Introduction

Whereas the previous chapter aimed to break away from the prevailing assumption that museums on the Web and the online public are complementary and convergent social spaces, this chapter is concerned with modelling the structure of the online social space and evaluating museums' digital practices against this structure. Such a juxtaposition will both reveal those 'online publics' who are socially distanced from the museum's online resources and also identify the particular digital museum practices that are informed by, and respond to, the 'online social organisation'; in other words the users' online behaviours as developed within the parameters of the Web's 'social space' and information flow. This discussion will allow us to explore the distinction between museums on the Web and the online public and provide the thesis with an explanation of the Internet as a socially structured space.

Since 2004, a growing number of experimental museum projects have explored the way online networked space changes the organisational relationship between publics and collections, in order to consider how this digital mediation can influence museum approaches to their onsite exhibition spaces (Bernstein 2008, 2012, Chan 2006, Cameron 2008, Proctor 2014). However, the literature often reveals such projects as bound within the museums' established social media networks and community definitions and thereby disconnected from the culturally diverse social space that is the Internet. The extent to which digital innovation is seen to be contained within established institutional frames indicates that digital practices that explore and experiment with the theory of networked space are often detached from the diversity of the online public. In this respect, institutionalised mediation of digital innovation is seen to correspond with the previous chapter's analysis which showed that museums' organisational culture towards digital technology does not respond to the cultural characteristics and rules of the Web as a public and social space of interaction (Gere 1997, Bennett 1995, 1998, 2006, Fyfe 2006, Kidd 2011, Castells 1996, 2002). This issue is argued here to imply evidence of a symbolic power that blinds museums to publics online and vice versa; moreover, it conceals a contradiction in the ways museums think about 'the public' and 'inclusion' and as a result it subdues calls for institutional reform (Bennett 1995).

The structure of the online social space sets the context for this chapter's arguments. The first section draws on a body of literature offering a 'sociology of the Internet'; this

includes Manuel Castells (1996, 2002, 2007), who has written a great deal about the interrelationship between technology and public space, and also Felix Stalder (2002, 2006, 2013), who has written extensively about Castells' notion of 'space' as 'flows' in a networked society. Similarly, the chapter will draw on Bourdieu (1984, 1986), Barry Wellman (2002) and Clay Shirky (2008), who trace the development of horizontal networks of interactive communication that are producing two social conditions of a networked society: 'networked individualism' and the rise of what Castells (2007) identifies as 'mass self-communication'. In both of these social conditions we find people are attracted to network on the basis of social and cultural capital, i.e. those who share capital are networked, while those who do not share their cypher are distanced.

Through juxtaposing the above sociology of network systems with the online resources and digital practices of museums I aim to expose a cultural divide between museums on the Web and networked society. It will be demonstrated that both Castells and Stalder argue that digital flows produce concepts of public and publicness, which premise a particular idea of space and time that reconfigures the public sphere away from institutions like museums. Yet, a great deal of current literature and discourse on the significance of museums in society is principled on them being part of the infrastructure of the public sphere (e.g. Bennett 1995, Lynch and Alberti 2010, Barrett 2011). Here, there is clearly disjuncture between museums on the Web and the public online due to the fact that, while the museum is motivated to provide a public and discursive space on the social Web, people online are self-generating a public sphere disconnected from the museum's activities. This disjuncture leads us to query how museums might reconcile such different formations of the public sphere in relation to their democratic ethic.

Overall, the arguments in this chapter are intended to rationalise research that investigates institutionalised mediation of digital practices in order to better understand the organisational and cultural barriers inhibiting museums from opening into, and engaging with, the online social space.

3.2 Time/space compression and the digital public space

According to Felix Stalder (2006), the digital public space consists of three layers. First is the physical layer, the material nodes of the network that create and administrate the flows; this includes specific buildings, roads, dedicated computer machinery, airports, communication wires and so on. The second layer includes the things that actually circulate, including people, materials and information. The third is a particular culture that facilitates the coordination of these elements, without which they would not coalesce into something stable enough to create space. This space is a myriad of

translocal networks, held together by a continuous circulation of people, materials and bits, each characterized by a particular make-up of resources, and developing, over time, a unique culture that defines the boundaries of that space (Stalder 2006). A socially and technologically constructed space mediating daily life makes the Internet an important topic in sociological discourse where, it is argued, networked communication comes with accompanying social conditions (Castells 2002, Stalder 2006).

To explain why unique social conditions are stemming from the Internet's mediation, Stalder is keen to establish the way this technology reconfigures the relation between space, place and time. This he achieves by first establishing a definition of space which is familiar to Bourdieu's structure of social space as a network of differing cultural dispositions separating people/nodes by their relative position to cultural objects. For Bourdieu, social space is the degree of difference between us and others, somewhere where there cannot be empty space because space cannot exist other than in relation to, and between, the things that are in it. His layout of space is one in which the distance between classifications of people is self-determined by the different volumes of economic, social and cultural capital they are able to accumulate, as well as by the relative weightings in the overall capital holdings of their classification.

Stalder also considers 'that space is created in between things, and therefore there can be no such thing as empty space, not the least because this would be a substance without properties. It is the objects that create space. Space is constituted by the relationship among these objects. Without objects, there is nothing in between, hence there is no space' (2006: 142). However, expanding upon Bourdieu's mapping of social space as a network of cultural distinctions, Stalder also draws on Manuel Castells who contributes the idea that space provides the material support of time sharing social practices as 'it brings together those practices that are simultaneous in time [and] if social actors are not present in the same space, they cannot share time, that is, interact in real time' (Stalder 2006: 144). In other words, space cannot be conceived without time as these two seemingly distinct properties are by nature expressed through one another. Both Castells and Stalder are interested in the way communication technology changes the dynamic between space and time and the impact this development is having not only on social organisation, but also in the public sphere. Before electronic communication, the only space that allowed for time-sharing was fixed by place, a location whose form, function, and meaning was self-contained within its physical boundaries. As Stalder recognises, if it takes time to get from place to place, time cannot be shared across places. This does not mean places are not connected to one another, or that they are independent from one another, but that their relation to one another is defined precisely by the fact that they do not share the same time. Thus, it is

the case that prior to the digitisation of communication flows, the space of time-sharing was assumed to be a geographical place, such as Manchester or New York, because time and space were taken to be coextensive.

Yet, this link between time, place and space is disrupted by computer networks and, in this context, Stalder highlights what he considers is now conventional wisdom: that communication technologies have expanded social relationships across distances at a greater rate and ever increasing speed, producing 'time/space compression'. While it is true that the 20th century has been witness to an unprecedented increase in the extent, intensity and velocity of global communication related to digital fibre-optic cable networks and digital data processing, time/space compression can be traced back to 1866. Then the transatlantic cable reduced the time of transmission of information between London and New York by over a week, followed in 1926, by the telephone which increased the velocity of messages to a few minutes. In this historical context Stalder introduces Castells' conceptualization of 'space as flows', based on the theory that there is a historical limit to the process of time/space compression, arguing instead that 'at one point, the negative, quantitative dynamic of compression (less space, less time) turns into a qualitative new condition (a new type of space time)' (Stalder 2006: 146).

It follows that, when time is no longer structured by location, it collapses into space. On this basis, Stalder like Castells before him, proposes that society's dominant social processes are re-organised and managed through digital flows connecting people in space, no matter where they are located, because they are all 'here' in the same time-sharing environment. Seen from this perspective, the common or everyday mediation of human activity online is generating networks coordinated by instant flows of electronic data. Consequently we are witnessing (Stalder 2006: 159):

the emergence of a temporality based on a form of organization unable to stabilize time because it is itself so dynamic and fluid. This new organization is operating in a completely artificial environment which itself has no natural or otherwise fixed, or at least inherent, temporality. Similar to space, the characteristic logic of the new time is also binary: "now" or "not-now." As a consequence, each network has to create its own temporality, ranging from the microseconds of the financial markets to the millennia of the ecological movement. Yet none of these temporalities has become dominant. Rather, they are interacting in unpredictable ways, inducing systemic disturbances into the flow of social time.

Here, Stalder is attempting to explain the fragmentation of collective organisation into a nonlinear pattern of people who may share the same local neighbourhood but whose

cultural and social contexts are increasingly disconnected from one another. As he is keen to point out, this disconnection is not because people are more isolated; on the contrary, the individuals are often hyperconnected. Yet, their integration no longer happens on the basis of their geography, but on the basis of their function in specific networks, their social capital, coordinated through the space of flows. As Stalder stresses, 'space is not placeless, although its structural logic is' (Stalder 2006: 153). From this perspective, the difference from before the Internet to now is that things and people are less defined by their intrinsic qualities and more by their relational position to one another. Stalder argues this is cultural, pointing out that without culture people would not coalesce into something stable enough to create social space.

Deeply fractured with a great deal of cultural diversity differentiating the many distinct clusters of people and networks found online, this complex space is challenging to the ideals of 'open' and 'public'. Openness becomes detached from its prior association with the institutions of public space or the public sphere, i.e. the museum building or its corporate website. Instead, being open is equal to opening the flow of collections' content into the digital social space where its travel is relative to the destination of online social crowding and the contexts of use found in these organisations. In this respect, opening out is the opposite to letting in; it is the museum turned inside out. However, to make the obvious comparison to museum practices as a distributed network or community outreach would be mistaken as, in this concept of openness, the travel of digital content is intrinsically linked to those social conditions caused by the way the Internet compresses space with time.

Mobile phone technologies illustrate this analysis well in the way they allow us to develop new spatial practices by coordinating with each other *ad hoc*. With smartphone technologies, our location and the digital space conflate to produce a social condition in which we flexibly engage with our environment in a way that changes the way we navigate by mediating our physical position between real and digital space. Consequently, Stalder argues that the new space is fundamentally different to the physical space yet connected to it. In his interpretation, 'the space of flows does not indicate a linear shrinking of distance, but the establishment of an environment with a completely different, non linear spatial logic. Being part of the space of flows means being part of a context whose functional logic is based on real-time interaction, no matter in which places its constitutive elements are located' (Stalder 2006: 147.) Put somewhat schematically, 'the easier it is to create real-time interaction across distances, the less important is the fact that local co-presence enables real-time interaction as well' (cited in Stalder 2006: 256). Thus, we have two interlocking movements, one the fragmentation of 'place-based' communities and the other the integration of social

processes and the particular cultures through which they are created. This dynamic encapsulates the digital public space.

3.3 Digital public space and inclusion in museums

If we use Castells' and Stalder's analysis of space/time compression to now consider the way in which the Internet's distributed medium structures human agency, it can be seen that the social capital we express to others through simple actions, such as Google search or friending or favoriting through social media, is a code which brings distant elements, things and people into an interrelationship that is characterised by being in real time. According to Castells, the specifics of networked space relate to the way social actors use technology relative to their own histories, objectives and abilities. Put simply, he notes 'there is no theory of space that is not an integral part of a general social theory' (Castells 1996 cited in Stalder 206:142). Accordingly, Stalder makes the point that, 'space is not a container. Space is not a given, nor is it stable. Rather, space is constituted by social relations and transformed along with them' (2006: 142). Here, attention is drawn to the relation between agency and structure; human action is structured by the histories, objectives and social capital of the individual actor as well as the technology that mediates their action, such as the Internet. When we consider that the social unit contains both structure and agency, the shape of social space conflates the cultural capital or code we display to others via technology. It follows that 'capital' is not only exhibited in how we choose to act online but also acquired through the interaction between people who generate the digital public space. Participating in a digital culture would therefore reflect a 'competence' learnt through time invested online that cannot be separated from the person and how they interpret and act in the world around them; in other words, we are socialised by being online.

Consequently, literature on the sociology of the Internet increasingly identifies various social conditions that have changed the way public space is conceived; these conditions also enable museum space to be re-imagined. However, it is also the case that museum projects which explore concepts of online social space often remain contained within their established social media networks of individuals who are already disposed towards an interest in art and culture. In their exploration of networked space, museums have tended to call upon those online publics with whom they have an established relationship, e.g. the people who friend and follow museums on social media who, it can be assumed, have a prior interest in cultural activities. While some of the interaction between this public and the museum is, indeed, mediated through the Internet, this 'museum public' cannot reflect the socially diverse space the Internet produces. Consequently, the way various museums explore and experiment with properties of

networked space for exhibitions, public access and engagement, more often than not, excludes online social diversity. This implies that the institutionalised mediation of digital practices may exclude particular online publics. To date, especially as this thesis' research practice will demonstrate in the following chapters, the digital practices of museums have failed to reflect the socially diverse network of interrelationships that make up the many public spaces of the Internet. Surely this situation is contradictory to the museum's principle of inclusivity.

In this context, the next two sections will outline distinct notions of digital public space that are at play in certain museum projects: the public spaces of 'networked individualism' and 'mass self-communication'. When considering these projects closely, it will be seen that their organisational structure and practices have largely kept them apart from online publics that do not have a prior association to the institution.

3.4 Museums and the public space of the 'networked individualism'

Due to the data trail each of us leaves as we go online, social scientists are beginning to put the individual at the centre of a system of social relationships and patterns. Both Castells and Wellman write about networked individualism as a transition from the predominance of primary relationships, embodied in families and communities, to secondary relationships, embodied in associations, to tertiary relationships embodied in 'me centered networks' (Castells 2002: 129). In the world of networked individuals, it is the person who is the focus more than the family, the work unit, the neighborhood and the social group. This social condition embodies the shift to a personalised, wireless world, 'with each person switching between ties and networks. People remain connected, but as individuals rather than being rooted in the home bases of work unit and household. Individuals switch rapidly between their social networks. Each person separately operates his networks to obtain information, collaboration, orders, support, sociability, and a sense of belonging' (Wellman 2002: 15).

When talking on mobile phones the socio-physical context of our immediate material environment cannot be taken for granted. Physical surroundings must be described rather than assumed as people have uncertain knowledge about the immediate whereabouts and social contexts of their mobile network members. As Wellman puts it (2001: 4)

Consequently, when people talk loudly on their mobile phones in public they are not being anti-social: the very fact of their conversation means they are socially connected. Rather, people's awareness and behavior are in private cyberspace even though their bodies are in a different public space.

A different perspective to this same phenomena, or effect of space/time compression, is that digital flows distribute data about the cultural disposition of a person's online networking with those whose social capital it intersects; by which I mean our every action online contains code about the way we are individually culturally disposed. Accordingly, the proliferation of computer-supported specialized relationships provides a basis for interest-based structures that provide support, partial solidarity, and vehicles for aggregating and articulating interests. However, the more dramatic examples of this phenomenon, such as viral objects and trending topics, are where the individual is seen in context of the crowd.

It is correct to define the phenomenon of crowding as 'a type of public' due to the fact that, in the instance of their organisation, the networked individual represents a collective of people within distinct cultural parameters. In this respect, it will be argued that the character of social organisation is changing to include greater examples of self-organisation that must be conceptualised quite differently to established museum methods of audience segmentation or place-based communities, which have dominated their recent history (Barrett 2011, Fyfe 2006).

In my view, *Click!*, a social media project at Brooklyn Museum (2008) that exhibited the structure of social space on the Internet, is uniquely interesting because it used the museum as a public space to display the Internet as social space (Fig 3.1).



Figure 3.1: Cick! Brooklyn Museum

This offers both a visual understanding of the way social media space can intersect people's private and public spheres and further demonstrates the way the Internet can influence a museum's onsite exhibition practices.

The project was conceptualised from the book *The Wisdom of Crowds* by James Surowiecki (2004), who asserts that 'diversity and independence' are two of the most important factors that make crowds intelligent. This wisdom is lost if people can see how their friends are behaving, making them less independent and weakening the diversity within the group.

Similar to Bourdieu's use of big data to map corresponding patterns in lifestyle and economic data, the distributed properties of social media space form a 'crowd' whilst maintaining the independence and diversity of the participants forming the group. The cleverness of *Click!* was to re-think how the connectivity of web media could be used to exhibit Surowiecki's concept and, in this respect, to explore digital space as an organising agent through which to visualise the wisdom or 'data' the crowd produced.

Click! was built around three stages. Firstly, the Brooklyn Museum solicited photographs from artists via an open call on their website, Facebook group, Flickr groups, and outreach to Brooklyn-based arts organisations. It was able to draw upon these established networks of interest by the connectivity produced through the museum as a social object in digital space. Secondly, the museum's online network, a jury of the masses, evaluated the photographs in terms of aesthetic quality and relevance to the exhibition theme. Importantly for this project, all evaluations were private and all artists were unnamed. Thus it was not possible for the citizen judges to know how others had rated the photographs. To this end *Click!* employed various techniques to preserve their independence and diversity, such as a widget which randomly selected the photographs to be judged so judges were blinded to the activity of each other. This technology inhibited friends from forming favourites and thus influencing the crowd behaviour. Lastly, the museum used their collective data to select and size the various images and displayed these in the physical space of the gallery. This exhibition generated a 'tag cloud' which made visible how the votes had coalesced to favour one image over another.

Representing crowd wisdom through their different sizes, the photographs behave as if rising to the front of a collective consciousness. In this way *Click!* acted as an interface to a crowd of individuals and as a source of visual data to further engage the public in museum space. Hence, in line with Surowiecki's concept of visualising wisdom through

connecting independent thought, it is digital space that has the influence as an organising agent in the display of objects at Brooklyn Museum. Consequently, the *Click!* exhibition was a visualization of self-organisation facilitated by digital media, which complements Bourdieu's conception of social space in the sense that those with similar tastes had coalesced independently in the cloud. A further aspect to this exhibition is its harnessing of digital culture as an interpretive regime. For instance, in Bernstein's methodology it is assumed the audience would possess the necessary cultural capital to de-code meaning from this digital clustering of visual data. In itself, this use of digital culture is indicative of the way that audience/publics have acquired habits and dispositions that are relational to their time spent online; accordingly acquiring a digital culture reflects a 'competence' learnt through socialization and cannot be separated from the person and how they interpret the world around them.

We can thus claim *Click!* as a data visualization of the structure of social space and read its symbols not only for the wisdom of the crowd but for the problems of exclusion to museums. A different crowd to this museum's already established digital network, I imagine, would have produced different results. In this respect, Stalder's (2006) critique of Castells' network society proves useful by providing an alternative perspective: to consider the way an institution's history and established habits mediate their use of technologies. Stalder draws attention to the social contexts in which technology is used and this emphasis gives us the flip side to Castells' argument, focusing instead on cultural history as a mediator structuring technology as opposed to the way Web technologies mediate space. Stalder's argument therefore complicates Castells' evolutionary approach to the network society by emphasising a social and historical layer of mediation acting on this process. Applying Stalder's thought to museum organisation brings its social history as an agent into play in the way technology is engaged by such institutions. Moreover, his approach also extends to the wider public and begins to explain how their social history mitigates the agency of technology as a force of change in the everyday.

3.5 Museums and 'mass self-communication' as the new public sphere

Castells (2007) argues that societies exist as societies by constructing a public space in which private interests and projects can be negotiated to reach a point of shared decision making. In the industrial society, this public space was built around the institutions of the nation-state that, under the pressure of democratic movements and class struggle, constructed an institutional public space based on the articulation between a democratic political system, an independent judiciary and a civil society in which the museum, connected to the state, played a pivotal role (Bennett, 1995, 1988).

However, in the network society, Castells argues the space of digital flows are challenging 'the boundaries of the nation state as the relevant unit to define a public space. Not that the nation-state disappears (quite the opposite), but its legitimacy has dwindled as governance is global and governments remain national' (2007: 258)

In networked society the public sphere becomes self-organised through the space of digital flows. This transformation of public space is structured in the interaction between political actors, social actors and public media business, both mass media and networked media. Within these interrelationships, actors striving for social change will use Internet platforms as a way to influence the information agenda of mainstream media. In a similar vein, the established media increasingly use real-time data of social crowding or trending topics as a context for their media activity, illustrating Castells' notion of mass self-communication, now rapidly evolving as online public spaces. He argues that the diffusion of Internet, mobile communication, digital media, and a variety of tools of social software, 'have prompted the development of horizontal networks of interactive communication that connect local and global in chosen time' (2007: 246). For Castells, the term 'mass self-communication' highlights the ways in which these horizontal networks are rapidly converging with the mass media. He writes (Castells, 2007: 248):

It is mass communication because it reaches potentially a global audience through the p2p networks and Internet connection. It is multimodal, as the digitization of content and advanced social software, often based on open source that can be downloaded free, allows the reformatting of almost any content in almost any form, increasingly distributed via wireless networks. And it is self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception by many that communicate with many. We are indeed in a new communication realm, and ultimately in a new medium, whose backbone is made of computer networks, whose language is digital, and whose senders are globally distributed and globally interactive.

Through the idea of mass self-communication Castells aims to capture the flexibility, instantaneity and unfettered capacity of large self-organized crowds online as particularly relevant for the practice of media politics to diffuse any kind of material. As he observes, 'we are indeed in a new communication realm, and ultimately in a new medium, whose backbone is made of computer networks, whose language is digital, and whose senders are globally distributed and globally interactive' (Castells 2007: 248).

In this communication space or digital public space museums have set up direct links to the users/producers of horizontal communication networks, scanning social media in

real-time to select themes and issues of potential connection to their collections. For instance, in May 2010 the real-time news 'object' of volcanic ash which was closing airports and stranding commuters prompted the Tate to look into its collections and reveal a past 'real-time' sketch-drawing by Clarkson Frederick (1793-1867) of a volcano spitting ash in a style that matched to the mass media imagery dominating news output at that moment (Fig 3.2).



The eruption that changed Iceland forever



Volcanic ash has halted all UK flights and many in Europe

By Tom de Castella

A volcanic eruption in Iceland is continuing to ground flights in the UK and Europe, but 227 years ago a far more devastating eruption occurred wiping out a fifth of the island's population - as well as tens of thousands across Europe.

Figure 3.2: Sketch-drawing by Clarkson Frederick (1793-1867) and news coverage of the 2010 volcanic eruption in Iceland.

Acting more like a newspaper than a gallery, the Tate put this timely image on the Internet through Twitter. This brought about further augmenting action in the digital network as the link was re-tweeted. There was thus interplay between the three media types, the Tate, traditional mass/broadcast media and the digital environment. All acted

together to tweet the location of the Clarkson Frederick sketch and were coupled in feedback, each shifting and adapting in real-time and in relation to one another, feeding off each other and events as airports cancelled flights and frustrated passengers posted their plight on the social web. Mass media, such as the BBC News, tapped into these localised networked exchanges as a source of content for their broadcast channels. In a continuing process of circularity, this content was re-circulated, transported and translated via the social networks.

Although not native to the Internet, by treating it as mass communications space the Tate was able to involve a widely dispersed public space. What is interesting here is not only the way distinct media types interacted in real-time and the quality of public space this produced, but also the rarity of examples of museums being inclusive of this public space. Since 2010 the Tate, like other UK museums, has been sporadic in its engagement with real-time public media space or, as Castells' puts it, the space of mass self-communication, which he argues to be the new public sphere. As things stand, the odd examples of museums working in this way indicates motivation to adapt their institutional and organisational forms, i.e. workflows and departmental responsibilities to engage the space of mass self-communication.

3.6 'Object-Oriented Democracies': museum experimentation with digital public space

In addition to the above examples there are a number of exploratory projects and research papers claiming innovation in digital practices. This section will examine the publications and initiatives at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, Australia for the way they exhibit how established cultural and institutional norms are mediating or structuring their practice. Under the digital stewardship of Seb Chan (2004 -2011), the Powerhouse Museum gained an avant garde reputation for making their digital collections open and visible to the public. Yet, when we deconstruct the assumptions on which these digital practices were formed, an argument emerges that they were as much a barrier to publics online as they were to the ideal of the open and inclusive museum.

Between 2004 - 2006 this museum's website had been developed to enable the public to add their own folksonomies (i.e. descriptive terms in the form of tags and keywords) to the collections' documentation data and these contributions now sit alongside its formal taxonomies (i.e. the curatorial classification of the collection) and object providence (Chan 2006 and 2007). As a consequence of this development, the new exchanges between the museum and users of its website aim to enable the flow of collections data into fresh digital contexts of use and consumption (Chan 2007).

Closely related to these developments at the Powerhouse Museum was Fiona Cameron's paper 'Object-Oriented Democracies: Contradictions, Challenges And Opportunities' (2008), which illustrated many of its arguments with examples of public use, reuse and contributions to the Powerhouse Museum's digital assets. Outlined below, these examples enabled Cameron to illustrate Latour's (2005) notion of object-oriented democracy by tracing the way collections' information is distributed through online social space to then self-organise within complex network structures and map out a public space beyond the museum. She argues that, within these complex systems, objects derive their meaning and significance from a number of elements: curatorial disciplines, contexts of production and consumption, practical use in everyday life and within networks as technical, social or political entities. Her list establishes the notion that there is no division between the material and social world, and no definitive categories exist that can capture all that can be known about an object. Cameron is responding here to Latour (2005), who proposed that people are more connected to each other by their worries and the issues they care about than by any other set of values, opinions, attitudes or principles. Latour's notion of object-centered democracies conveys the social and cultural contexts that shape network forms as indicative of human relations mediated through objects. To establish this principle he directs us (Latour 2005: 15-16):

just go in your head over any set of contemporary issues: the entry of Turkey into the European Union, the Islamic veil in France, the spread of genetically modified organisms in Brazil, the pollution of the river near your home, the breaking down of Greenland's glaciers, the diminishing return of your pension funds, the closing of your daughter's factory, the repairs to be made in your apartment, the rise and fall of stock options, the latest beheading by fanatics in Falluja, the last American election. For every one of these objects, you see spewing out of them a different set of passions, indignations, opinions, as well as a different set of interested parties and different ways of carrying out their partial resolution.

It's clear that each object each issue generates a different pattern of emotions and disruptions, of disagreements and agreements. There might be no continuity, no coherence in our opinions, but there is a hidden continuity and a hidden coherence in what we are attached to. Each object gathers around itself a different assembly of relevant parties. Each object triggers new occasions to passionately differ and dispute. Each object may also offer new ways of achieving closure without having to agree on much else. In other words, objects taken as so many issues bind all of us in ways that map out a public space profoundly different from what is usually recognized under the label of 'the political'.

For Latour, objects are social in the sense that they act as the points of intersection between the distinct properties that make up network forms. He maintains that these social objects structure networks, and that the public space and the readings of the object that emerge are profoundly different from those usually recognised under the label of the political. According to Cameron, the analogy for the museum object lies in the way collections data is organised, read and used in networked public space by different individuals and groups (Latour 2005, Cameron 2008).

Both Cameron (2008) and Chan (2006) document how the rich metadata of the additional public terms/tags has meant collections information is increasingly likely to flow within digital networks that transcend their museum location. Chan draws attention to the difference folksonomies can make to the travel of collections data as publics are, on the whole, unfamiliar with formal classification systems whereas user keywords are more descriptive of popular culture. Folksonomies thus have the effect of 'augmenting serendipity' (Chan 2007). For example, in contrast with the Powerhouse's official description: 'Sylvester the Cat, licensed from Warner Brothers Looney Tunes cartoons, cloth / cardboard / plastic, Equity, China, 1994', a particularly memorable user keyword for Chan was 'puddy tat'. While a museum's official collection records would be highly unlikely to employ such a term, Google's sophisticated algorithms for returning information based on search queries can easily make the semantic connection between this object and its user keyword.

Folksonomies can therefore act as a kind of interstice between formal museum nomenclatures and popular culture; this new space then has agency to engage more nuanced and social understandings of collections. Accordingly, Cameron (2008) makes the point that collections information, when traveling in the distributed informational flows of digital space, becomes more discursive and playful rather than solely based on deep ideological symbolic constructs about heritage, history or culture. In this respect, the organisation of collections through the digital social space seems to correspond with Clifford (1997: 214) when he argues for:

a democratic politics that would challenge the hierarchical valuing of different places of crossing. It argues for a decentralization and circulation of collections in a multiplex public sphere, an expansion of the range of things that can happen in museums and museum-like settings. [...] A contact perspective argues for the local/global specificity of struggles and choices concerning inclusion, integrity, dialogue, translation, quality, and control. And it argues for a distribution of resources (media attention, public and private funding) that recognizes diverse audiences and multiplies centred histories of encounter.

The fact that user keywords/tags were being spidered by search engine algorithms attracted my research interest in museum's digital collections and the Internet as public space. The effect of these algorithms meant Google was increasingly likely to return 'object records' to queries that had relevance to the searcher's questions and motivations but seemed detached from them having any prior knowledge or interest in the museum's holdings. In this respect, digital flows of interconnected cultural, political, economic, technological ideas, agendas and resources attract collections data through semantic association into new social contexts. The difference this optimisation made to the visibility of Powerhouse Museum content was that Internet users searching for common topics and consumer items were coming across object records on the first page of their Google search returns. In this instance, collections information is contextualised by the contexts of its consumption, i.e. all the other data returned by the search query.

This explains why the 1950s *Ubra* (Fig 3.3) became one of the Powerhouse Museum's most viewed online objects in 2007 in contrast to its previous relative obscurity (Cameron 2008).



: Powerhouse Museum Collection object 93/391/66 Brassiere, womens, 'Nu-U', nylon / cotton / metal, Berlei, Australia, 1957 and advertisement for the 2006 Ubra.

Figure 3.3: 1950s *Ubra*, in the Powerhouse collection.

With the re-invention and launch of the 2006 *Ubrain* stores and the associated media coverage, Google searches were linking it to a consumer culture of shopping via user keywords. Cameron (2008) uses this example to convey how the space of connectivity generated by public interest in the Ubra online brought together an assembly of unlikely

parties: heritage values, an authorised museum significance and the mobile worlds of consumer consumption and online shopping. Expanding this distributed and real-time notion of public interaction with collections data beyond the Powerhouse collection, Cameron also maps museum objects taking an increasingly active and engaged role in social networks and political agendas (2008):

via Google, collections of Persian objects used as signifiers of Iranian cultural identity were mobilised to counter negative representations of ancient Persia following the '300' movie controversy about the battle of Thermopylae between the Persians and Spartans in 480 BC (Jones 2007). Searches for the film '300' were diverted away from the film to a Website Project 300 that displayed contemporary Iranian art, documentaries, and links to the British Museum's *Forgotten Empire* exhibition of Persian artefacts (Jones 2007, 6). Art works were used as tools to project positive representations of Persian civilisation and bolster contemporary national narratives.

Through this and other examples, the case is made that the relationship between consumption and production has become more diffuse, with consumers being the medium through which collections data is shared; consequently, the contexts of consumption increasingly bypass the museum, being self-generated by the social grouping instead. Cameron's is a convincing argument: collections and the meanings, values and significances attributed to them can no longer be considered fixed, given or separate from the networked forms and qualities of space enabled by the Internet. Through the contribution of both Cameron and Chan, it became possible to explore what a collection becomes when it is external to the museum as a spatial and organising medium because these agencies are now delegated to the Internet's informational flow. The digital public space thus invites discussion on the cultural currency of collections when social space is no longer mediated by the museum.

By 2008 this line of questioning seemed to be a developing area of institutional critique. For example, John Pratty's (2006) paper 'The inside out Web Museum' had aimed to focus attention on digital space as an organising medium and public context that was alternative to the museum. An assumption here is that the more technology facilitates a networked social structure, as seen most recently with Web 2.0, the more difficult it becomes for museums to produce universal or consensual meanings for their collections. From Cameron's perspective, the work museums do to embrace the radical mutability of objects and their meanings, together with the way this activity can engage people from different backgrounds, delineates object-based networks. Here, the travel or flow of collections records is their re-organisation as a result of political, economic, intercultural relations and the ongoing debates these provoke. Although the network systems she maps exhibit democratic exchange within their structure, these are still

bound and coded relationships. This fact opens up further discussion on the way these collectives are positioned relative to one another in social space, who is excluded from them and the potential issues of social inequality this implies. These issues will be examined below.

3.7 Object-oriented networks and exclusion in the digital public space

While implying greater democracy to collections access, digital innovation at the Powerhouse museum also supports an alternative reading of social exclusion. In Cameron's (2008) various case studies she refers to different materials, social and cultural influences all being networked relative to a mutual object of interest. We learn that the 'object' of network relations is what attracts the flow of collections data. However, that some of these network environments and social contexts attract collections data implies that many others do not; this potential for 'exclusion' seems to be hidden or 'mis-recognised' under an assumption that 'inclusion' is object-centred and thus democratic, networked, visible and open.

Following Latour (2005), Cameron argues that an 'object' is not necessarily a thing in itself but rather a social space made up of a network of different perspectives, cultures and materials that together produce a definable, if unstable, space. Thus the structure of a network is shaped by the inter-definition of network participants and their relative relationship provides the identity of the network itself; for example, the networking of unlikely parties such as heritage values, an authorised museum significance, the mobile worlds of consumer consumption and online shopping.

Stalder (2006) argues that this differential quality of the network form follows a definition by Pierre Musso: 'a network is an unstable structure of connections, composed of interacting elements, whose variability follows certain functional rules' (Musso cited in Stalder 2006: 178). There is, in this respect, a connection to be made between Musso's theorisation of network forms and Star & Griesemer's (1989) notion of 'boundary objects' as objects which are both plastic enough to adapt to the local needs and constraints of the several parties networked through them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across the different sites. Boundary objects have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them a recognizable means of translation. Star & Griesemer argue that the creation and management of boundary objects is key in developing and maintaining coherence across intersecting social worlds, and therefore also for sustaining stability in network forms. From this perspective, what holds a network together is its explicit purpose or object, which provides the network as a whole with

some fundamental values in relation to which its internal negotiations maintain the logic of the collective identity. Both Star & Griesemer's (1989) notion of 'boundary objects' and Stalder's use of Musso convince us that networks operate on the basis of a common protocol and a shared set of goals; without these properties the network would disintegrate.

A 'protocol' is a type of 'code'; without the necessary cypher neither data nor people will be attracted to generate into a network structure. Consequently, for all the diversity contained within these complex structures, we find the 'object' of their organisation has the effect of an algorithm in computer programming, attracting some collections data and not others. For this reason, these network formations can also be treated as culturally bound structures where 'code' is considered a form of 'cultural capital'. 'Capital', as theorised by Bourdieu (1977, 1986), has a particular resonance within museum theory as a reason for publics to exclude themselves from visiting (Merriman 1991, Prior 2006, Barrett 2011). The link to Bourdieu being proposed here is based on Latour's (2005) notion that an object in 'social space' is an effect of an array of relations, the effect, in short, of a network. As such, the stability of this object/network can only maintain itself while those relations linking the different agents or actants hold together and do not change their shape.

Similar to Bourdieu, Latour presumes that the cohesion of 'social space' is a balancing of different perspectives, which requires the networked members to be self-aware of their relative positions to one another, i.e. the protocols that keep the network environment stable. Following their logic, the attraction or non attraction of collections data in the digital public space would be contained within the communication parameters and variables that structure the shape of network, thus reflecting a symbolic order in those interrelationships. Consequently, the organisational effect of the Internet's distributed structure would mean that, before collections data can travel/connect within network formations, it needs an attractor in the form of a social object which first needs to be generated by human activity. Searching the Internet or posting content via social media disperses that action/personal data through loosely tied connections between distinct social clusters. This distributed flow of information attracts previously disparate people to cluster in network formations based on there being a common protocol between them, i.e. social capital. Latour, like Stalder, Shirky and Bourdieu, places a great deal of emphasis on the cultural qualities that delineate network shapes.

Shirky, for instance, documents the way 'social media' was used to organize flash mobs in the much popularised spontaneous organisation of protests in Belarus in the spring of 2006. Here, the object of organisation generating these protests was the rigged (as it

was claimed) election result of the then president, Alexander Lukashenko. According to Shirky (2008), spontaneous organisation relies on there first being shared 'social capital' i.e a code. This is why he is able to argue that, via the Internet's distributed structure, 'we now have communication tools that are flexible enough to match our social capabilities, and we are witnessing the rise of new ways of coordinating action that take advantage of that change' (Shirky 2008: 20). One of the reasons we have witnessed technology at work in key social situations is, as he has documented, thanks to the ubiquitous use of now mundane technologies like email, blogs and Twitter augmenting social capital. Consequently, the forming of social groups or interest groups has gotten a whole lot easier.

Instant communities, such as the protests in Belarus, may only sustain for a short period, making it near impossible to tag collections data relative to these emerging 'real time' social structures. Compared to the many everyday social contexts emerging online that often disappear as quickly as they arrive, Chan's (2007) notion of augmented serendipity seemed an inadequate solution to engaging the digital public space. Moreover, while Cameron (2008) may have shown that some online social groups attract collections data, what we do not learn is why other social contexts are distanced or excluded from this cultural resource. The task is therefore to explain why museum data travels to and within some networks, but is not attracted by others. Rationally, it is not simply the attraction of online collections which has to be explained, as Cameron and Chan have attempted, but also their non-attraction. That groups organise themselves via the Internet shifts the rationalisation many established media institutions, among which we can include museums, produce content for their audiences. By its nature this social effect bypasses or transcends a pre-digital assumption that the medium largely fixes the context of consumption.

The apparent potential for cultural disparity in the flow of collections data seemingly reproduced the same issues of social inequality or exclusion to collections in the digital public space as those demonstrated in Bourdieu's and Barbel's 1960s social survey of museum visitors; this revealed a connection between social background and non visiting. Their classic study of European art museum audiences, *The Love of Art* (1991) remains one of the most influential academic studies of social indices of art perception (Prior 2006). 'Its core assumption, that visiting a museum is a function of one's social location, [or position in social space], identified the mechanism by which art appreciation differentiated those from higher social backgrounds, possessing what Bourdieu later termed 'cultural capital' from other groups' (Prior 2006: 539). Referring here to the way the capital holdings of the dominant class can be discerned in the notion that 'taste' is a gift from nature, Prior helpfully sums up Bourdieu's broader argument that taste, an

acquired 'cultural competence', is used to legitimise social differences. In other words, 'taste' functions to make social 'distinctions'.

A Bourdieusian perspective to the 'digital public space' as 'social space' would suggest that exclusion to collections data is a problem of self-exclusion to do with individual properties of cultural and symbolic capital. Arguably, Cameron's analysis of object-centered networks can also be read as implying a problem of social exclusion, particularly when we consider that the internet's manipulation of space enables social networks to self-organise on the basis of code or 'cultural capital'. If this explanation of exclusion is the case, then developments at the Powerhouse Museum in 2004-2006 would only have compounded the problem. The shared culture that ties museum visitors into a community contributed the folksonomies and this arguably extended their shared language and assumptions about museum value into the digital space, which is counter to the idea of improved diversity. To query how the collective social disposition of museum publics acts on the travel of collections data is to draw comparisons with Bourdieu's theory of social space in which people are disposed to self-organise in line with those culturally similar to themselves. In other words, they are networked into collectives by similar cultural capital, meaning their folksonomies would be relatively monocultural, i.e. exclusive.

We can compare Bourdieu's (1984, 1989) modelling of the structure of 'social space' and the 'digital public space' by using Shirky's concept of 'small world networks'. This helps in two ways: firstly, it explains how the travel of information occurs through distributed structures, clustering those with similar social dispositions; and secondly it illustrates how the dynamic between 'social capital' as the context through which information flows and the Internet as the distributed structure shape one another.

Shirky encourages his reader to imagine striking up a conversation with the stranger next to them on a plane. He asks why it is that two people who previously did not know one another quickly realize they have a friend or acquaintance in common, at which point both passengers express surprise and say: 'What a small world!' (Shirky 2008, 212). This apparent serendipity seems impossible. Considering the world population each would have to know something like sixty thousand people to have a fifty-fifty chance of knowing someone in common. Clearly few of us do, yet we discover such small-world connections all the time.

For Shirky, these seemingly abstract meetings are indicative of the way social capital is both formed and travels on the Internet. In practice, only a few travel by air and these passengers share departure and arrival cities. This increases the odds of there being a

link between them. But significantly, each traveller has a circle of friends so there is a network of potential interrelationships. His point is that in any social group there will be a disproportionate amount of social capital between members, with some more connected than others. Although you are unlikely to know any given contact of the other traveller, you are very likely to know one of the most connected people they know. In fact, social networks are held together not by the bulk of people with hundreds of connections but by the few with thousands, the point being that highly connected people are the backbone of social networks. 'And the 'knowing someone in common link -' the thing that makes you exclaim "Small world" with your seatmate is - specifically that connection' (Shirky 2008: 215).

Through tracing the informational flow in network systems we realise that a few influential people account for a wildly disproportionate amount of overall connectivity online which allows information to move through large networks. In this sense, 'small world networks' are both an amplifier and filter of information; information in the system is passed along by friends, and friends of a friend tend to get information that is also of interest to their friends. Through Shirky, the concept of 'small world networks' offers a model of social space based upon the principle that, in social media communication, information disperses through the mass of the many by loosely tied connections between distinct social clusters. His analysis describes Bourdieu's notion of 'social space' in the sense that information can be shown to organise itself relative to the points in which the social capital of our two travellers intersects. Interestingly, the language Shirky uses following his introduction to small world theory is familiar to that used by Bourdieu (1984) and Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992). By discussing the following examples of this similarity, the issue of social exclusion in the digital public space will be contextualised within Bourdieu's concepts of 'symbolic power' and 'misrecognition'.

Shirky maps the way that distributed media have made it much easier for people to create 'social capital' as the visibility and searchability of social life online means that the semantic possibilities for the like-minded to locate one another, and to assemble and cooperate with one another, are so much greater. In other words, the Internet's distributed structure means that a person's activity is made visible and 'public' to others, networked within their own cultural parameters, implying that the social dispositions individuals display to others generate the networks they travel in. Like Bourdieu, Shirky is also describing a space where people organise themselves according to their internalised schemes of perception and the relative structure of symbolic order this creates. He comments, 'one reason the phrase "social capital" is so evocative is that it connotes an increase in power analogous to financial capital. In economical terms, capital is a store of wealth and assets; social capital is that store of behaviours and

norms in any large group that lets its members support one another' (Shirky 2008: 222). This definition echoes Bourdieu who writes: 'social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu, in Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 118). Shirky also draws our attention to 'one of the essential conundrums of social capital [that] inclusion implies exclusion' (2008: 202). Thus, 'social space' for both these authors describes an unequal, non-inclusive and symbolised environment or ecology.

As he documents, social media networks can emerge instantly and across geographic distances so demonstrating a consequence of this technology to be that 'groups have become ridiculously easy to form' (Shirky 2008). From his perspective, social media is fracturing social strata into niche networks due to the fact that social capital ceases to be structured by the influence of the relation between location and time, thus 'un-fixing' community from place. The use of mobile phones is a further stimulus to these changes (Stalder 2006).

For the place-based museum the problems of connecting with participants in transient digital networks are seen to be hard to overcome. In the context of the above analysis, the form that public engagement would need to take in order to address the inequality of the digital social space should be queried. For this production of space to be the organising principle by which collections data is made publicly visible would place that content into the ebb and flow of everyday contexts. It therefore follows that the visibility of collections data would be bound within specific systems of social capital as they are produced through the online activity of the digital public. But the problem identified in this chapter is that the institutionalised culture structuring the digital practices of museums misrecognises the complex, time-based and diverse ecology of the public digital space. Consequently, museums are blindly excluding the digital public which contradicts their public remit.

3.8 Conclusion

Overall, the arguments in this Chapter have aimed to rationalise research that investigates institutionalised mediation of digital practices. Through the sociology of the Internet, its approach has been to trace particular social conditions and properties of space that are unique to this medium and then to juxtapose this digital public space against museums' online resources for public access, inclusion and participation.

Through this process the Chapter has worked to expose a cultural and institutional divide between museums on the Web and networked society. In this context, it was seen that digital flows produce concepts of public and publicness which premise a particular idea of space and time that reconfigures the public sphere away from institutions like museums. In this respect, social scientists are beginning to put the individual at the centre of a system of social relationships and patterns which sees a transition from the predominance of primary relationships, embodied in families and communities, to secondary relationships, embodied in associations, to tertiary relationships embodied in 'me centered networks' (Castells 2002: 129). Consequently, in the world of networked individualism, public space can no longer be construed in relation to the family, the work unit, the neighborhood or the social group. However, the institutional form of the museum remains structured to these non-networked concepts of public (Rainie and Wellman 2012). Thus, we have two interlocking movements, one, the fragmentation of 'place-based' communities and the other the integration of social processes and the particular cultures through which they are created. This dynamic was shown to encapsulate the digital public space.

In my argument, this public is contradictory to the idea of the museum as a contextualising medium because the Internet's distributed structure already serves this function. It is the Internet's social agency that manipulates the flow of data and therefore this informational flow is not just alternative to the medium of the museum but contradictory to it. At the same time, speaking metaphorically, a museum collection is data. Uncovering contradictions embedded in museum practices can be used to explain both the direction and mediation of movement in a museum's organisational learning and structural development. As Tony Bennett argues, the museum is by nature of its public status inherently contradictory and thus in a state of perpetual flux (Hooper-Greenhill 1992, Bennett 1995, Prior 2006). As Gere puts it (1997: 65), when 'one characterises the museum as a medium of communication then it is still one to which access is limited culturally if not literally.' To emphasise the contradictory logics that define the way museums reform their public remit is to open the museum to research methods framed by identifying and triggering contradictions, which Chapter 4 will discuss in detail.

Chapter 4. Research Methodology: Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and a Research Residency at the Whitworth Art Gallery

4.1 Introduction

Having, in the previous chapters already problematized the institutional and organisational issues that frame current thinking and practice in the interaction of museums and galleries with the digital public space, this chapter will now present a dialectical methodology for mapping development and movement where there is, according to Ilyenkov, a 'certain deviation from the previously accepted and codified norms' (1982: 84). This method offers a route to achieving a complex and layered understanding of the issues that arise when one tries to engage with publics native to the Internet. It also addresses the main research question of this thesis: 'What are the organisational and institutional limitations, opportunities and outcomes that arise when the museum's digital practices are informed by and address the qualities of the digital public space?'

As the previous chapters have discussed, the premise of this question is that museums largely fail to follow and materialise their principle of social inclusion in their interaction with online publics as they tend to be blind to the Internet's complex and socially diverse space. In this context, the chosen research methodology will identify the issues that arise in a museum's organisation and established cultures of practice when they are required to engage with the digital public space. Where possible, it will also trace any resulting movement in their organisational self-reflection and structural development.

As will be explained in detail in this chapter, core to the thesis' research methodology is a research practice which aims to open the digital collections of the WAG into the same time and space as the online public. Its premise is that, where the thesis' research practice comes into tension with WAG's established or normalised practices, the process exposes and triggers contradictions. As Engeström explains (2008), contradictions are historically accumulating structural tensions within and between systems of practice where the primary contradiction is between use and exchange value, i.e. the practice, culture and resources required to open the museum to one public can also act to close it to a different public. This concept and application of contradiction will be particularly useful in developing the research practice at the WAG, as it will allow tracing what publics are included/excluded in the effort to opening collections to the digital public space of the Internet.

In relevant literature contradictions constitute a key concept in organisational studies of working practices in institutions and their management structures; they are also a core principle in research that intervenes in the working environment (Hernes 2004, Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares 2008, McNiff 2006, Engeström 1987, 1999, Engeström and Sannino 2010 *et al.*). As will be discussed in section 4.3, contradictions existing between the policies structuring public access to museums and their democratic ethic for social inclusivity can cause systemic changes in museum processes. The thesis will draw on the principle of contradiction in systemic change as a means to research in what ways activity that aims to connect museums with online publics can be used to trigger development in digital innovation at the WAG. It will also draw attention to the analysis that contradictions that remain invisible or unrecognised by the institution can hold back, even prevent, development needed to maintain the museum's social relevance.

The use of the notion of contradiction will be accompanied by an application of methods that fall broadly within the scope of 'cultural historical activity theory' (CHAT). Activity theory provides a method for analysing activity that takes account of the history and culture of the context, placing humans as agents of change within that context. From a CHAT perspective, we define culture through our actions, complying with or breaking rules (tacit and explicit), and operating within a community that is directed to tasks through the explicit division of labour. It sees human activity as constitutive of, and shaped by, the objectives of practices and takes account of all aspects of activity in the workplace, multiple realities and interacting systems.

Applying CHAT methods in a museum setting facilitates research into the institutionalised mediation of digital practices which aims to address a gap in the available knowledge concerning the cultural, organisational and historical forces structuring the way museum projects have experimented with concepts of a networked society. Examples of these projects were discussed in Chapter 3 as being an emerging area of museum practice (Cameron 2008, Chan 2010, Bernstein 2008, 2012). However, a problem with the available literature is that it tends to neglect reference to the agency of the museum's organisation as a mediating factor shaping how these projects unfold.

Rather, the way museum projects are written up often treats theory and practice in a non-dialectical manner; documenting and evaluating museum projects are often predisposed to first describe the concept informing the practical approach, what they did, followed by the project outcomes (see projects in Bernstein 2008, Proctor 2010, Simon 2010). Accordingly, we are told how theory is translated into practice but less about the nuance of its production, such as the influence of social and material factors

like the working language, symbols, beliefs and habits of museum staff, as well as the more practical considerations to do with spatial practices that intersect buildings, bodies and technologies. Instead, by drawing on CHAT, this thesis will reflect on such working culture and practical considerations when developing and analysing its research practice in WAG.

Therefore, this chapter will outline the application of CHAT methods to map and analyse the cultural historical and structural forces acting on a research practice to open the collections of the WAG into the same time and space as the online public. In addition, the analytical principles of CHAT methods will be detailed for their capacity to structure and analyse discussion with museum professionals on the opportunities and limitations of managing collections relative to the way digital public space is produced. Accordingly, the following sections begin by describing a research residency at the WAG which provided the real life contexts of a working gallery to develop, with both staff and the public, models for opening their collections into digitally produced space. Here, the WAG, as well as the MM with which the Whitworth shares organisational structures, are described in terms of the broader structures that shape their established practices in, and language about, public engagement. Detailing these socio-cultural contexts enables CHAT methods to be unpacked in the remaining sections for their analytical capacity to decipher practice as it was shaped by the existing structures of the WAG, its departmental organisation, language, symbols, beliefs and habits. These later sections start with the theory of dialectics as a core principle in CHAT's analytical method, followed by description of reflexive practice within the CHAT framework.

4.2 Research Residency in the Whitworth Art Gallery (2008-2014)

This was a practice-based PhD. The PhD's practice took the format of an on-and-off research residency at the WAG between 2008 and 2014.⁵ This means that I was not resident in WAG throughout this period of time (which was not practical nor necessary), but only during the design and organisation of specific activities or projects. This varied from few days to few weeks or, in some cases, months. As the aim of the research was to document and analyse the contradictions that arise when I worked with WAG staff to develop practices for opening the gallery's collection into the same time/space as the online public, the residency's frequency and length was organised around those

⁵ The residency was arranged by Esme Ward, Head of Learning and Engagement at the Whitworth Art Gallery. Esme Ward was also one of the thesis's supervisors. Due to this dual role and in order to avoid any conflict of interests, an effort was made to minimise as much as possible the direct involvement of Esme's in the design and organisation of the research practice, beyond my initial induction in WAG. However, this was not always possible and it must be acknowledged that the process and progress of the research practice was to an extent informed and influenced by discussions that took place during formal PhD supervisions.

particular actions. This allowed me to analyse how the gallery's departmental organisation, organisational culture and systems for collections management impacted the practice and vice versa.

It was important that the research practice took the form of a residency within a cultural organisation, rather than follow, e.g. a case-study approach. The research questions and the premise of the theoretical framework of the thesis required a research methodology, where I would follow, document and indeed influence the dialectic emergence and resolution of contradictions, as outlined below (and further explained later in this Chapter). Therefore, the practice of building a complex understanding of the WAG's organisation, its cultural assumptions and symbolisms towards public space was only possible through the residency, the access it gave to people as well as participation in its processes. Through the residency I was able to build relationships that allowed him access behind-the-scenes, staff meetings, exhibits, and most importantly to people. By taking the time to develop real relationships, the researcher-in-residence gained meaningful insight into the culture of a working gallery.

A research residency along the above lines is not uncommon in relevant literature and research practice. Authors, such as Bodrožić (2008), Engeström (1987) and Yamagata-Lynch (2010), have outlined the benefits (as well as the challenges) of a researcher embedded in an organisation for a period of time. This methodological approach relates directly to epistemologies of reflexive practice, to which this thesis subscribes to. Reflexive practice has been discussed in detail by Coffey (1999), Whitehead (1999) and McNiff (2006). It has allowed me to develop a piece of research that not only identifies the nuances of professional digital practice in a cultural organisation, but also provide an in-depth analysis that juxtaposes this practice to the particular organisational, policy and professional contexts of the institution. It has also allowed (if not 'forced') me to acknowledge my own role and agency in the process: this is not just good research practice, but also a crucial element of the CHAT that the thesis follows. In this context, I was not an uninvolved observer of WAG's digital practice, but a catalyst that generates actions and responses and 'forces' contradictions to reveal themselves.

Why a research residency in the WAG, one would ask. The reasons for choosing WAG were both conceptual and practical. This is a progressive gallery that conceptually and practically reforms the way it works with the public and actively invites critical discourse about its processes. (Esme Ward, 2015, personal communication, Appendix 1) Indeed, in several contexts and instances WAG has argued that it aims to push the boundaries of an art gallery's experimentation with collections and practices via temporary

exhibitions and public engagement programmes. (Pidd 2015) This rhetoric and related action culminated to the emptying of the WAG's exhibition spaces in 2009 to make space for a performance art project (part of the Manchester International Festival), led by artist Marina Abramovic. More recently, WAG went through a £15m redevelopment that aimed to double its public space and open the Gallery to its neighbouring Whitworth Park; a redevelopment that brought WAG the Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year 2015.

In a way my research residency is evidence of this openness and invitation to criticism. A research practice in this type of progressive/reflexive environment created various challenges associated with participating in an evolving and adaptable environment and participation in this complex ecology, I believe, fitted the research questions because it positioned the researcher/practitioner to question why this Gallery is evolving in the way it is rather than researching what it does. It enabled me to trace implicit power acting on what is possible in terms of digital practices due to the way a museums organisation and workflows and priorities adapt to reflect the policies governing their funding. Also, at the time the digital engagement practice of the WAG was under development, with the role and responsibilities of the New Media Officer moving from one department to another, especially after the merge of the senior management roles between the WAG and MM in 2010. This in-flux situation offered me an opportunity to both trace the developing practice and challenges of digital engagement in WAG and the space to contribute to it (or even shape it to an extent). Indeed, my research residency was seen by the WAG within the context of this developing practice and as an opportunity to critically reflect on it.

Furthermore, the reasons for approaching WAG for this project were also practical. WAG is one of the two museums of the University of Manchester (the other being the Manchester Museum) and works very closely with the Centre for Museology, the home of my PhD research. This existing collaboration between the two departments of the same University offered me access to WAG staff and resources necessary to negotiate and organise a research residency. Indeed a WAG member of staff, Esme Ward, Head of Learning and Engagement, was also one of my PhD supervisors and she was pivotal in arranging this residency.

This positioning required an ethnographic understanding of the WAG as a system through which practices are produced. When starting my research at the WAG my position in the organisation might have been described as that of the ethnographer and participant observer; I lacked insider knowledge and cultural capital, however there were some advantages to being an outsider. I was not involved in the organisational politics

nor bound by the departmental organisation. Thus I was able to work with a wide range of people, some of whom would not necessarily work with each other.

This access enabled my research to develop an ethnographer's focus on the differences that appear between distinctly different cultural understanding of public space. By reflecting on my own position in the WAG's organisation and drawing on the conversations with staff members in different departments an institutionalised culture towards public space emerged. In this context, qualitative research methods proved effective for collecting rich detailed data by involving staff to talk about public space in relation to their work at the gallery. These conversations were largely ad hoc emerging naturally in everyday contexts, more often than not in the gallery cafe. Although participants knew about my research and role at the gallery the informal nature of these encounters allowed uninhibited rich conversations. From these encounters more formal interviews were organised, nine in total, representing staff in different departments, including staff with curatorial, marketing and communication and learning and engagement roles and responsibilities. These staff were selected on the basis of their involvement and participation in digital engagement activities and projects, both those organised by WAG and those initiated by me. As the purpose of these interviews was to 'obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena', qualitative interviews was used (Kvale 1996: 5-6).

The method of these interviews was to follow Steinar Kvale who suggests an interviewer's approach is the traveller who undergoes a scholarly journey with the interviewee to elicit their own stories about their lived world, 'a post-modern constructivist understanding that involves a conversational approach to social research' (Kvale 1996: 3-5).⁶ Accordingly, the interviews at the WAG were designed to be semi-structured so that there was both a clear theme of questioning and flexibility to 'travel' with the interviewee on their narrative and explore new areas of discussion as they occurred. This 'traveller approach' enabled purposeful, professional conversations to obtain interviewees' perspectives on themes and issues relevant to my research. However, qualitative research is context dependant and interviews especially capture an image of thoughts and feeling of the moment, if repeated results may well be different.

⁶ A problem with this form of interviewing was the difficulty of maintaining the anonymity of interviewees, as they could be easily recognised by associated factors. At the same time the freedom to travel meant anonymity was important. Given a choice to be identified or remain anonymous most asked to remain anonymous which has restricted the use of direct quotes or any informations that would give away the identity of those interviewed.

Overall, as a research methodology the residency at the WAG provided a mechanism to develop an ethnography of the institution's perspectives towards public space as displayed in its departmental organisation, workflows and staff attitudes. Alongside the above-mentioned informal conversations and formal interviews including a key presentation to WAG's leadership team that the analysis will reflect upon, the research practice involved also the running of a professional forum during the Museums on the Web conference in Baltimore (2014). Although it might seem slightly odd that a conference workshop is presented here as part of the thesis' practice-based research, there are specific reasons behind this choice. The workshop was organised as a response to specific issues and difficulties with regards to level of understandings and experience identified during the WAG's interviews and informal conversations. By bringing the content of discussions I had in WAG to a professional forum that is concerned specifically with digital engagement practices I aimed to use this context of expertise to dig deeper into the cultural separation between museums on the Web and the online public. So, by bringing this into the scope of my research practice, I used the way international conferences bring delegates into the same space to explain the social effect of time/space compression online and this analogy provided a structure to draw out issues about the management of digital collections for online public engagement.

The main part of the research practice involved the design, preparation and analysis of four digital engagement projects and initiatives that I undertook in collaboration with WAG staff and other partners. These projects that aimed to open the digital collections of the WAG into the digital public space of the Internet have offered the bulk of research data that this thesis draws on. The projects (the process and outcomes of which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6) were: 'Community as Curator', a Manchester Beacon funding application and related collaboration with the Social Media Cafe in Manchester and Little Star TV (2008), that aimed to use the search and sharing activity of Manchester's diverse online communities as the curatorial frame within which to produce and share museum content; an initiative to use data about WAG collections on the M60 website and Manchester Evening News (2011), both of which publish news and stories related to place-based communities in Manchester; The Artcast Weather project (2011), a collaboration between WAG and the Guardian Northerner website to link WAG's artworks to weather forecasts; and participation in the Culture Hack in Leeds (2012) that offered WAG collections to data to a group of developers.

Importantly, it should be clarified that the above elements of the research practice (the interviews and informal conversations with WAG staff, the presentation to WAG's leadership team, the Museums and the Web Conference workshop and the four digital projects) were produced as part of an action-research model, where specific discussions

led to specific initiatives/projects and reflections on those projects led to other activities and so on. These projects/initiatives were of varied size, duration and length and involved the collaboration with both WAG staff and other external partners. Also, they involved the application of different processes, methods and techniques (interviews, workshops, hack events, data cleaning, use of digital and online platforms and tools).

This flexibility and fluidity in the research process, although challenging and time-consuming, allowed me to use different sources of data, carefully unpack contradictions and build further experimentations into follow-up initiatives, without being restricted by pre-defined and specific methods of data collection. In other words, the research practice of the WAG residency developed over time and its directions and actions were influenced not only by the thesis' research questions (the questions themselves shifted over time) or my own research objectives, but also realities on the ground. The mention of 'realities in the ground' is not used here as a disclaimer of research limitations, but as a crucial element of the research process itself: the research did not just aim to produce digital engagement projects, but indeed to study the conceptual, organisational and professional realities around such projects.

The research residency and its various methods and initiatives raised a number of ethical issues. Due to the length of the residency and my irregular presence at the WAG, I needed often to remind existing and inform new WAG staff of my role and remit. The University of Manchester guidelines on getting WAG interviewees' consent were followed and, as already mentioned, every effort has been made to maintain their anonymity in this thesis. In the case of the Museums & Web Conference workshop, participants were made aware of the context of this initiative as part of my PhD research and permission to use the (anonymised) discussions in my thesis was sought and granted during the workshop. However, when it came to the four digital projects, anonymity of the key agents and participants was neither possible nor necessary. Especially in the case of analysing the M60 and the Artcast projects, acknowledging and reflecting on the responsibilities and actions of specific individuals is integral to the research methodology and argument building of the thesis. Also, with regards to analytics of the Artcast digital project, I avoided collecting demographics or personal information of online contributors/commentators.

From an ethnographic perspective, the people who produce a working gallery and all that entails in terms of daily pressures coming from work flows and work evaluation can be analysed to build an understanding of implicit rules structuring WAG's digital practices, including the projects and activities outlined above. This ethnography feeds CHAT methods (discussed below) by identifying the rules, symbols and assumptions

mediating any practice to open collections into online space/time. However the localised experience of WAG's practices and cultures of space do not tell us about the broader policy framework that structures their activities which also feed into the methodology and are detailed below.

4.3. Whitworth Art Gallery, The Manchester Partnership and local policy contexts

The Whitworth Art Gallery and its sister Manchester Museum are the two University of Manchester Museums. Together with the Manchester City Galleries (run by Manchester City Council) they also form the Manchester Museums and Galleries partnership (Fig 4.1).

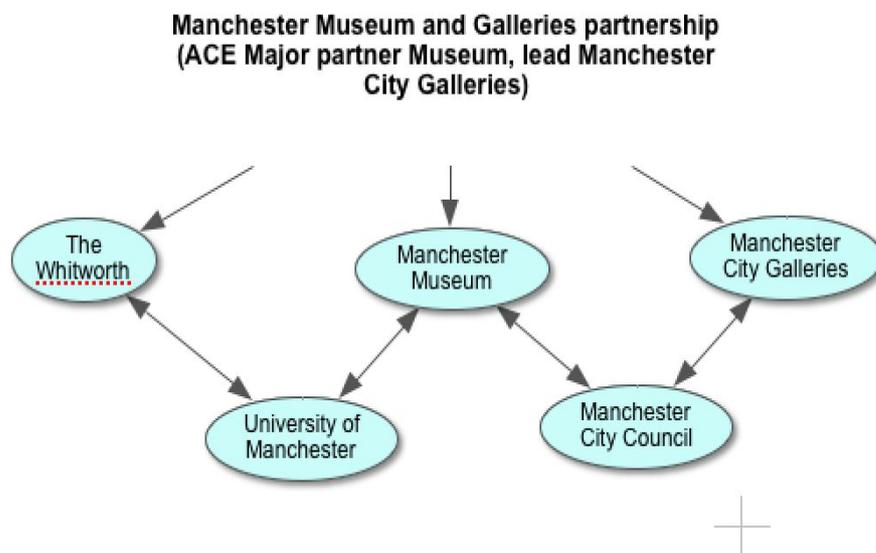


Figure 4.1 Manchester Museum and Galleries partnership

The way the WAG exists in a network of partners closely relates to the choice of CHAT methods discussed in this chapter as they enable research practices to be analysed in relation to the social, cultural and organisational contexts, or symbolic schemes, in which the practitioner acts. This approach treats the contexts of practice as a complex system of interrelationships that structure its actions by displaying underlying power, resources and assumptions. CHAT methods were chosen for their capacity to analyse practice in context of the social systems in which it is performed. The analytical approach therefore considers the motivation, priorities and values that the WAG adheres to as part of the Manchester Museums and Galleries partnership and treats

these properties as mediating, or structuring, its digital practices and online resources. It will be seen below that CHAT's capacity to analyse the way structure acts on practice enables the researcher to reflect on the cultural and historical contexts in which they find themselves. Moreover, by paying attention to the interpretive, political and rhetorical nature of empirical research, CHAT supports reflexive analysis of the researcher's motivations in the context of the cultural and structural constraints acting on them. This understanding will be seen to fit the core research question's emphasis on museum's organisational and institutional mediation of digital practices.

The way CHAT methods can be used to reflect on practice in museum contexts requires tracing the different cultural and material components producing museum systems of practice, such as the symbolic schemes through which the Manchester partnership frame their practices in public engagement as well as WAG's departmental organisation to deliver these practices. This ethnography is important because it helps develop an understanding of the material and cultural aspects structuring the WAG's approach to public engagement.

Moreover, this understanding can produce for us a context that sets the background against which to explain how CHAT methods would function relative to a research residency that acted to open the collections of the WAG into the same space/time as the online public. 'Context' is, in this respect, not only influenced socially but also interpreted and defined individually. This leads to a disposition of acting as if all new contexts exhibit the same pattern, a habit of expecting the social order in the world to be self-validating, promoting certain behaviours and discouraging others. However, in CHAT methods it is the notion of breaking contexts that enables a fundamental shift of existing understanding and convictions from those in the activity system. For this reason the WAG's social, cultural and structural systems for public engagement will first be briefly outlined providing some context to the discussion on methods that follows.

Formed in 2011, the Manchester Partnership was constituted through an agreement between the University of Manchester and Manchester City Council. This set the terms and aims of the partnership which relate to the Art Council England (ACE) objective for widening participation to enable everyone to experience arts that enrich their lives. A principal funder of the partnership, ACE is actively influencing the partnership's policy, language and approach to widening public access, participation and engagement with cultural activities. This is to address the variety of reasons people do not access the arts. In particular, ACE (2014) identify:

- people with little or no formal education

- people in a lower socio-economic position
- people from Black and minority ethnic groups
- people in poor health and/or with a limiting long term illness or disability
- people on low incomes and
- people who live in social housing.

These identifiers or symbols of those disengaged from arts and culture are headlines emerging from a much broader and more progressive discourse examining the value of arts to society in terms of economy, health and wellbeing and education, as well as the more implicit values such as empathy, self esteem and active citizenship. As Abigail Gilmore (2014) in her analysis of recent studies into the cultural values of art participation has traced, there is a growing body of research which focuses on personal intrinsic values of arts participation. She writes about the large body of evidence from a variety of professional perspectives, including ACE, that considers the way people's quality of life can be raised through their everyday participation in arts and culture. On this basis she makes the argument for arts and cultural policy to take local contexts into account (Gilmore 2014: 22):

Research shows the importance of demography, place and context to the contribution the arts can make - the influence of structural inequalities as well as 'structures of feeling' in shaping the interests and tastes people have and the stakes and values they place on arts and cultural activities.

Arts policy which has the potential for enduring effects in improving quality of life must respond to local contexts - and may have very different demographics, histories and characteristics which shape the infrastructures and possibilities of participation. Policy must be locally sensitive; it must work as well, if not better, at the level of the local than the level of the national or international.

A policy for arts participation that recognises the intrinsic values stemming from experiencing cultural activities within, and relevant to, local contexts is very evident in the language and argument of the Manchester Museums and Galleries Partnership's 2014 application to ACE for funding. This document responds to the Art Council's call that 'everyone has the opportunity to experience and to be inspired by the arts, museums and libraries' by detailing their approach to making their collections part of the everyday by exhibiting in the public spaces that are local to the people they want to reach relative to the contexts of their locality. As the document explains: (Balshaw 2014: 9)

One of the key planks to our audience development strategy is to bring high quality culture and collections to people's everyday lives. We will work directly with community members in low participation neighbourhoods to develop

exhibitions drawing on collections and themes they are interested in, displayed in the places they live, work and play; such as GP waiting room, cafe, vets and nursery, with accompanying co-curated programmes.

Read this document for the way the partnership describes local contexts as the everyday places people live, work and play and an ethnographic understanding develops of the symbolic schemes through which the Manchester Partnership interprets locality and its public spaces. It traces the way the professional ideologies that exist within the museum sector are structured by both the explicit and implicit policy preferences expressed by actors inside and outside of individual museums and galleries and their inter- and intra-organisational relationships with other institutions.

The research methods of CHAT bring these schemes of understanding and their symbolisms into a 'system of activity' defined by the 'subject' of local contexts and the 'object' of public access and participation in arts and culture. Against this system and its ethnographic framework, CHAT offers an analytical method for deciphering how the 'system' responds when there is contradiction between the 'subject' and 'object' of its activity; for instance, when a different scheme for understanding local contexts contradicts not only the partnership's methodology but the logic that underlies it, and the organisational structure and departmental workflows that maintain it.

Already in Chapter 3 we have discussed how in online contexts, time compresses with space and this sociology of the Internet can provide a way of re-imagining local contexts as public spaces, thus opening challenging opportunities to how museums work with publics in these digital spaces. Accordingly, the research residency at the WAG provided the real life contexts of a working gallery in which to develop, alongside permanent staff and in collaboration with relevant external agencies, practices that would open their digital collections into locally produced, online, public space. As the approach taken to this practice was contrary to the WAG's established schemes for comprehending art engagement in local contexts, it pushed to expand those parameters and was at the same time constrained by them. In this context, the methods of CHAT provide the tools for analysing the structuring effect of the WAG's established schemes for understanding locality, space and public engagement on the development of new digital practices and online resources that premise a different understanding of local contexts formed on the logic of space/time compression. In other words, this method traces the organisational and institutional limitations, opportunities and outcomes that arise when the gallery's digital practices are informed by and address the qualities of the digital public space.

The remaining sections of this chapter interpret the research and analytical methods of CHAT relative to both the organisational contexts of museums in general and their applicability in the research residency in WAG.

4.4 The origins and principles of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

Activity systems are the foundational unit of analysis in CHAT and are defined as 'systems of collaborative human practice [...] the generator[s] of a constantly and continuously emerging context' (Artemeva and Freeman 2001, cited in Foot and Groleau 2011). Influenced by Marx's interpretation and use of dialectics, CHAT emerged out of the Soviet school of psychology of Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), Aleksei Leontiev (1903-1979) and Alexander Luria (1902-1977). Langemeyer and Roth (2006) and Engeström (1987, 2001) introduce Vygotsky's contribution to activity theory, drawing attention to how he used dialectic principles to explore whether human development might be explained as something that is producing of itself through mediated engagement with the social and material world.

Considering museums from the dialectical point of view, their public remit can be understood as a dynamic object, a 'moving target' that contains a changing inner contradiction and thus fits with the dialectic methods unpacked below, for tracing museum development in the resolution of contradictions. Vygotsky's dialectical theory of human development has been applied in places such as factories, schools, hospitals and more recently museum contexts as a method in developmental work research (Engeström 2010, Yamagata-Lynch 2010, Park 2014). Built on his theoretical approach, research methods expose contradictions within the established histories and cultures of a workplace. However, by a practice of intervening in work processes with the aim of initiating a research cycle, these methods can also act to trigger contradictions through which a new practice emerges to resolve the contradictory state. Here, the idea of internal contradictions as the driving force of development in the workplace has achieved status as a guiding principle for empirical research (Engeström 2010, Yamagata-Lynch 2010). Contained within this broadly theoretical and methodological approach are the closely associated concepts of 'subject- object interaction' as well as Vygotsky's (1978) further contribution of 'mediating artefact'. These two concepts will be outlined below for their practical application as research methods in this thesis.

The concept of dialectics is rooted in the idea that subject and object are not independent entities but form a new unit which *sublates*, i.e. overcomes, includes, transcends, and destructs the opposition between them; this process is articulated through *activity*. A 'unit of activity' stands for the idea that 'subject and object are

mutually presupposing and constitutive opposites that cannot be thought independently' (Langemeyer and Roth, 2006: 22-23). Following the logic of this concept would mean that a difference between subject and object would be a difference of a thing with itself or, in other words, Friedrich Hegel's influential concept of inner contradiction. Hegel includes contradictions into the very nature of thought processes as a movement. Accordingly, he claims 'the movement of a being that immediately is, consists partly in becoming an other than itself, and thus becoming its own immanent content; partly in taking back into itself this unfolding or this existence of it, i.e. in making *itself* into a moment, and simplifying itself into something determinate' (Hegel cited in Langemeyer and Roth 2006: 23). Here Hegel is describing a moment when an inner difference gives rise to self-differentiation because consciousness, having turned a part of itself into the object, discovers contradictions. As conscious beings we work to resolve these contradictions by means of a process of sublation, 'which both deconstructs and overcomes a contradiction in articulating new units of which the old contradictions are but moments and external expressions' (Langemeyer and Roth 2006: 23). It is in this respect that the dialectical method holds that movement in social practice is a mediated unfolding of phenomena working to resolve inherent contradictions, and as such, is based on a view of the inner logic of a system as a unity of oppositions.

CHAT methods are directly related to the concept of human activity as a 'subject-object' relationship where the subject's interaction with the world is structured by the object of their activity. Accordingly, 'activities and their subjects mutually determine one another; or, more generally, activities are generative forces that transform both subjects and objects' Kaptelinin (2014). Seen from this perspective, subject-object makes a system or unit of activity the foundational unit of analysis in CHAT methods.

However, Vygotsky's modelling of the subject-object interaction uses a tripartite form in order to insert a mediating artefact as seen in the graphic depiction below (Figure 4.2).

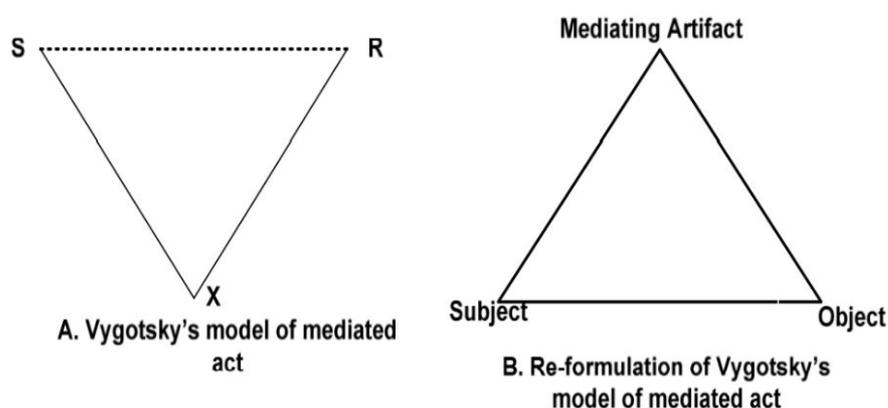


Figure 4.2 A. Vygotsky's model of mediated act and B. its common reformulation (Engeström 2001: 34)

For Vygotsky 'objects appear in two fundamentally different roles: as objects and as mediating artefacts or tools' (Engeström and Escalante 1996: 361). This model is concerned to make visible the way solutions to contradictions in the subject-object relationship are mediated by empowering artefacts with agency to transform the object. His notion of mediation is simply illustrated with an account of a 'meaningless situation', an experiment in which the subject was asked to wait in an empty room with a clock. The subject was secretly observed to see how they would resolve the confusion and contradiction of waiting to be called once it became increasingly obvious they had been forgotten. In this repeated experiment it was when the clock struck that the subject left. Thus the clock mediated the thought process, giving support to find clarity in what was an otherwise contradictory state. Accordingly, Vygotsky comments (1978, *cited in* Kaptelinin 2014):

in experiments involving meaningless situations, the subject searches for some point of support [...] He transforms the meaningless situation into one with a clear meaning. [In mediated activities] the central feature is self-generated stimulation, that is the creation and use of artificial stimuli, which became the immediate causes of behavior.

The concept of 'mediating artefacts' in activity theory pulls together elements of various natures and, in this sense, refers not only to what we traditionally understood as tools, *i.e.* instruments through which we manipulate, transform and create, but also includes signs, language and symbols, all of which mediate the subject to object relationship. In the simplest of terms, Vygotsky is modelling the way contradictions can lead to innovation and transformation in an activity system. As the contradictions are aggravated, the subject uses tools (mediating artefacts) to deviate from established behavioural norms.

In the context of this thesis, Vygotsky's concept of mediating artefacts is contextualised by the medium of WAG through which the 'subject and object' of the research practice is acted out. In practice, in this research the subject refers to the WAG's principle of publicness; *i.e.* that every person has the opportunity to experience the richness of its collections, and the object refers to the practices the WAG (and for that matter other museums too) has developed to overcome barriers to social exclusion. However when the subject is contradicted by its object because opening the museum to one public closes it off to another, social and cultural artefacts of various natures can act to mediate between the subject to object relationship in order to resolve their contrary state by developing it into new forms. In this respect, we can think of Bourdieu's influence on the way museums understand the object of social exclusion as a mediating artefact

structuring the relationship between subject and object. The focus of analysis is thus to give greater emphasis to the structural mediation of practice in a museum environment.

4.5 Cultural Historical Activity Theory and practice-based research

As a unit of analysis, an activity system links individuals and groups with the society they live and work in. The theory of activity has itself developed into three overlapping units of analysis that, taken together, have informed developmental work research (DWR) in institutional contexts. Firstly, artifact mediated and object oriented action, which relates to Vygotsky's (1978) original triangulation of cultural mediation in human conduct; secondly, Leontiev (1981) and Engeström (1987) developed Vygotsky's original analytical unit to include the additional categories of rules, community and the division of labour; thirdly Engeström (2001) contributed the principle of a network of activity system which relates to his notion that units of activity are not isolated but intersect with one another and are thus mediated by other systems within a complex ecology.

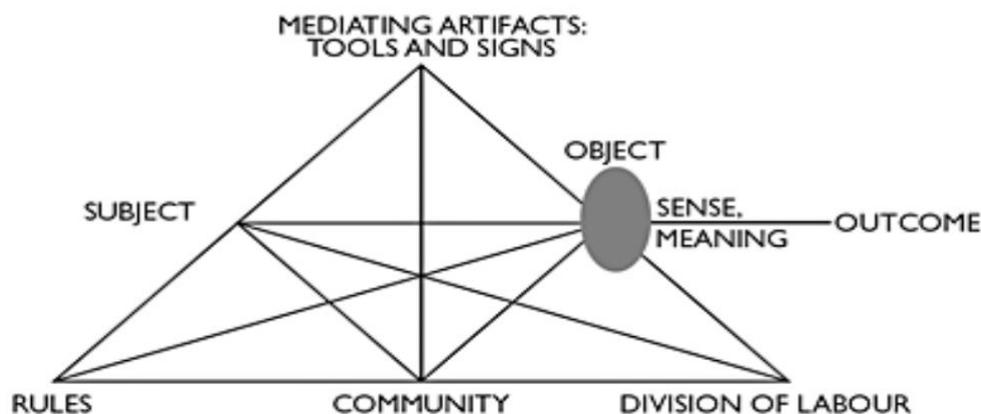


Figure 4.3 The structure of a human activity system (Engeström, 2001:135)

Unpacking these developments, we see that the addition of 'community' is to represent those sectors in the activity whose object-motive intersects with, for example, government bodies relating to museums, museum professional communities, academic discourse, prevailing concepts of public and publicness. In contrast, the 'rules' represent the range of influences shaping the interactions among the different categories, which can be both explicit, for instance, laws and policies related to museums, and implicit, such as organisational culture and behavioural norms. Intersecting these categories is the 'division of labour' which gives agency to the way subjects share or distribute work, either amongst themselves or with the rest of the community. This aspect is illustrated

when different departments in a museum have conflicting priorities in their perception of value regarding employing digital technology. In this respect, each stakeholder plays a contrasting role mediating digital practices in the museum. Thus, activity systems and their interconnections generate their own questions and aiming to address them becomes our starting point for using this analytical method.

This complex understanding of the unit of activity provides an analytical framework through which to trace museum processes as it allows researchers to follow human interactions that take place in collective settings. In the next development of activity systems analysis Engeström (2001) has made the case that the model of two or more systems should be used as the minimal unit of analysis. Different activity systems with potentially intersecting objects can now be analyzed using a network model which is argued to mirror work processes that are increasingly carried out between organisations in multiple, loosely structured networks. These are 'patchwork' entities of activity, in which shifting relations, contexts and alliances are a prominent feature (Engeström 2001, Bodrožić 2008, Lee and Roth 2003).

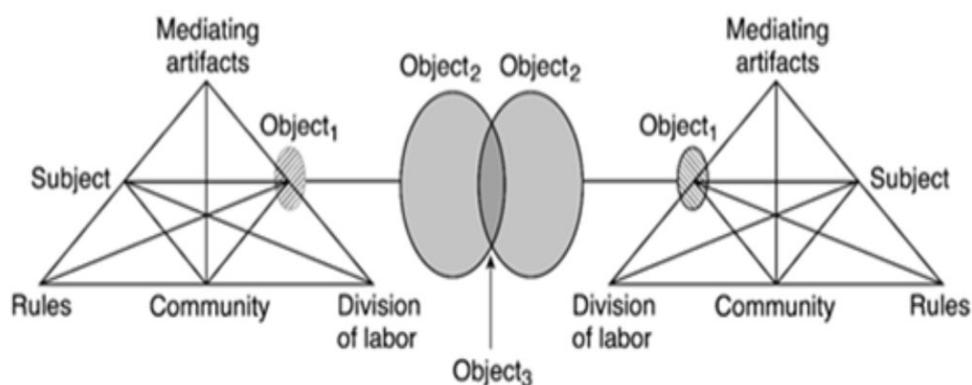


Figure 4.4 Two interacting activity systems (Engeström, 2001:136)

Seen from this perspective, what holds the network together is the way it provides a mutually supportive culture linking museums with those external and governing agencies and public policies concerned to produce a socially cohesive society. Providing the network as a whole with fundamental values in relation to which its internal negotiations maintain the logic of the collective identity, shared objects cross the boundaries of each distinct system, without which the network would disintegrate. From an activity theory view contradictions are disturbances, breaks, structural tensions or different understandings and identifying or triggering contradictions can result in change and development (Engeström, 2001). Therefore I propose that the suitability of CHAT as

an analytical technique in museum studies lies mainly in its capacity to reveal contradictions. Following Vygotsky (1978), Engeström and Miettinen (1999) emphasise a view of contradictions as the motive force of change and development. However, despite the potential of contradictions to result in transformation in an activity system, this transformation does not always occur. 'In fact, contradictions can either enable learning to progress, or they can actually "disable" it, depending on "whether or not they are acknowledged and resolved"' (Nelson, 2002 cited in Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares 2008).

Contradictions may not lead readily to transformation because they may not be easily identifiable or easily acknowledged, visible, obvious, or even openly discussed by those experiencing them. Capper & Williams, for instance, maintain that invisible or undiscussable contradictions are the most difficult to use as springboards for growth in relation to the context of the work of teams (Capper & Williams 2004 cited in Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares 2008). From their perspective, cultural assumptions about the way things are done and relationships managed in institutions are often taken for granted; members of a group may misrecognise the contradictions in their practice. What gets misrecognised in this case is the operation of what Bourdieu (1977) calls 'symbolic power.' On the other hand, work teams will recognise that undiscussable contradictions are those not talked about because they are 'embarrassing, uncomfortable or culturally difficult to confront, such as gender [...] issues [...] or offensive personal habits of politically powerful program stakeholders' (Capper & Williams cited in Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares 2008).

Activity system analysis has traditionally been used to study the way visitors learn in museums (Ash 2014). Although I'm not aware of examples of CHAT methods being applied in organisational studies of museum digital practices, recent research papers suggest that this situation may be about to change. Park (2014), for example, makes a case for activity theory as a conceptual framework for research into the relationships amongst the various stakeholders in museums. The 'subject' in this activity would be the museum and/or museum practitioners; the 'object' would 'vary according to the aims/agendas of museums and of each programme/project'. He envisages mediating artefacts as being either physical, such as a smartphone, or mental, such as theoretical concepts like the new museology (Vergo 1987). On this basis he has translated the activity system by relating each of its components to the museum.

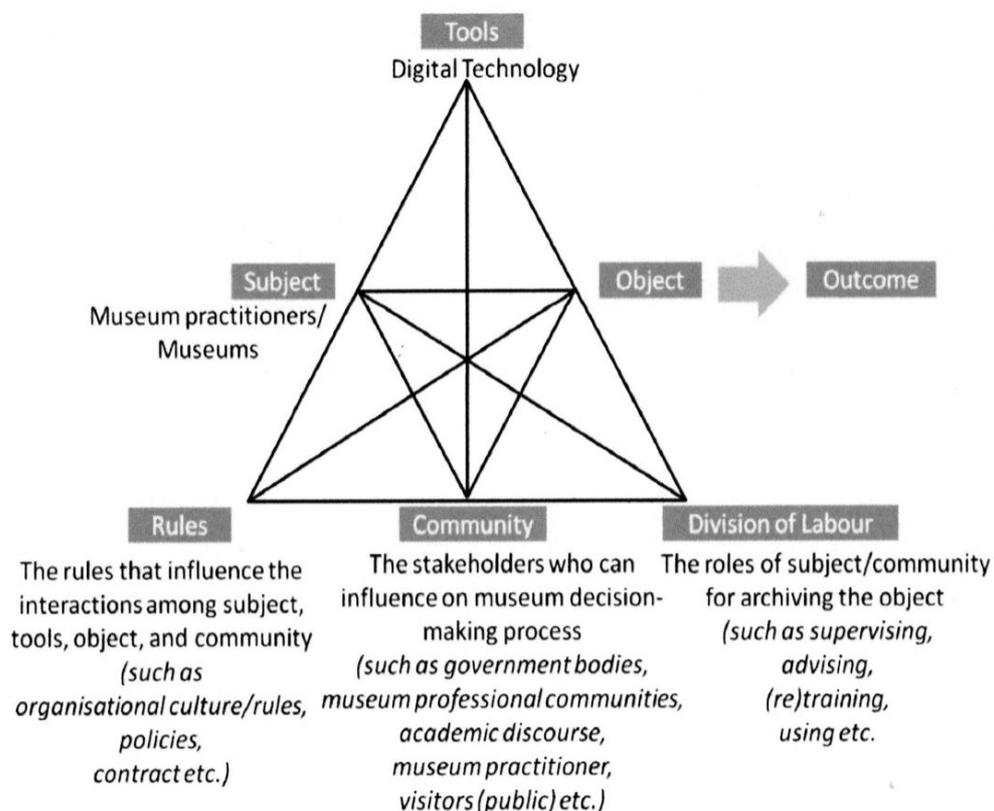


Figure 4.5 The analytical methods of CHAT in a museum context (Park 2014)

In recent literature there have been numerous applications of activity systems analysis in qualitative research on workplace development (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Here, activity systems analysis is used as a descriptive tool to capture processes in organisational change and to reveal historical developments in organisational learning (Nardi 1996, Engeström 2001, Bodrozic 2008, Yamagata-Lynch, 2010 et.al.). While there are no known examples of activity systems analysis specifically in museum workplace development, Engeström (2001) conducted a qualitative study tracing multi-organisational activities in children's medical care in Helsinki. I would suggest that this example conveys some of the complexities likely to emerge in an equivalent study of museum processes and contradictions. Given that activity systems are characterized by inner contradictions, the first step in applying this theory as an analytical approach involved clarifying those tensions that characterised the course of the activity system. Engeström describes the unit of analysis under investigation in terms of identifying the following tensions (2011; cited in Langemeyer and Roth 2006:34):

A critical structural issue in the Helsinki area is the excessive use of high-end hospital services, historically caused by a concentration of hospitals in this area. In children's medical care, the high-end of medicine is represented by the Children's Hospital which has a reputation of monopolizing its patients and not actively encouraging them to use primary care health centre services. Due to rising costs, there is now much political pressure to change this division of labour

in favour of increased use of primary care services. The problem is most acute among children with long-term illnesses, especially those with multiple or unclear diagnoses. Such children often drift between caregiver organizations without anyone having overview and overall responsibilities of the child's care trajectory. This puts a heavy burden on the families and on society.

Yamagata-Lynch 2010 identified nine elements in this case study that followed a consistent framework of analysis. These include the research purpose, research questions, data context, data analysis techniques, the unit of analysis, use of activity systems, results and implications. Each of these elements is taken from their de-construction of Engeström's research process and provides an example of a framework that can translate to developmental work research in a museum setting.

4.6 Reflexive research and critique of 'activity systems'

Langemeyer and Roth (2006) query whether the application of Engeström's triangular representation of human activity to map practice through its movements and mediations runs the risk of losing the social and societal complexity which it promises. They identify a potential problem in that the relation between subject, object, tool, community, rules and the division of labour are represented as mutually determining each other and that this dynamism aims to convey an irreducible and holistic unit of the inner structure of human practice. It is in this respect that Langemeyer and Roth are prompted to ask whether this model leads researchers to find the constituents of activity before experiencing or learning about them through tracing their movement. In other words, there is a risk that the researcher is led to start from a perspective of othering in the sense that the unit of analysis is external to their agency. While it is acknowledged that models always exclude some aspects and interrelations to highlight others, they argue that, if we follow the subject-object-axis, the triangular model favours a third-person perspective rather than a subjective or an intersubjective view. Accordingly the logic of the system becomes that of the analyst, the 'neutral observer,' rather than of the participant. Otherwise it would be important, for example, to represent the researcher's position in the activity triangle.

Langemeyer and Roth thus provide a particular understanding of the risk of duality in the researcher producing the illusion of conceiving the real as the product of thought. Coffey (1999), in her concept of the 'ethnographic self', argues it is only through the researcher's reflexive awareness of self in the research process that the dualities shaping their thought can be overcome. According to Coffey, 'becoming a researcher, for example, means that one takes up a self-concept of oneself as such a person' (Coffey 1999 cited in Hughes 2006). Such a perspective provides a particular

understanding of duality that is grounded in the experience of contradictions that are embodied in 'who I am and what I do'. Similarly, Whitehead (1999) and McNiff (2006) regard the identification of a reflexive concern on the part of the practitioner as methodologically central because it raises the idea of the 'I' as a living contradiction in that 'I' hold certain values, while at the same time negating them in my practice. It is in the spirit of activity theory as dialectical science that fundamental questions concerning the researcher's own subject position and how they deal with the presuppositions of their own research activities become significant and challenging as they have to continually query a variety of presuppositions concerning research methods and practices based on dialectical thinking.

For me, a living contradiction (Whitehead 2001) resided in my identity as a researcher at the WAG and the influence this positioning exercised on the social practices I engaged in. That the museum was supporting my research is in itself evidence of their culture; to then argue that my practice was contradictory to their culture seems embedded in its own contradictions and revealing these contradictions would imply the need for an additional researcher's activity system where the unit of analysis is the research process. Moreover, to be true to the dialectic method and trace the points where what is researched and the researcher intersect means acknowledging the contradictions between them and in what way they are producing of one another. For this reason Whitehead's (2001) method of using an 'action research' cycle as a mode of reflexivity will be introduced as a complementary methodology to activity theory approaches.

Whitehead's method is to use an 'action research' cycle as a mode of reflexivity. The cycle begins by framing reflexive questions concerning the researcher's positioning in the environment in which their practice is enacted. These aim to reveal the contradictions embedded in that moment and action is then taken to resolve these. By nature of its cyclic structure this method results in feeding more questions back to the researcher. The whole process is based on the dialectical movement of the research cycle.

4.7 Cultural Historical Activity Theory methods

A focus on activity systems and contradictions is congruent with Yin's (2003) description of investigating 'a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context'. CHAT methods are focused on the whole systems of activity rather than considering individuals in isolation; it thus situates individuals within the activity system(s) in which they are involved. Data collection techniques may include individual interviews, group interviews, transcripts of interactions from video recordings of meetings, chat room conferences,

emails and online discussion forums, instant messaging, online journals, observations and field notes. Yamagata-Lynch (2010) identifies that the advantage of using 'activity systems analysis' is that it provides 'methods for researchers to extract the essence of complex data sets [from the real world settings] in a graphic model that they can communicate with others' (2010: 11). Research within a CHAT framework often relies on qualitative, historical, and ethnographic methods. In this respect Basharina (2007) has argued that ethnographic methods track the history and development of practice as it naturally occurs.

In this respect, the literary analysis in chapters 2 and 3 which juxtaposed the distinct histories through which museums and the Internet, as public media, developed and showed them to be founded on contrary principles of social organisation in time and space was, in its approach, following a CHAT methodology. Moreover, the rationale for reading this literature was born out of practice. When the research residency at the WAG started in 2008 its organisation and cultures of practice inhibited early attempts to open up its collections into online/space time and this experience returned me to the literature in order to think through the issues it had revealed. Both the literary analysis in chapters 2 and 3 as well as the choice of CHAT methods were a response to that early experience at the WAG.

In practice, the methodological rules sketched above are first used to identify the objects of an activity, i.e. WAG's objective to open its digital collections to the public online. It observes how digital practices are organised via the division of labour and the cultural-historical rationales informing this organisation. On the basis of ethnographic studies, the research method is to feed back to WAG where cultural and structural differences separate its digital practices from the public constituency online with the aim of revealing, aggravating or triggering contradictions in the museum's public remit. The feedback will be gained by intervention into museum contexts and will critically question in what way reform is necessary in order to open their collections into digital flows.

Interventionist methods fall in line with Engeström's premise that 'as the contradictions of an activity system are aggravated, some individual participants begin to question and deviate from their established norms' (Engeström 2001:137). For him, the act of critical questioning is a necessary first stage for developing new systems for working and so his expansive research cycle (fig 4.6) always starts with the critical interrogation of an accepted and established practice; the effect of which is to open the activity system to potential dissent from the community (Engeström 1987, Engeström and Sannino 2010).

As can be seen in the diagram below, Engeström traces the different phases of a research cycle in accordance with CHAT which premises that movement is driven via discovery and resolution of inner contradictions. These are contained in the subject-object relation of the activity system

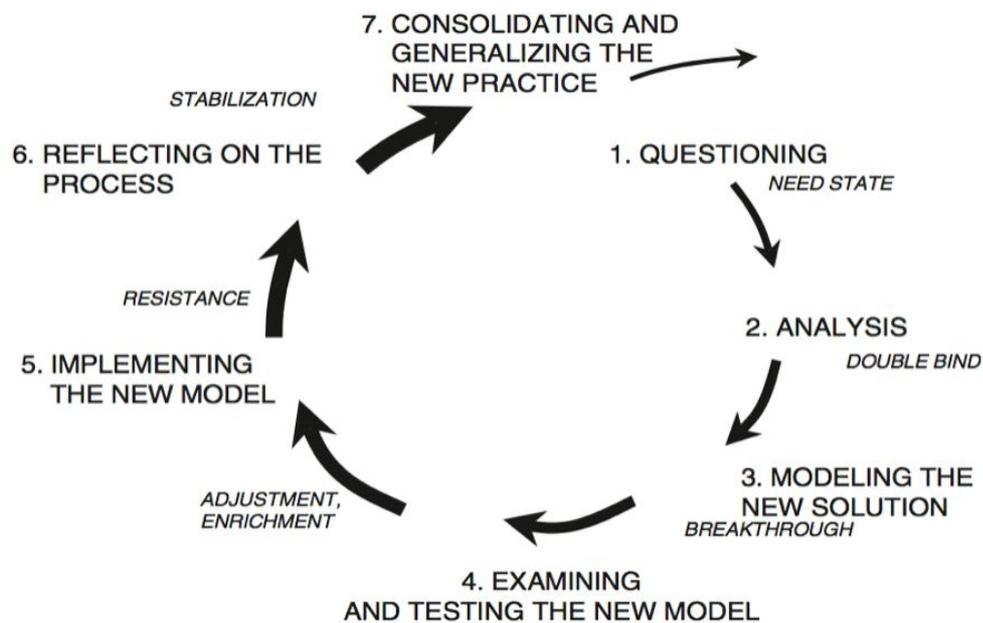


Figure 4.6 Sequence of learning actions in an expansive learning cycle (cited in Engeström and Sannino 2010: 8)

In its graphic depiction as a representation of movement through dialectics the thicker arrows indicate the expanded scope of, and participation in, the learning actions of the community. Its cycle thus provides a method for tracing development of novel practices that, by their nature, break from the established rules and community norms while remaining structured or contained by them but in an expanded form, such as the development of new tools that mediate approaches to work practices. The cycle of expansive learning is considered to be a process of individual and collective development. However the process of expansive learning does not necessarily lead to a positive result. It may be abandoned at any steps if the contradictions can not be solved and the community resistance avoids changing their general assumptions. As, Engeström and Sannino (2010) are careful to explain, the cycle of expansive learning is not a universal formula of phases or stages, rather this method is intended to be used as a heuristic conceptual device.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of CHAT as the theoretical and analytical framework of a practice-based research in WAG that aimed to investigate practices for opening its collection's into the same time/space as the online public while analysing how the gallery's departmental organisation, organisational culture and systems for collections management impacted the practice.

It offered the rationale of a 'research residency' as a valid practice-based research methodology, as well as an articulation of the reasons of carrying out this research in WAG. The chapter introduced the key and main elements of practice undertaken during the research residency and the reasons behind them. These will be further discussed in Chapter 6. It also provided a discussion of how CHAT needed to be adjusted and applied to serve and inform the design, organisation and analysis of the research practice.

As detailed above, the unit of analysis in activity theory is made up of the component parts: subject, object, tool, community, rules, and division of labour (Engeström, 2001, Murphy and Rodrigues 2008). Using this model, contradictions can be identified by tracing the system's historical origination and applying the cultural historical background as a means for constructing a picture of the object's inner systemic relations. Following this method allows us to gain an ethnographic perspective in order to decipher WAG's cultural and organisational framing of its public remit. The strength of analysis thus lies in its capacity to identify inner contradictions in the system by first establishing the parameters of its existing contexts. The research data that stems from using CHAT methods establishes the nature of contradiction and identifies which tools in the system that have the necessary agency to mediate developmental change through contradictions.

When following CHAT methods the basic, most rudimentary form of WAG's systems of practice is first analysed with a view to identifying its basic relationships and the dynamics of its development into more complex and varied forms. Thereafter, the qualitative transformations that have taken place in the system and its inner logic can be studied (Bodrožić 2008). These guidelines were used to inform the practice-led research residency at WAG which questioned and problematised its current digital practices. It identified various contradictions within its established practices and intervened within these activity systems with the intention of developing their processes to resolve this contradictory state. Chapters 5 will set the context for the research practice and CHAT methods by tracing the establishment rules in the WAG's online practices. In turn,

Chapter 6 will discuss in detail the processes and outcomes of this thesis' research into WAG's digital practice, the contradictions identified and the efforts to resolve these contradictions.

Chapter 5. Public Engagement in WAG and the Manchester Museums and Galleries partnership

5.1. Introduction

Chapters 2 and 3 made the case that the current policy shaping the digital practices of museums and galleries is contradicted by data from online social behaviour (Fyfe 2006, Bennett 1995, Castells 2002, Stalder 2013 *et al.*). Yet, although digital publics are largely excluded from museum programmes, calls for museums to reform their digital practices are muted.⁷ It was argued that literature drawing analogies between the discursive space of the 'new museology' and the participatory and distributed properties of the Web blind the museum sector to seeing that the new, networked social conditions are a source of disjuncture between the way public policy structures them and their democratic ethic (Gere 1997, Simon 2010, Parry 2007, Proctor 2010, *et al.*).

Also, alongside outlining the aims and methodology of the research residency, Chapter 4 outlined how the broad structures of funding and policy making shape WAG's (and its partners') established practices in, and language about, public engagement. This discussion aimed to unpack how the way WAG exists in a network of partners relates to the use of CHAT methodology, as it allows the research practice to be analysed in relation to its social, cultural and organisational contexts or symbolic schemes. As it was argued, CHAT can offer a conceptual and methodological framework that brings symbolic schemes through which WAG and the Manchester Partnership interpret locality and its public spaces into a 'system of activity' defined by the 'subject' of public access and participation in arts and culture and the 'object' of local contexts.

This transitional Chapter 5 will provide a more detailed analysis of WAG's practices in public engagement and online presence in order to illustrate the earlier chapters' arguments and bring what has so far been a largely theoretical set of ideas into a real world context. The aim is to map how the WAG, structured by external agencies in the form of funders and policy makers, has evolved an ideology of public space which is contrary to the digital public space. Being able to conceptualise the WAG in this structured way allows us to build a cultural and historical understanding of its

⁷ See discussion on Gere's (1997) analogy between museum and the Internet in Chapter 2

establishment of norms and values, and the production and materialisation of ideologies of social and public space. As this chapter will argue, the broader influences structuring WAG's organisational culture towards public space inform analysis of the cultural and functional barriers to engaging with the online public. This discussion thus sets the broader context to the research practice, the particular initiatives and projects of which will be discussed in Chapter 6.

5.2 Public engagement and policy contexts

As briefly outlined in Chapter 4, WAG shares both social capital and the symbols attached to a social responsibility agenda with a much wider network, including the university it is attached to, national and local government and funding bodies. This situates it within a wider ecology of relationships in their recognition of issues to do with social inequality - what might be called the 'objects' of public engagement.

Mapping these interrelationships for the way they define one another, either by mutual support or difference, is our process to grasp an understanding of the ways in which public engagement is structured as an object of human activity'.⁸ For this purpose we need to trace the volumes of social capital networked between the WAG and society's other institutions with an investment in social responsibility, such as the Manchester Partnership.⁹ Here, it is useful to mention that the University of Manchester, as the umbrella institution under which the WAG operates, incorporates 'a weighted portfolio of measures to monitor progress against the social responsibility agenda, including equality and diversity profile, engagement with communities (especially those that are disadvantaged), sustainability, and economic and social impact' (Manchester 2020, 2012). These measures reflect an ethical awareness of social inequality on the part of the University and recognition of the need to correct this imbalance through practices in public engagement in Manchester's neighbourhoods, public spaces and broader society.

⁸ For Bourdieu the relationship of structures and actions is not conceived dualistically, one rather speaks of a duality of structure; social systems are structuring, producing social actions, and structured, produced by social actions (1984).

⁹ The Manchester Partnership brings together three organisations from the City and University - Manchester City Galleries, Whitworth Art Gallery and The Manchester Museum. The Partner organisations work together, across governance structures, to deliver the city's objectives and promote Manchester as a centre of knowledge, creativity and culture. In January 2015 a three year Major Grant funding package from Arts Council England (ACE) was awarded to the Partnership – the largest sum offered to any museum and gallery service in the country.

As the governing body structuring the WAG's public policy, the University of Manchester's social responsibility agenda provides a cultural and historical context for reading the 2012 report by Maria Balshaw, director of WAG and Manchester City Galleries, to Manchester City Council's 'Cultural Engagement Task and Finish Group'. This report is interpreted here for the way its language and content indicate the influence of public policy structuring practices for public engagement at the WAG. The language surrounding social responsibility and the practice of public engagement will be discussed as a system of activity that is symbolised and evaluated within a cultural historical network of institutionalised relations. In this respect, Balshaw's report outlines the work being undertaken by the Manchester Partnership to address these key questions:

What are Manchester City Galleries and the Manchester Partnership doing to engage residents of the city in arts and culture?

What are Manchester City Galleries, the Manchester Partnership and other strategic partners doing together to engage local communities in projects, especially those linked to galleries and museums?

What evidence is available to monitor and evaluate our activities in these areas?

In addition, it is important to note that the report makes clear that the Manchester City Galleries, Whitworth Art Gallery and the Manchester Museum are particularly renowned nationally for their work in three key areas (Balshaw 2012):

Volunteering

Museums and galleries across the city have been at the forefront of volunteer development for the past five years and are much admired for our work with long-term unemployed and socially excluded adults. Our multi-award winning *In Touch* volunteer programme was recently awarded £500,000 from Heritage Lottery Fund to further develop our work with these groups.

Children and young people

Our successful engagement of children and young people has attracted national attention and journalist Dea Birkett, founder of the Guardian's *Kids in Museums* campaign, regularly cites us as ground-breaking. Last November, we hosted *Culture Baby*, a national seminar on increasing 0-2 year olds' engagement with culture, attended by more than 100 policy makers, Cabinet members and health professionals as well as museum and gallery colleagues. A follow up event is being planned. Our comprehensive offer for Early Years won the £10,000 Clore Award for Museum Learning 2012, with judges noting how the city is unique nationally in its focus on earliest intervention.

Our Creative Consultants programme, which involves teenagers in developing

our services, is attracting similar national attention. We were recently approached by Barnardo's and are now working with them to increase opportunities for looked after teenagers to engage with our work.

Valuing older people

We have been sought out by national associations such as Age UK to collaborate on our valuing older people cultural offer. Our innovative intergenerational grand-parenting scheme, exploring creativity, aging and digital media across Manchester hospitals, is of particular interest to national partners and has attracted financial support from the Baring Foundation.

Further examples include:

Arts and Health work with young people in collaboration with NHS Trust Manchester (has just won an award from *Royal Society for Public Health*). *Schools in Residence* programme at Whitworth Art Gallery, reaching a diverse range of children and their teachers through focused, intensive year long programmes of activity.

Balshaw sets out to evidence how residents and local communities are engaged in art and culture, highlighting the quality and quantity of collaboration between Manchester's galleries and partner organisations. Where she refers to organisations like Barnardo's, the Baring Foundation and Age UK, Balshaw is mapping out a community of partnerships which all have agendas in social responsibility and are working to influence social change according to specific categories of social capital, such as youth, old age and refugee status. The report thus illustrates the way Manchester City Galleries and museums are structured within a network of funders who between them produce/attach various symbols to a social responsibility agenda. These interrelationships tell us a great deal about the culture and symbolism underpinning 'public engagement' at the WAG, revealing that this institution exists in a complex and networked dynamic and not in isolation. Such complexity is significant to understanding how the community of partners, who between them produce the system of public engagement, are symbolically and culturally aligned to a particular understanding of public space and social organisation. However, analysing this complexity creates the challenge of constructing a shared object between two or more activity systems and incorporates the idea of distinct networks as interlocking structured units of human activity, depicted below in the diagram that follows Engeström's activity systems model.

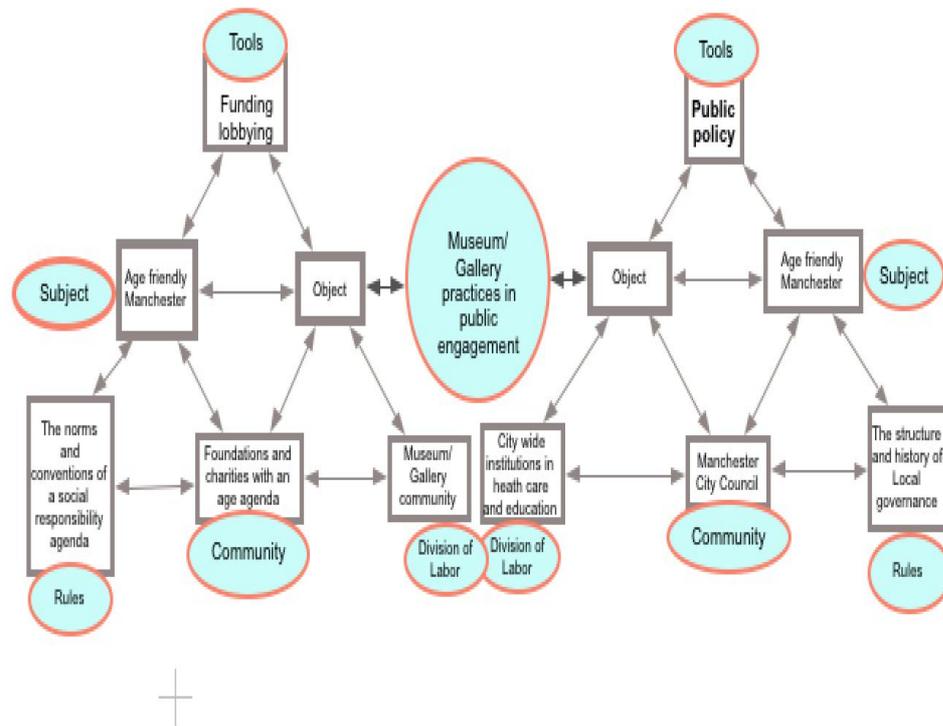


Figure 5.1: Two activity systems and their shared object

In this model of activity, the object, i.e. public engagement, is produced between the interacting parts of two or more distinct systems structuring one another. Such a structure has the effect that the two ‘communities’, one in each triangle, occupy relative positions in social space, i.e. the museum community that acts out public engagement is relative to the community that funds and evaluates their practice. Bodrozic (2008) argues that one of the characteristics of current developments in the world of work, in which we are including the practice of public engagement, is that production is increasingly carried out between organisations in multiple, loosely structured networks. Referring to Lee and Roth (2003), he maintains that work activities have become increasingly less bounded ‘patchwork’ entities in which shifting relations, contexts and alliances are a prominent feature. For this reason, a critical issue when using Engeström’s analytical model to map museum processes is that, when we think of ‘community’, we acknowledge that the WAG is itself structured by public policy; this interrelationship produces the ‘object of public engagement’.¹⁰ In this context, the tools

¹⁰ This complexity has a long history beginning with the Museums Act of 1845. Clive Gray (2014) for instance identifies 13 distinct types of ‘structures’ that can be seen operating in the museum and gallery sector in particular. He traces the way the professional ideologies that exist within the museum sector are structured by the explicit and implicit policy preferences expressed by actors both inside and outside of individual museums and galleries and their inter- and intra-organisational relationships with other institutions.

or mediating artefacts the WAG has at its disposal to engage the public are also cultural and produced through the community network. These tools include the symbols of 'social responsibility' and 'public engagement' stemming from the established theories that explain social inequality.

A tool in this sense of meaning would be Bourdieu's theorisation that, due to our individual holdings of social, cultural and symbolic capital, we are disposed to certain patterns of social behaviour which can exclude us from art and culture according to the way we read its symbols relative to our self-perception.¹¹ Following Bourdieu (1984, 1986), an individual does not simply act on the world, externalising their understanding, but does so in line with their sense of place. For instance, 'age' has specific qualities of social and symbolic capital attached to it; the way we perceive our age affects who we are attracted to or disposed to associate with and, significantly, how we understand ourselves relative to the museum or art gallery.

This focus on age reflects a contemporary shift in Bourdieu's ideas from social class, which is now considered outdated, to broader social issues and thus constitutes Prior's argument for a revision of Bourdieu's emphasis on social class 'over other dimensions of audience stratification. Prior argues that maintaining an emphasis on class strata reduces analysis of social inequalities to a "modernist" taxonomy of social formations that is unable to capture complex and cross-cutting mechanisms of inequality based on gender, age, and ethnicity' (Prior 2006: 540).

The varied and distinct approaches of Manchester City Galleries to public engagement certainly capture complex and cross-cutting mechanisms of inequality and, by doing so, avoid the tight fit posited by Bourdieu between cultural habits and class differentiation. They engage with postmodern and psychological dimensions of public found in diversely interpretable concepts such as age or gender. However, the examples of 'engagement' discussed by Balshaw (2012) can still be read as following Bourdieu's idea that social and symbolic capital produces both cultural barriers and cultural access to museums and galleries.

In this context, the 'capital value' contained or coded in social issues becomes the museums' cypher to mediate a public space or the social space of engagement. The different people/actors and objects in space thus become public due to the way social capital both links and distinguishes between them. Notions of 'capital' are thus shown to

¹¹ Bourdieu's ideas about self-exclusion were principally based on differences in stratification between the social classes.

structure practices in public engagement, yet this process is further structured by a network of more or less institutionalised relationships between policy makers and funders. Moreover, this structuring of social practices for public engagement is argued here to barrier museums from the way online social capital mediates social organisation and public space. As will be seen below, museum online communication wrongly assumes the same patterns of social organisation in society that Balshaw (2012) and Hawkins (2009) identify.

For example, the social responsibility agenda of both the University of Manchester and Manchester City Council is concerned with the deprived neighbourhoods which are geographically close to the university campus; these places are managed by a number of institutions and governing bodies, including health, education and social services, as well as financial intervention from various charitable and governing bodies to support their idea of community cohesion. In this respect, Manchester City Galleries partner with established institutions at the neighbourhood level, producing a network of relations through which the social issues concerning age, health, gender and ethnicity act to filter particular publics and community groups (Hawkins 2009).

'The Whitworth Social' (2008) is an illustration of this approach and was used as a case study in the WAG's 2009 public engagement strategy document (Hawkins 2009). The context was that the WAG is neighbour to diverse communities in the city who are distanced from one another in social space by the lack of intersections linking social capital between them, such as the stark contrast between permanent residents and the student population. The Gallery was interested in how it might act as an agent to connect these two communities through finding a common interest in a participatory arts project. Led by artist Lucienne Cole working with social dance groups from Manchester, 'The Whitworth Social' was an intergenerational participatory arts project. In this instance, the WAG had rationalised that, in order to make engagement happen, a process was needed to decipher the culture or code separating the social capital of these two distinct communities. Andrea Hawkins, who was leading on the public engagement strategy at the WAG in 2008, describes the Gallery's process in the following way (Hawkins 2009):

Lucienne Cole quickly identified communities of interest through Manchester City Council's community engagement ward coordinators. Students from the University of Manchester's Combined Studies course were approached to work with Lucienne, and freelance arts administrator Amanda Griffiths, early in the project. After much consultation with the elderly communities in Fallowfield and Rusholme the original project idea was transformed, now popular cultural history was the basis for the Whitworth Social.

The Whitworth Social now focused on communities of interest, specifically amateur and social dance groups in South Manchester wards of Rusholme,

Fallowfield, Platt Hall Lane and Burnage.[...] process of co-creation was now underway, with the artist collaborating with the communities to develop a participatory arts project that would result in a mass dance event in the gallery.

From her description it can be seen that 'community' was identified via the WAG's established networks with the University of Manchester and Manchester City Council. Lucienne Cole quickly identified communities of interest through Manchester City Council's community engagement ward, which implies that an aspect of community making as well as engagement was going on. Council ward coordinators intervened in neighbourhoods to engender social inclusion and cohesion, implementing policy action at this neighbourhood level. In this instance, the amateur and social dance groups in the South Manchester wards that Hawkins refers to are supported financially and encouraged through forms of social intervention via local governance (Hawkins 2009). Linking Manchester City Council and the WAG is a shared history and symbolism attached to their social responsibility agenda and, when this relationship is taken into consideration, rather than revealing the Gallery and the communities they identify as separate and oppositional entities, their relation to one another is seen to be more diffuse, almost conflated; community and Gallery are instead interpreted as structuring of one another.

5.3 Public engagement and online public

The above analysis of the Manchester Museum and Galleries' production and materialisation of ideologies of social and public space has provided a framework of symbolic schemes that can explain these organisations' digital content and Web presence. To illustrate this point and its significance, we will draw on Manchester City Galleries' age-related engagement programme for people with dementia, which is represented across various websites. When the online presence of this programme is compared to the way public interest in dementia is expressed online it is seen to be excluding the online public.

For example, use the keywords of age, dementia, health, Manchester and museums and Google returns information on the public engagement activities addressing age related issues at the WAG and also its partner organisation the MM. Through this online search we recover or discover a city-wide public engagement programme that is fixed in local time and that represents an institutionalised network of interrelationships which, although on the Web, are not of the Web. The individual websites with their specific pages devoted to the way cultural experiences can help improve health and wellbeing interlink, thus structuring a very particular network of online content which is suggestive

of institutionalised relationships. Downloadable PDFs are available from the City Council's 'Age-friendly Manchester' pages as well as the 'Age of Creativity'¹² and 'Health + Culture' websites which all detail a citywide policy and investment in supporting age related issues via cultural intervention. The 'Health + Culture' website was set up by the Manchester Museums and Galleries Partnership to provide information for patients and staff on the creative arts for health programmes in the city's local communities and hospitals. Here, we find links on the '+ Culture Shots' programme by MM and the WAG which have run over 60 'drop-in' sessions across eight Manchester hospitals, as well as 'Coffee, Cake and Culture', a monthly programme of fully supported museum visits for people with dementia and their family members or care partners. The online reporting of this engagement programme links to specific Web pages of the University of Manchester on their research concerning the way cultural experiences can help improve health and wellbeing, from the physiological to the emotional. In summary, all the online content recovered on this programme refers to specific public engagement events undertaken in a particular time and place.

If this online content is juxtaposed with the available social data on search terms, locations and times when Manchester residents went online with their questions about dementia, more often than not the online representation and resources of the public engagement work at WAG and MM would be bypassed. For example, in November 2014 terms relating to dementia and its symptoms used on Google corresponded, in real time, with the language of global news feeds concerning the suicide of American actor and comedian Robin Williams. 'Lewy body', a particular form of dementia, attracted significant global media attention when symptoms of this disease were reported as contributing to William's death. When we use Google trend¹³ to see which dementia related words residents in Manchester searched for, we find a spike corresponding to Lewy body in November 2014.

In Manchester, the real-time online search patterns reveal a particular disposition or collective culture towards dementia that digs deeper than the headlines. If we follow this public's likely online journey and search for 'Lewy body', the first page of returns provides links to largely UK-based websites for dementia support and advice, where we learn about symptoms such as the effect of visual hallucinations which are thought to have influenced William's suicide. In this respect, we might assume that the searcher's

¹² The 'Age of Creativity' website is an online platform to share, celebrate and inspire work in the field of arts and older people, has the highest rating in the search returns. On this site MM has posted about their innovative and award winning programme for people with dementia in clinical, community and museum settings.

¹³ Google Trends is a public web facility of Google Inc., based on Google Search, that shows how often a particular search-term is entered relative to the total search-volume across various regions of the world, and in various languages.

underlying curiosity into the relation between mind and body corresponds with the motivation that drives so much art production to explore the human condition.¹⁴ Further down in the search returns, the personal blogs¹⁵ of people and carers globally who are dealing with 'Lewy body' are listed. The fact that global websites are being viewed and commented on from Manchester illustrates a local/global public space that is in close physical proximity to the WAG but nevertheless bypasses their online presence. Manchester's public interest in Lewy body and the cultural disposition this displays allows us to group people in a space and time that is abstracted from their physical location. To juxtapose this example of digital public space against the online presence of Manchester City Galleries reveals two very different concepts of public space.

For example, the online presence of the WAG's and MM's innovative programme for engaging people connected through dementia care is mediated by notions of public space that assume time local to Manchester City Galleries is the dominant structure defining the space of public engagement. Through it, WAG and MM engage communities associated with their localities in neighbourhoods and their institutions, such as the hospital, school and health centre, which all mediate networks of social capital fixed to 'their place in time', as well as the Gallery buildings with their own opening times and social networks. This notion of space stems from local governance and is about the role of the city's cultural institutions in the delivery of policy for an age friendly Manchester.

It is significant that, while such institutions structure and organise people in society, yet they cannot compare with the Internet's structure as a social or public space. As discussed in the earlier chapters, online time and space is compressed with the effect that our physical environment no longer determines our spatial and social contexts; as a consequence, public spaces and social organisation are re-defined through horizontal networks of interactive communication. The spatial conditions of a networked society were identified in the two social theories of 'networked individualism' and the rise of what Castells (2007) identifies as 'mass self-communication'. These premise a particular idea of space and time that reconfigures the public sphere away from institutions like museums and instead puts the individual at the centre of a system of social relationships and patterns in 'me centered networks' (Castells 2002: 129). Both these

¹⁴ The body has a special place in art history as both subject and as source of painting, sculpture, installation and performance. Artists continue to explore a range of philosophical questions about the relationship between mind and body, questions about representation, expression, and physicality.

¹⁵ For example, see the blog 'Sharing my life with Lewy Body Dementia'

social conditions are evident in the example of ‘Lewy body’ as a trending search term¹⁶ following the aftermath of William’s suicide.

5.4 Conclusion

As the above example of Manchester City Galleries online presence illustrated, the institutional form of the gallery/museum remains largely structured to concepts of public space situated in local time and societal structures, such as families and neighbourhood groups. Consequently, and to conclude, we have two distinctly different spatial-temporal realities, and therefore two different models of public space against which to evaluate the publicness of the museum. From this perspective, the WAG embodies a set of active social processes that anchor taken-for-granted assumptions about social organisation and public space; crucially, this culture misrecognises the city’s online public which, interestingly, contradicts the democratic ethic of these institutions. Accordingly, we can draw on Bennett to claim a mis-match or contradiction between the democratic rhetoric ‘governing the stated aims of the museum and the political rationality embodied in the actual modes of their functioning’ (1995: 90).¹⁷

As Chapter 4 explained, contradictions constitute a key concept in cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) and are characteristic of activity systems, i.e. the social, cultural and historical systems that structure the way museums produce their public remit (Engeström 1987). Thus, questioning the way these institutions can develop new practices inclusive of the digital public space can function as a method for identifying likely areas of contradiction between their established digital practices and the development of new ways of working. It is this questioning the thesis will now turn to in Chapter 6, documenting and analysing the contradictions that emerged when I worked with WAG staff to develop practices for opening the gallery’s collection into the same time/space as the online public. This analysis will draw on the complexity of societal influences structuring the online presence WAG.

¹⁶ This example hints at the increasingly complex and real time interrelation between public media, public space and personal networks.

¹⁷ See chapter 2

Chapter 6. Travels with Data. A research residency mapping digital practices at the Whitworth Art Gallery (2008-2014)

6.1 Introduction

The research practice discussed in this chapter relates to opening the digital collections and core metadata of WAG for the first time, thereby enabling it to travel in the same digital flows as the online public. This research practice included liaising with different members of WAG staff, but working particularly with WAG's new media officer and the curator of fine art to develop systems, processes and initiatives for the online distribution of collections metadata. The practice also mediated between these staff members and various external media organisations with established online practices for producing and distributing content within real time social media spaces.

Framing this practice were the social conditions that are the symptoms of the Internet's sociology and, as discussed in Chapter 3, captured in the theory of networked individualism and Castell's notion of media space as mass self-communication (Castells 2007, Shirky 2008, Stalder 2013). These concepts assume online social patterns and digital public spaces are cultural and that the online social structure reflects cultural diversity. As Bourdieu has theorised, the way social space is structured emerges out of our lifestyle choices, which display the way we see ourselves relative to others. Online, such choices are displayed in the things we search for and the content we share through social media and such activity produces social capital networks and digital public spaces. From this perspective, some digital networks are culturally disposed to engage with museums' online resources while other are excluded. As discussed in Chapter 3, Bourdieu's argument was that our internalised unconscious sense of place in the social structure determines our choices. In the context of the Internet's spatial/social structure Bourdieu's argument gives us an understanding of what and how online publics are socially excluded by museums social positioning on the Web. The rationale framing a practice of opening the WAG's collections data into digital flows was to close cultural distances that exclude online publics from the WAG's online resources.

Put simply, this practice aimed to apply Bourdieu's particular understanding of the social reasons people exclude themselves from visiting the museum to the realm of the Internet. At the same time, this practice was dependant on the support of staff at the WAG and a willingness, on their part, to work in new and innovative ways. When we

follow Bourdieu's theorisation of social space, it is also the case that museum professionalism provides its workers with sense of self-identity and role within these organisations that reflects their position in the structure of social space. The public engagement work of the WAG is positioned within these professional frameworks, and in this context the term 'social exclusion' calls up issues of social stratification and inequality based on demographic and socioeconomic and cultural factors, as well as notions of community and neighbourhood, and the precise social, cultural and economic capitals of specific social groups.

As discussed in Chapters 3 and 5 an implicit aspect of this professionalism is an assumption that excluded publics exist in a space and time that is structured by a physical location. However, as the Internet's sociology collapses space into time (Chapter 3) it enables networks of social capital to organise in a shared time that may be associated to location but, importantly, are not structured by it. For this reason alone the symbols of 'exclusion' as they are currently understood within professional constructs as well as the social capital associated to museum professionals working for a more inclusive museum experience are neither convergent with the Internet's social structure nor its temporal conditions.

From the researcher's practical experience, for the WAG to re-configure as a hub from which to open its data, even on a small and experimental scale, necessitated negotiating certain kinds of cultural and organisational disturbances, thus highlighting the tension between digital innovation and established organisational and workplace culture. This research intervened digital practices that were novel to this organisation, thereby disrupting its established workflows, but was itself mediated by the institution's processes and organisational cultures. In this context, the methods of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), as outlined in Chapter 4, provide the tools for analysing mediation in work-place processes by using the principle of contradiction; i.e. a dialectical movement where participants in the activity of opening collections data began to question and deviate from established norms.

As will be argued here, practices that open digital collections by making them visible online in personalised, networked and public spaces are in juxtaposition with the fundamental properties or values networking museums in society. Such positioning thus facilitates discussion on the organisational and institutional limitations, opportunities and outcomes that arise when the museum's delivery of its public remit is informed by the qualities of the digital public space. Moreover, as will be shown in this chapter, pushing against various social, cultural and organisational structures proved problematic at the time of the practice, identifying the following issues as contradictory:

- opening collections data into digital flows at the WAG did not symbolise 'public engagement' or 'social inclusion' in the same way that these ideals are legitimised via the existing system of dispositions to certain practices;
- procedures/workflows to manage collections data lacked the necessary standardisation to open that content relative to real time digital flows;
- a critical framework from which to address ethical questions stemming from collections data in public contexts that are detached from the exhibitionary sensitivities of the WAG was needed;
- 'network individualism' as a public was not recognised, neither was social exclusion of this public from this institution's digital collections and online resources;
- WAG acts to produce public space but misrecognises when the space of 'mass self communication', as identified by Manuel Castells (2007), serves this purpose.

Each of these issues identify a juncture in the research practice where a cultural or organisational barrier to the activity of opening collections data into digital flows came about; the structure of this chapter broadly follows critical analysis on each of these points. This approach draws heavily on the way the various actors working to open up collections' data acted to navigate around cultural and organisational barriers at the WAG. Their actions produced the research data that provides the context to then analyse institutionalised mediation of digital practices.

The first issue, that the practice of opening data into digital flows at the WAG did not symbolise 'public engagement' or 'social inclusion', threads throughout the chapter, linking the different sections. For instance, staff expressed difficulty in seeing value in the approach taken to opening data and did not recognise social exclusion from the digital resources of the gallery. As discussed in chapter 2, Jenny Kidd's (2011) work on deciphering museums' cultural framing of social media and digital practices makes a similar point. Hers is a nuanced argument that museum approaches for inclusivity tend not to translate to the online/social media environment due to the fact they do not reflect the socio-ecology of these spaces. Yet the problem identified through following this chapter's analysis differs considerably from Kidd's. It will be seen that, when a gallery-based practice is attuned to the ecology and spatial structure of the digital public, the outcomes are misrecognised as unrelated to the gallery's core practices in social

inclusivity, an effect which will be argued to be a form of symbolic power¹⁸ holding back digital innovation. As Wacquant (1996: 210) identifies, ‘the capacity that systems of meaning and signification have of shielding, and thereby strengthening, relations of oppression and exploitation by hiding them under the cloak of nature, benevolence and meritocracy.’

To develop this notion of symbolic power, the research approach included running professional fora and workshops at local, national and international museum conferences, as already outlined in Chapter 4. These events borrowed from the rationale and method for opening collections into digital flows alongside experience of navigating cultural and organisational issues to provoke and structure conversation. And in this context the views of museum professionals were gathered to see whether opening digital collections into the same space and time as the online public would require changes to their organisational culture, departmental structures and workflows.

The different subject perspectives in these conversations are those of the researcher-in-residence, permanent staff at WAG, members of the museum community, and staff at two of the partner organisations who were working with the WAG, Manchester’s Digital Development Agency (MDDA) and Manchester Information & Associated Services (MIMAS). The conversations and questions provoked by these events revealed a great deal of sector confusion surrounding digital audiences. Yet, there was also an emerging sense that public exclusion to digital collections and museum online resources is a problem gaining recognition.

In this context, the aim of this chapter will be to contribute a localised study of the organisational and cultural issues that are brought to bear when a gallery is required to work differently and in a way that has relevance to ‘digital publics’. The findings from this study will therefore have implications for understanding organisational and cultural barriers between galleries and emerging conceptions of the ‘public’ and ‘public engagement’. The chapter will start by considering issues that emerged through a series of semi-structured ‘conversational’ interviews with WAG staff about their thoughts towards the online public space. These discussions set the contexts for a professional forum workshop at Museums and the Web Conference (2014) where members of the museum community explored cultural and organisational barriers to opening their collections into online space/time. The remainder of the chapter sections draw on CHAT

¹⁸Drawing on Castells (2007) I understand power to be the structural capacity of a social actor to impose its will over other social actor(s). All institutional systems reflect power relations, as well as the limits to these power relations as negotiated by a historical process of domination and counter-domination.

methods to provide analysis of contradictions in the WAG's systems for collections management and public engagement when collaborating with gallery staff and the public to develop practices for opening the gallery's collection into the same time/space as the online public. The chapter will conclude with a brief summary of the research findings as a bridge into Chapter 7, the thesis' Conclusion.

6.2 Institutional understanding and practice of digital engagement

Identifying the contradictions hidden in the assumptions and symbolisms framing the digital practices of museums and galleries is a method for tracing the organisational and institutional limitations separating the online public or digital public space from these ostensibly public institutions. A seemingly straightforward strategy to achieve this understanding was to gather the views of museum professionals about whether opening into the same space and time as the online public would require changes to their organisational culture, departmental structures, digital practices and workflows. This methodological approach consisted of conversations and semi-structured interviews with individual members of staff in different departments of the WAG which produced a set of questions and concerns that went to form the subject of a professional forum at the 2014 Museums and Web conference.

Engeström's (1987) analytical model of an activity system was used in this context as a tool to help participants identify where digital practices for online publics would contradict the existing systems and cultural norms of the organisation. For this purpose the six aspects of Engeström's model were re-categorised to fit with museum systems. Accordingly, the 'subject' of the activity is shown as the museum's publicness, while the 'object' of this activity is to make museums public in the same space and time as the online publics. Rules of the activity system referred to established museum practices and behavioural norms, whereas the community engaged in the activity referred to everyone working in the gallery. The aspect of Engeström's model that divides labour was used to subdivide every one in the community within their departmental organisation. However, the tools aspect of this model was left undefined so that participants could introduce new processes and ideas into the system that would help mediate any changes in its function.

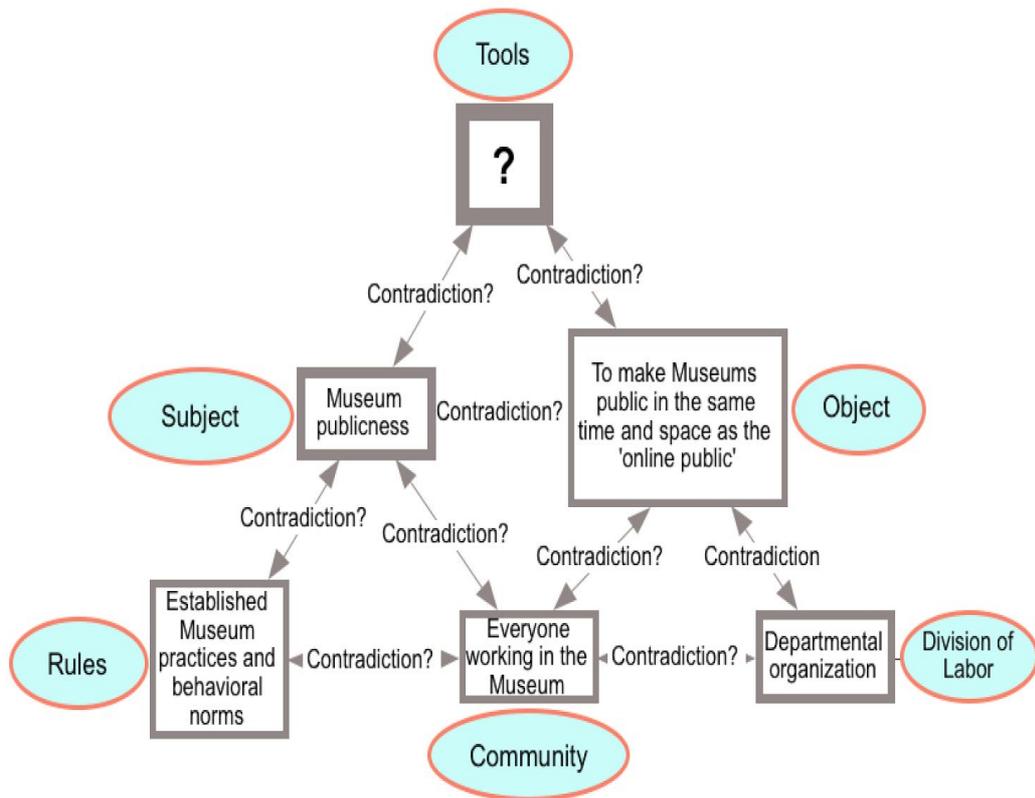


Figure 6.1: Contradictions in museum and gallery contexts

After explaining the premise and elements of Engeström’s diagram to interviewees and group discussants, the author asked them to mark on the activity diagram where they thought digital practices for online publics would contradict, for example, their existing systems for collections management and curatorial workflows; this would translate as a contradiction between the object of activity and the division of labour. This gathering of research data thus traced the thought processes involved in identifying the contradictions exposed between their existing work processes and recognising the need for development of those systems.

6.2.1 Interviews with Whitworth Art Gallery staff

The WAG interviews and conversations were with staff with curatorial, marketing and communication and learning and engagement roles and responsibilities who were selected on the basis of their involvement and participation in digital engagement activities and projects. Interviewees were asked to think about who the audience were in the digital projects they had been involved in and how these audiences related to the Internet and social media and public space. In order to find out about their experiences from an organisational perspective the interviewees were also asked to reflect on any

distinct problems they experienced due to the online nature of these projects. As it will be seen, it proved difficult to find a shared language to talk about digital engagement.

These conversations were premised on there being a mutual understanding between interviewer and interviewee on the way the Internet's medium compresses space with time and the social conditions and public spaces this produces. However, when first using this method at the WAG it became apparent that the interviewees were unable to imagine opening their institutions into the same space and time as the online public as they were unsure if they had enough practical experience or knowledge about the theory of digital space to draw on. The concept of time/space compression was difficult to convey in this context and, through my attempts to put across the idea that, online, the private individual produces their own public space and social patterns, this notion was met with confusion and concerns about its relevance. As one interviewee said, 'I think I get it, are you saying viral objects are public space [and] how does that help what we do? It would be useful if we could see these communities' (Public engagement officer WAG, 2009). In this respect, as the definition of online publics was questioned, the interviewees became interviewers, and with this turnaround it proved difficult to find the necessary shared language to answer their questions.

In several of these interviews the subject directed the discussion to talk about the fact that they had started blogging about their work. For instance, a curator had started a blog about the process of the exhibition they were currently working towards and had been disappointed by the lack of public feedback to their posts. This was despite direct requests, in their words, to an 'unknown public to join the conversation'. It was again clear from their language that they did not read the Web as a social space. Yet finding a language to explain my particular social understanding of online public space and the digital practices that attract public interest to produce social media spaces avoided me. Using words like 'networked publics', 'networked individualism', 'real time', or phrases such as the 'space of mass self communication' were met with confusion and were unhelpful in these situations. Often interviewees were clear that what they wanted to know was where to find and how to build an online community. When talking about their digital practices, they projected a set of institutionalised values fitting established schemes for social inclusivity, audience segmentation, and public engagement. As these symbolic schemes do not translate to the way online space is produced these interviews often reached an impasse when it became apparent that I was unable to tell them what they wanted to know. Differences between interviewees' and the researcher's language about the public acted as a barrier to productive discussions about social inclusion of online public spaces. In this respect the interviews did not work according to the methodology. Although these interviews never reached a point where

a mutual understanding of the digital public space was achieved they were lively producing conversational travel (Kvale 1996). However, this meant the method that the interviewees could be asked to mark on the activity diagram where they thought opening digital collections into online time/space would contradict their existing systems for collections management and curatorial workflows was not possible.

In spite of the fact that the WAG interviews did not work as intended, they do serve to illustrate a gap in knowledge and skills in the emerging social conditions and public spaces stemming from the Internet. This experience of the unfamiliarity of digital public spaces in gallery staff raises its own questions as to why sociology's¹⁹ explanation of online social organisation and public spaces are, in this instance, not framing the digital practices at the WAG. The experience of these interviews also made the case for a straightforward way of illustrating the spatial and temporal conditions of a networked society within the cultural and organisational contexts of those professionals who work in museums to ensure a mutual context of understanding as a basis for future interviews. Such mutualism came about by hosting structured discussions/interviews with museum professionals within the context of international conferences, and by running professional fora at these events, as will be discussed below.

6.2.2 Professional forum at Museums and the Web Conference 2014

By their nature, international conferences for the museum sector compress time with space and, like the Internet, they combine both a social and technological aspect that produces public space within particular cultural boundaries where delegates coalesce in the same space and time. When museum conferences are looked at for the way they bring people together we see that they, like the online public, are a socially and technologically constructed space made up of different layers. A technological layer administers the flow of information within the social capital networks of those who work in or provide services to the museum sector, including airports, roads, buildings, dedicated computer machinery, communication wires and so on. The globally distributed community that attends museum conferences relies on this technological infrastructure, without which our global museum community would be unable to coalesce.

The organisation of delegates, both on the conference site and online, operates in a completely artificial environment which has to create its own temporality,²⁰ developing over time a unique culture that defines the boundaries of that space wherever it is located. These conferences thus provide a straightforward way of illustrating how public

¹⁹ See Castells (2001, 2007) and Stalder (2006, 2013)

²⁰ In this respect time is relative to wherever in the world the conference is held.

spaces and social organisation are re-defined through real time horizontal networks of social capital. They combine both a social and technological aspect that together produces collective organisation and public space within particular cultural boundaries. The conference delegates thus represent a crowd of similar interests that coalesces in the same space and time and are public to each other due to their shared social capital. Put simply, the participants' own organisation within the conference contexts provides an illustration of the way online public space, collective organisation and social capital networks occur.

As the delegates' own organisation within conference time/space explains the structure of online public space, the shared context of the delegates provided a mutual experience with which to frame questions and discussion about opening collections into the same space and time as the online public. In this respect, the research practice involved hosting a professional forum at the Museum and the Web (MW) 2014 conference in Baltimore²¹.

This event used the public spaces and social organisation generated by the conference to draw out issues about the management of digital collections for online public engagement. This method provided a way of overcoming the difficulties in language that dogged the interviews at the WAG. The research aim of this professional forum was to trace contradictions hidden in the assumptions and symbolisms framing the digital practices of museums and galleries in order to gather qualitative data on the way sociological concepts²² of space/time compression and online publics are interpreted within institutionalised discourse. This was also the aim when conducting interviews at the WAG. Indeed, the data collected from the forum discussion informed the analysis of the research practice at the WAG.

Twelve museum and gallery professionals from around the world participated in this discussion group, and between them represented a different museum/gallery department; these included 'digital management and web services', 'collections management', 'education and public engagement' and 'marketing department'. They also represented a variety of museum types, e.g. a children's museum, sports museum, heritage site, war museum, each with a distinct notion of audience and public engagement.

In the group, various methodologies for tracking online networks of social capital were discussed, with 'Google trend' being recognised as particularly useful as a freely

²¹ See Appendix

²² See chapter 3 for its discussion on 'networked individualism' and the space of 'mass-self communication'

accessible application for querying the time and location data of specific search terms; it can then triangulate this social data with headlines used in news media. For them, the value of Google trend was the way it represented the individual in the crowd of those who are similarly disposed to search on the same topic combined with a facility to map that crowd in time to a specific location, i.e. Baltimore or, for that matter, Manchester. In addition, the contextualising of search data with real time news flows was described as 'visualizing the pulse of a city'.

A digital manager and an arts marketer spoke about experimental work they had already undertaken to engage the online public by scanning social media trends and online search patterns to select themes and issues of potential connection to their collections. Online social data was thus being used as metadata,²³ contextualising digital collections records relative to Google's sophisticated algorithms. In their view, such data was key to both mapping out an online public space beyond the museum and opening their organisation's digital collections into it. However, evaluating this work by tracking reuse of museum content in different online contexts and social media spaces was described as both difficult and a work in progress. It was also noted that there was less organisational support for online projects unconnected to the branded website.

From the perspective of these two participants, the locality of the museum buildings and the significance of place were treated as important mediators of their online activity. They wanted to further experiment with the potential of real time social data to bridge online public and public museum spaces. Here, the case was made that a demonstrable local connection between online public spaces and the museum would be needed to rationalise the additional resources for opening into the same time/space as the online public. Thus, this discussion also indicated ingrained assumptions about the way digital innovation was being structured to fit the existing rationales of their organisation's public remit; this framing of the online public is seen below to be problematic.

When the twelve participants were asked to mark the activity diagram to indicate how the digital practices discussed fitted with the organisational culture, departmental structures and workflows at their museums, there was a mixed, even contradictory, response. It was evident that the type of digital practices needed to open collections data into online public spaces was not new to them. However, it was also the case that these practices were not institutionalised into their organisation's everyday workflows. All participants spoke about the inclusion of online social data in museum processes for collections management being haphazard, experimental and organisationally difficult. The contrasting perspectives of two participants from different museums, a 'digital

²³ This meta data contextualizes the curatorial classification of the collection and object provenance.

content manager' and a 'curatorial assistant' represent the main issues and are unpacked below.

The digital manager praised curatorial knowledge as the single most significant tool for opening collections into real time digital flows. For him, curators are the most confident users of his museum's content management system (CMS) and, due to the nature of their work, uniquely equipped with in-depth knowledge of the collections to then enrich the digital catalogue by 'semantically bridging'²⁴ online social data as collections metadata; in his words, 'they're the ones to feed Google and get the stuff seen on the Web'. He added 'we know that audiences will discover most content through global search engines and increasingly they will do so on mobile devices'.

Although opening collections into the same space/time as the online public sat within curatorial skill, the digital manager was critical that, in his experience, when curators did work in this way, it was often related to their personalised social media activity via twitter rather than institutionalised workflows to do with collections management. He was keen to point out that the descriptive narratives contextualising the digital collections reflected curatorial vocabularies without any bridge to the online public. 'Our language does not translate well online and this is hiding the collections from the public networks that would benefit from them' (MW workshop 2014). He was in part echoing Naomi Jacobs, Bill Thompson, Jeremy Myerson and Kasia Molga (2012: 23), who all argue that 'the notion of findability is critical in a digital space where so much data and content is being created. If something cannot be easily accessed then to some extent it does not exist for those who cannot find it.' In this online discovery context, digital collections are 'hidden' due to poor cataloguing quality or descriptions that reflect curatorial practice as opposed to language used and recognised by online users. At the same time, the digital manager queried whether there were incentives for curators to bridge the collections. For him, the nature of work required to 'engage' online real-time public spaces and social patterns was contradicted by both the established practices and cultural norms of his museum.

In contrast, the 'curatorial assistant' was interested in the activity system diagram and the way it allows for tools to mediate a solution to what she identified as a problem of visibility. To answer this issue she spoke about the provision of a simple online dashboard that would interpret social data through live visualisations. This tool was to be clear and straightforward, free of jargon and relevant to their professional needs. Without it, she suggested, staff would remain mystified to the Internet as a social structure and public space. 'They need to see clearly the issues, challenges and practices in integrating social data in their day-to-day work'. In addition, there was a brief

²⁴ His phrase.

discussion about how the staff resource and digital literacy required to open digital collections into online spaces would itself need to display value within the organisation. Here, there was some confusion about the value of this type of work.

To sum up, in the competing priorities of the museum workplace environment, the cultural and organisational issues, which the participants in both the WAG interviews and the Museums and the Web forum highlighted, were as much to do with perceived value in opening their collections into the same production of space/time as the online public as any particular opposition to it. However, it also became clear that any institutional value to this work could only stem from their existing value systems for public engagement. These concerned social issues and relationships with neighbourhoods geographically local to their museum's buildings; without this connection, it was queried what incentive there was for staff to engage online publics. From their perspective, the digital practices discussed during the interviews would have needed to carry the same symbolic representation of access and public engagement as that already established within their organisation's cultural disposition. I suggest that these dispositions amount to an acquired system of generative schemes that make possible the production of 'thoughts, perceptions and actions' (Bourdieu 1990: 55) and reveal a cultural framing through which digital innovation has been inhibited.

6.2.3 Workshop with WAG leadership team and symbolic representation of public engagement

The issues identified through the discussions held at the MW conference help explain certain assumptions and symbolisms that impacted the way practices to engage online public spaces were perceived at the WAG. By juxtaposing a workshop in 2009²⁵ about opening the WAG's collections into online space/time, with the above professional forum discussions at MW in 2014, we find various overlapping symbolic schemes that barrier galleries and museums from opening up to the online public. There is also a connection with the interviews with individual staff members at the WAG.

In this respect, in 2009 I organised a workshop with the WAG's leadership team that aimed to discuss a proposal to open collections to online publics. The WAG leadership team included the director, departmental heads for collections management, public engagement, conservation and curators. As with MW 2014 forum, participants questioned the practice of opening collections into online networks for the reason that

²⁵ As part of the research residency the author ran a short workshop with the WAG management team which aimed to to introduce the practice of the research, its aims and the nature of organisational support and resources it was looking for.

they did not recognise the symbols of this activity as public engagement. In this context and similar to the individual interviews of WAG staff it was again queried whether the proposal was similar to viral marketing and in what way viral objects would benefit their work. In this respect, the presentation had used colloquial phrases associated with digital media that give the impression of viral growth, such as 'live data' and 'trending topics'. The comparison to viral marketing made a useful analogy as the group seemed to treat the Internet as a self-organising 'social space', assuming messages will distribute globally, but organise within distinct holdings of social capital. Similarly, a model of digital engagement, in which collections data responds to Manchester's daily life by drawing on the social data in those topics trending across social media platforms, assumes this data will organise within distinct holdings of social capital that are local to the city. Thus the data itself is not the destination of public interest, rather it becomes visible within real time online public spaces of social capital.

Offering an insight into the perspective of a museum professional, the symbols of this type of marketing were perceived as distant and disengaged from WAG's existing work for social inclusion. For instance, 'viral' implies something contagious and new and, as discussed earlier, the WAG's approaches to public engagement are more longform, about establishing and sustaining relationships in their neighbourhood communities and associated institutions. Perhaps surprisingly, the term 'engagement' can conceal more than it reveals about the realities of collaborative practice. In this respect, there was a sense that, as the proposal did not symbolise 'public engagement' as it was currently legitimised, the online public would remain largely misrecognised.

Moreover, in this meeting most of their questions were assuming that I would know in advance the community to be engaged with and would be working with that community over a sustained period. In contrast, the proposed model of 'digital engagement' required no prior knowledge of a community but rather the social objects that sustain 'real time' social networks and the way these objects reflect the capital holdings of the network members. This approach, although designed to tackle exclusion of the online public and engage their influence in gallery processes, was unlikely to be recognised as public engagement for the reason that its 'symbolic representation' was not recognisable as public engagement. Problematically for my research method of identifying and triggering contradictions, misrecognition is not contradiction but rather a form of invisible power that assumes a certain symbolic order, whereas the idea of contradiction in developmental work research is of a destabilising effect that works on the core proposition (Engestrom 1987, Bourdieu 1984).

The symbolic is a formidable but highly elusive type of power in Bourdieu's view, one that affects a 'mysterious alchemy' (1991: 233). In Weininger's (2002) reading of Bourdieu the application of symbolic schemes is essentially a two-sided process. On the one hand, it categorises, divides and separates individuals and, through this, constructs social collectivities. In doing so, it constitutes the collective identities through which social actors come to know themselves and others. On the other hand, classification also entails the 'theatricalizing display' of underlying powers, resources and privileges. In this capacity, the symbolic functions as a medium through which claims for social honour are expressed and recognised. By means of these two functions, the symbolic contributes to maintenance of the social order, recognising its own practices as legitimate at the expense of alternative approaches (Weininger 2002).

Such symbolic schemes have already been traced in the way WAG's programmes for (online and offline) public engagement approach social organisation and public space as coincident on networks of social capital mediated by the societal structures of family and neighbourhoods, as well as institutions of local governance. However, meeting with the people who work in WAG to discuss online programmes revealed certain contradictions. These issues stemmed from the fact that any digital practice to open into the simultaneous space/time of the online public would need to be rationalised against the symbolic representation of WAG's established practices for access and public engagement.

Problematically, distinctly different spatial and temporal realities are unlikely to share the same symbolic representation; thus the interviews and meetings had identified a potential contradiction between practices to engage the online public and the symbolic representation of practices in public engagement at the WAG. In addition, as museum practices for access and public engagement adhere to a particular symbolic representation of public space and community organisation, this disposition is therefore articulated via their systems for collections management, departmental structures, curatorial workflows and established practices in public access and engagement. All these organisational systems for producing the public gallery stand to be contradicted by the requirement of new systems fit for the purpose of opening into and engaging the online public. Seen from this perspective opening collections into the same time production of online space would require a cultural shift in the way staff perceived digital engagement as well as development of new practices and technologies for collections management and curatorial workflows.

This analysis would also explain why opening the digital collections of the WAG is seen below to have been both culturally and organisationally difficult to achieve. When

starting this research in 2008, and also at the time of finishing it in 2014, the gallery had not developed any systems for managing their collections metadata relative to social data from online behaviour; neither had they developed methodologies for distributing their digital collections into online social spaces according to the data coded in them. The difficult cultural, organisational and practical conditions for opening collections data into online time/space at WAG are indirectly documented in a report by Mimas to the Manchester Museums and Galleries Partnership (Manchester Museum, Manchester Art Gallery, Whitworth Gallery). In 2012 Mimas was recruited by the Manchester Museums and Galleries Partnership to undertake research that would help establish a roadmap for their shared digital infrastructure. The Partnership vision was to provide a radical reorientation of traditional online access to cultural heritage collections, supporting wider-spread discovery, reuse and engagement with these significant Manchester cultural assets. This report is useful to mention because it includes a section entitled 'Getting museum content on the wider web - seen as an important but unknown area of development' (Palmer.,et al, 2013: 4). It is here that staff perspectives at WAG (and MM) towards the principle of museums on the wider Web are articulated.

There was general acknowledgement that this is something museums and galleries should be considering – the benefits were understood but there was also a lack of understanding of what that might involve and whether the benefits would outweigh the costs. [...] At MM, there were some mixed responses – some reflecting that this was an area that needed to be considered - "I've never thought about it, although I do see other museums and our competitors appear there" – and others expressing concerns over the quality of the data, or the additional work it might involve.

Here, Mimas is telling us that WAG and MM did not understand what was involved in getting museum and gallery content on the wider Web or whether the benefits would outweigh the costs. Yet we are also told the benefits are well understood, although what those benefits are is never stated. Thus, this section of the report seems rather confusing and contradictory.

Even presuming that 'getting museum content on the wider Web' is referring to online museum/gallery content elsewhere online, this presumption is unhelpful as it tells us nothing about this wider Web as a public and social space, in what way online social capital networks form or the nature of public space this produces. In this respect, the Mimas report demonstrates little understanding of online inclusion or exclusion against which to evaluate digital practices for 'getting museum content on the wider Web'. Accordingly, the question left unanswered by Mimas is how then is it possible to know whether the benefits would outweigh the costs?

As a guide to provide a radical reorientation of traditional online access to cultural heritage collections there is surprisingly little engagement with the sociology of the Internet or the theory of networked space. Yet this complex and social understanding of the Web is needed if the costs of opening collections into the same space/time as the online publics can truly be evaluated. A further aspect of this report that supports the arguments of this thesis is the additional understanding it offers concerning the way staff at both the WAG and MM are frustrated at the user experience of their Website search facility (Palmer., et al, 2013: 24):

to search effectively requires a pre-knowledge of the data that most users will often not have: “the website works[...] if you know what you need to find.” Respondents felt the search & presentation of results was very poor: “it’s not the data as much as search and presentation of results”; “embarrassingly poor” ... “the narratives look really tedious”. People were most passionate about the poor quality of the images: “It’s the images for me, unless you’ve got a visual reference, the record is almost meaningless”; “the images are crap”.

Again, this is having a negative effect on individuals’ sense of professional pride and morale. Respondents clearly valued their collections and institutions and felt a strong sense of professional pride in being part of the institution, but at MM and WAG, it was felt that the web presence overall significantly let them down.

it’s just bonkers... we’d be better off without anything at all”. (Curator WAG) It’s so frustrating... our images are actually just as good as the Smithsonian’s! (Curator MM)

The irritation seen here exposes a contradiction between the pride of staff in their collections as public assets and the poor online user experience of searching those collections. In this respect, the symbolic representation of an open and publicly accessible collection is contradicted due to the public experience of the online interface, a product whose development has been mediated by the organisational structures that have developed to make the museum public. Such contradiction produces confusion and therefore creates the environment for a dialectical movement in organisational change in order to resolve the contradictory state.

6.3 Manchester Beacon project: A Community of Practice for modelling digital engagement

Contradictions of this nature became polarised when a Community of Practice (COP) came together to model an approach to opening digital collections into the same space and time as the online public, to which this section will now turn. This is based on the analysis of a piece of practice that was formed via a funding proposal to the Manchester ‘Beacon for Public Engagement’ in 2008 (see below for more details about this

initiative). The COP that was produced out of this project incorporated individuals and interest groups, each with their own particular idea about the problem of social exclusion to digital resources. For instance, people in Manchester interested in social/digital media for professional practice were using online tools to organise regular meetups in the city. This cluster of expertise reflected a particular disposition towards digital collections whereas the staff at the WAG involved in management of those collections were differently motivated. As a researcher in residence at the WAG with a particular approach to bridging the theory of digital/social space with the practice of opening collections data, I represented yet a further sensibility.

Mapping and analysing the way this network and community overcame differences between its members' attitudes and assumptions about digital collections, digital publics and social exclusion furthers this chapter's arguments; they provide insight into the nature of cultural barriers to the idea and significance that the online public are often socially excluded from digital collections and the practical barriers to the work of resolving this issue. As detailed in Chapter 4, this analytical approach segments the distinct rules, conventions and symbols that divide community members so that the social distances between them can be plotted. Through this mapping we can trace the way a COP develops or expands its learning into new forms.

The circumstance that brought this COP together came about via an initiative by the 'Beacons for Public Engagement', a research and funding body set up in 2008 in order to investigate how universities can embed strategic support for public engagement into their systems and cultures (Beacon 2012). Its mission focus was on 'reaching out', 'listening to' and 'learning from' local people, which led Manchester Beacon (one of six such Beacons across the UK) to open a competition to commission an online service that would map connections between people, knowledge and creativity within Greater Manchester. Detailed below, the competition brief illustrates one of the early methodologies employed by Beacon to achieve their goals.

'COMMISSION ::: B.TWEEN: MAPPING CREATIVITY'

Deadline for submission: September 12, 2008, 5pm

Manchester Beacon want to commission an interactive project that drives collective creativity to connect people, places and knowledge across Manchester and Salford. The commissioned project will use disruptive, open source or social technologies to maximise Manchester's creative communities. It will facilitate better communication between two or more social groups and provide tools to visualise this interaction. Four ideas will be selected and receive £1,000 to develop their ideas further. The final commission will be £25,000 in total. Upload your seed ideas in no more than 150 words with a supporting image onto the bTWEEN.co.uk Mapping Creativity page at: Upload your seed ideas in no more than 150 words with a supporting image onto the bTWEEN.co.uk Mapping

Under the strapline 'Community as Curator', the idea of opening collections data into the same space of flows as real time trending topics in the Manchester geography formed the basis of a successful bid by the author to develop this approach with seed funding. The application expressed its intention to 'connect people, places and knowledge across Manchester and Salford' in the following way:

The aim of the 'Community as Curator' project is to use the search and sharing activity of Manchester's diverse online communities as the curatorial frame within which to produce and share museum content. Online sharing, conversations across social media platforms, the sharing of user generated content, this multitude of sociability provides the context for interpreting museum collections with the aim of introducing a new level of cultural engagement for communities. [...] Any issues defined by online communities can be interpreted through the museum, providing a new perspective on the everyday and the relevance to those collections to that everyday. Communities will be facilitated to, in effect, 'Google the Museum'; by searching its banks of knowledge from their perspective and sharing what they find across multiple social platforms.

Beacon's method to develop this 'seed idea' required that the community which had emerged via the competition call was now pulled into the process of developing or modelling the idea. Calculated to manipulate collaborative practice, Beacon's method removed ideas from the individual and situated their development within a community of practice. The approach is similar to Step 3 in the 'cycle of expansive learning', outlined in Chapter 4, where a community collaborate in the modelling of a new solution to a problematic situation. In this respect, being partnered with 'LittleStar TV', a small city based arts and media company with strong network links with Manchester's developer community, proved a useful interface into a community of expertise in digital/social media.

Based on the Tuttle Club in London and largely instigated via input by 'Littlestar TV', Manchester's 'digital landscape' in 2008 had reached a new point of formation with the development of the city's first Social Media Cafe (SMC). The idea of SMC was essentially a meetup of individuals who shared a professional interest in digital culture; the difference between this group and other meetups in the city was the fact that it drew people from across many different backgrounds, professions and localities. For the first time journalists, Web developers, academics, arts practitioners, and museum professionals had reason to engage in a process of collective learning linked by their common interest. Practically, social media platforms provided this community with both its tools for coordinating group activities and made this organisation visible in the digital

public space; anyone using the search terms 'Manchester' and 'social media' would return information on them.

This network of people shared an interest, even passion, for social media and associated digital technologies and, through collaboration, aspired to learn how to utilise this technology better; network membership thus implies a shared competence that distinguishes its members.²⁶ Due to the partnership with 'LittleStar TV' people attending the first two Social Media Cafe meetings were also invited to participate in developing the 'seed idea'. This resulted in a broad discussion for re-modelling the seed idea, which involved various professionals working in the fields of Web development, digital marketing, teaching, journalism and film production. The first session began with a short presentation that aimed to explain the problem that the 'Community as Curator' concept hoped to address: that digital collections are inaccessible and ostensibly hidden from the online public.

In the discussions that followed there was confusion in the group about how this concept could be developed to answer the 'mapping creativity' brief. As someone who worked in digital marketing remarked, this proposal sounded like an exercise in search engine optimisation (SEO). She was talking here about techniques and tactics used to increase the amount of visitors to a website by obtaining a high-ranking placement in the results page of a search engine, i.e. Google, Bing or Yahoo. However sophisticated at filtering, the algorithms that structure search engine returns can be manipulated. For instance, since 2006 the Powerhouse Museum had been adding folksonomies as meta-data to the records of their collections with the intention that 'common' as opposed to 'curatorial' language would augment the serendipity of its digital collections being returned/discovered via Google search (Chan 2006). Also, two in the SMC group who worked in digital marketing were keen to draw attention to the risk of placing content in search returns that may appear irrelevant to the initial query and suggested this approach may be more damaging than beneficial. 'An inherent issue with SEO techniques is that done badly these methods can be invasive and misleading [...] and have little to do with communities.' In this respect, they questioned 'what has SEO got to do with 'community curators'?

Their confusion was a common concern, seen both in this group and in several of the online comments posted about the proposal on the mapping creativity website, e.g. the following comments that are centered on a disbelief in the idea of the online crowd as a community curator:

As individuals we already have via the Internet to museums. When I google a

²⁶ In this respect, Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of a 'community of practice' also fitted the SMC network.

museum or art gallery there is usually someone there I can contact who can help me with my enquiry. I personally do not want to be part of a “community” but I can see that his proposal would attract groups of people interested in the same topic. (Giovanna; Beacon comments in appendix 1).

The point we are trying to make is that museums are great places to visit. By experiencing the physical nature of something we understand it better. I agree with Giovanna about the community thing. If this proposal relies on like-minded people to contribute it will probably end up being clusters of disparate groups not necessarily connected, which I am sure is not part of the brief (Tony; Beacon comments in Appendix).

The opinions expressed above, similar in tone to the questions raised by the SMC group, problematise the Community as Curator seed idea for presenting a crowd of unconnected individuals as a community; this notion contradicted both their established understanding of ‘community’ and their image or idea of curatorship. From the SMC point of view, a principle of involving the ‘community’ as curator would need to engage a group who would then select objects for display, thus replicating what they understood as the curator’s work. Consequently, there was an impasse as the SMC members internalised (cognitive) symbols for representing both community and curatorship had become contradicted by the proposal. In this context, the words ‘community’ and ‘curator’ had produced a great deal of confusion due to the SMC group having a determined idea about what an art gallery is and does and therefore what a community curator would entail.

As Merriman (1991) argues, to understand the public image of art galleries and museums we have to first consider the way the social history of these cultural institutions now shapes people’s images of them. His point is that social and cultural history is both alive in the present and shapes the future; it *sublates*, i.e. overcomes, includes, transcends and deconstructs, the opposition between what is and what will be. Merriman is thus describing both a dialectical movement and also re-stating Bourdieu’s notion of ‘history turned into nature, i.e denied as such’ where the public’s schemes of perception acquire the status of habitus. (Bourdieu 1977: 78).

Discussed in the earlier chapter on methods, the concept of dialectics is rooted in the idea that a ‘subject’ (Community as Curators) and an ‘object’ (opening digital collections into the same space and time as the online public) are not independent entities but form a unit of activity which sublates the opposition/contradictions between them. Following this theory, the SMC workshop can be analysed as a ‘unit of activity’ acting to overcome contradictions by means of a process of sublation.

The way the SMC group approached resolving its contradictory state was to test the

collections' search facility on the WAG's website to mediate a shared understanding of the problem the proposal was trying to solve. However, in this smallish group there was some embarrassment about how few artists' names they could recall to search for. It was also unknown whether artists whose work shared the SMC's capital holdings in social media, social systems, cybernetics and computer programming were held in the WAG's collections. The search facility had yielded no returns when used with any combination of words reflecting this group's interest in digital culture. Yet, when Google was searched using the combination of the words 'British art, social media, social systems and cybernetics'²⁷ it offered a different experience. Here, the first page of returns provided links to a range of content about the British artists Stephen Willats, Richard Hamilton and Gordon Pask, pioneers who had worked with computers both as a social medium for community engagement and as a subject and language of art practice. However, when these names were used with the WAG's search facility, although they yielded results in the case of Stephen Willats, the image was missing and the narrative was described as poor.

This usability testing produced feedback that, in effect, the SMC group were excluded from those collections that perhaps had the most relevance to their interests in digital culture/social media.²⁸ And the experience of their own exclusion was to change the character of the discussion. From here on, the digital collections at the WAG were criticised as unusable to non experts; moreover, the word 'gatekeeper' was attached to the gallery for being the authority that decides what is or is not made visible online and on its website. A regular visitor to the WAG pointed out that, 'walking round the gallery you see the exhibits and you can make choices about what you like, whereas the difficulty when using the collections search is that you need to know in advance the sort of thing you're looking for' (SMC Meeting 2008). In other words, the collection was ostensibly hidden from the online public spaces produced by the SMC network. This issue is similar to the notion that, if something cannot be easily accessed, then to some extent it does not exist for those who cannot find it. The feedback from the usability testing had thus produced an awareness of social exclusion in members of the SMC network that they lacked the necessary knowledge to search a collection as well as the

²⁷ Using this combination of search terms the wikipedia page for Stephen Willats was ranked 4 in the search returns

²⁸ A snapshot survey of this group's habits for visiting the WAG revealed that 7 out of 15 had, in the previous three months, visited the retrospective exhibition of the printmaker Anne Desmet. Although this survey did not seek any demographic detail as the people surveyed were all attending the SMC, a professional COP, we might assume them to be in the ABC1 classification. A demographic that corresponds with the 80% majority who visit Manchester's museums and galleries. Albeit ad-hoc, surveying the SMC group in this way proved useful as a 'tool' for feeding back to them that, although often visiting the WAG, they remained excluded from those collections that perhaps had the greatest relevance to them.

power to decide what is exhibited and how to give that power to others.

The experience of user testing the WAG's search facility had mediated a critical space for questioning the gallery from a perspective of exclusion from its digital resources. Moreover, this point of view had produced a dialectical movement, a movement which went from the initial state of confusion produced by the Community as Curator proposal to seeing in what ways this idea might be re-modelled to answer the group's issue of exclusion.²⁹

That said, several people in this discussion, including those who worked in digital marketing, were still of the opinion that the proposal's focus on search terms was too blunt an instrument to deal with the complexity and variety of online space and social organisation: 'Yes I see that things get picked up on Google and shared across the SMC network but we also produce public spaces like this meeting [...], more a trad-community that exists through social media. It would be much better if you looked at the interrelationship between online news media and social media sharing as well as search terms; [...] it would help to map all the different community/public spaces'.

From the perspective of the SMC group, online content that became public in the same time and space as their network occurred when online news media intersected their communications' protocols and reported on developments in digital media; this information was then shared through their social media channels and, more importantly, vice versa. Their point of view was similar to Manuel Castells' analysis of the transformation of the news media industry from a mass-medium to that of mass-self communication.³⁰ Castells (2007) argues that the Internet's architecture of a distributed network of peers who are able to communicate between one another is characterised by the senders and receivers of information, their cultural codes of reference and protocols of communication structuring communications within and between established media businesses, networked individuals and their group formations.

This interrelationship between news media and social media was introduced to the group by a BBC software developer who used the extraordinary example of localised online activity associated with the Manchester boxer Ricky Hatton. The son of a pub landlord in the economically deprived area of Hattersley, Greater Manchester, Hatton, is indelibly linked with his local community. A world champion who dominated the light-welterweight division between 2005 and 2009, Hatton was at the height of his powers at the same time the SMC workshop was being held (October 2008). At this time, Hatton stories were regularly trending on social media and his name was also trending as a search term. According to analysis by Google Trend, the epicentre of this

²⁹ See Vygotsky 1978

³⁰ See Chapter 3

online activity was in the very neighbourhood where Hatton had been brought up and still lived.

The introduction or intervention of Hatton as an approach to engaging online public space changed the group dynamic at the SMC workshop as it produced a new objective - to make collections public in the same public space generated by online interest in this boxer. Perhaps the reason that the online public spaces generated by Hatton were so attractive to this group was the fact that boxing exposes and exploits the human condition with so much theatre. The BBC developer who introduced Hatton also spoke about his interest in how this sport had been a subject for artists but apologised for being unable to remember their names.

On the basis of the communication protocols which describe the social capital networks of online interest in Ricky Hatton, the idea was put forward to develop code to scrape data from real time online search and social media sharing and also to devise, together with the WAG curators, the algorithms for querying the metadata from the digital collections. Thus the model of digital engagement being proposed was to bridge the two data sources in the same time; in this respect, timing is everything as online public space is produced in shared time. The desired effect was to make WAG content pertinent to the physical, emotional, cultural and theatrical aspects of boxing and to do this in the same public space as the network of peers connected by their interest in Hatton. This publicness was to manifest via individual online search, by sharing through social media and also via reporting by online news media.

That said, to open the WAG's appropriate digital collections into the same production of online space/time as that being generated by the social capital network of interest in Ricky Hatton would have classified and interpreted them for their relevance to a contemporary working class discourse.³¹ From the stance of a gallery aiming to engage publics in the more deprived neighbourhoods of a city, whose demographic classifications showed them as non visitors, the social capital network and online public spaces generated by interest in Hatton were uniquely interesting as they return the significance of class as an issue of social exclusion to gallery/museum online resources. Ricky 'Hitman' Hatton was identified within media discourses as resolutely working class or blue-collar. According to James Rhodes' paper (2011), informatively entitled 'Fighting for "Respectability": Media Representations of the White, "Working-Class" Male Boxing "Hero"', the media construction of Hatton is situated within contexts in which deindustrialization, economic restructuring and hardening inequalities are serving to

³¹ Data at a Greater Manchester level shows that a large proportion of deprived areas in the county continue to fall within Manchester's boundaries. (Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2010).

reconstitute the relationship between classed identities, masculinities and Whiteness.

He writes (Rhodes 2011: 353):

the White male boxer has long held a special appeal among the public and media. Boxing “heroes” are constructed not only on the basis of Whiteness but also on the basis of their perceived “working-class” nature, at a time when “working-class” or “blue-collar” identities in both the United Kingdom and the United States are subjected to forms of negative stigmatization. However, central to the appeal of the White, “working-class” boxing hero is their asserted “respectability,” which is used to establish distance from less “respectable” forms of raced, classed, and gendered identities. The media representations that surround boxing champions Ricky Hatton and Kelly Pavlik illustrate the way in which their “respectability” is asserted, explored, and related to broader conversations about a perceived growing “White underclass”.

In Rhodes’ analysis of the media discourse surrounding Hatton he is inadvertently also deciphering the cultural codes of reference and protocols of communication as well as the scope of the communication process where objects and people become public in the same online networked time and space.³² The media discourse surrounding Hatton as a working class blue collar throwback fighter is representative of particular sets of respectable dispositions, qualities and values, shaped by the different national contexts in which such discourses are being produced. Hatton thus provided an approach of art being opened to the public in Manchester’s most deprived areas and thereby engaging³³ some of the hardest to reach audiences. This approach provided a model of digital engagement that was put forward for funding from the Beacon competition, Mapping Creativity. The model was based on software development and in this respect was reliant on winning funding in order to purchase developer services.

Although the Hatton proposal developed in the SMC workshop was unsuccessful in getting the funding it needed, the way it contrasts with the winning proposal is interesting as it supports this chapter’s argument by showing two distinctly different approaches to social organisation in time and space. Manchester Beacon’s preference was to support a proposal which demonstrated an established network of relations with social groups at the community/neighbourhood level (Private communication 2008). The winning proposal, like the various and distinct practices of Manchester City Galleries for public engagement, tended towards mediating a space of engagement with social

³² Similarly, Hubbard (2007 cited in Rhodes: 54) observes how ‘Hatton has always been the cheeky chappie of the ring, not so much a Jack-the-lad but a natural comic with the people’s touch, one of those homespun heroes who takes his washing home to his mum, likes a jar, a jape and a game of darts down at his local and prefers crispy duck to caviar.’

³³ Here engagement is referring to the mutual production of the objects in public space.

groups identified through the localised structures that organise people in society, such as families, community/ neighbourhood groups, hospitals and schools; these structures mediate the relationship between space and time according to their geography, i.e local time.

In contrast, the Hatton proposal assumed the social theorist Clay Shirky's (2008) idea of organising without organisations and was thus unlikely to be recognised as representing the symbols of public engagement. In this respect, there is a theoretical difference between the two approaches in that, where the Hatton project premised an idea of engagement based on making collections visible in the same space/time production as the online public, the winning proposal was premised on mediating a public space by networking established social groups in their own neighbourhood. In other words, each proposal was structured on a different theory of space/time.

As detailed above, without funding for software development it was not possible to proceed with the planned research. Moreover, the way the departmental organisation is set up at the WAG meant that they did not have in house developers; rather, when such digital services were deemed necessary, they were commissioned from external agencies. It is significant that the organisational structure and available resources at WAG were poorly suited to support the practice of opening their collections data into real time digital flows as this indicates that the structure of space online is not central to their digital praxis.

6.4 Travels with data; remodelling digital engagement

The fact that developer resource was not available meant remodelling my research practice to fit the changed circumstance. This situation provided useful research data on how a system for digital innovation had to adapt in order to navigate structural constraints stemming from the WAG, i.e the process of sublation. In this respect, the new model needed to be small enough in scope to work within the constraints of the available resources at WAG, such as restricted curatorial time, limited access to collections data and a staff resource skilled in using the CMS. These understandable constraints set the rules mediating the development of the new model.

However, the different approach changed the object of the practice and thereby the subject to object relationship. Whereas in the Hatton project the 'subject' was to engage the online public and the 'object' was to gather real time feedback of social data from online behaviour, the new 'object' was to use descriptive data about the collections as a key to making those collections public in online spaces. As will be seen below, this

change in the objective of the practice was to expose and trigger a different set of contradictions to those already discussed. It was also to define a role that seems to be missing in most UK museums but which is necessary in order to put digital collections into different online public domains.

When we consider the organisational systems through which the WAG acquired its collections, we see that the objective to open those collections into the same time/space as the online public is immediately contradicted. For example, copyright issues concerning the right to reproduce the artist's image barrier the reuse of that image online. For this reason, the approach taken to opening the digital collections was to mostly use collections data from the work of Artists who have been dead for more than 70 years and are therefore largely free from copyright. Thus the historic art collections at the Whitworth became the project focus.³⁴

In 1892 the Whitworth received by far its largest gift of watercolours from John Edward Taylor, the influential owner of the Manchester Guardian. The collection of landscape watercolours has a vast amount of fielded data attached to it,³⁵ for example, a single artwork by Alfred William Hunt (1830-1896), illustrated below, has nine basic fields as well as additional contextual data such as interpretive narratives and exhibition history.

Title	Tynemouth Pier: North-East Wind
Object type	Watercolour
Date	1866
Artist/maker	Alfred William Hunt (1830-1896)
Support	Paper
Medium	Watercolour
Techniques	Watercolour
Dimensions	h:27.3 w:38.1
Accession number	D.2010.1

From a public or digital engagement perspective the two aspects to the title of Hunt's painting provide a straightforward illustration of the way collections data can be utilized to make this artwork public in various online contexts. From 'Tynemouth Pier' it is easy

³⁴ The only exception to using the historic collections were contemporary textiles and artist prints which are exempt from copyright.

³⁵ The WAG has 55,000 artworks in its collection so, while this may not qualify as big data, it is certainly large.

to get the latitude and longitude data enabling this image to be geolocated in the place it was made. According to Bearman and Geber (2007: 32), geo-aware museum content allows 'turning the museum inside out and the embedding of the collection in physical space.' They raise the question as to whether an art gallery should retain its current role in society as a centralised storehouse and exhibition venue; for them, locating objects virtually to their original contexts offers incredibly rich opportunities for both art galleries or museums and audiences.

The second aspect to William Hunt's title, 'North-East Wind', enables collections data to be merged with meteorological data.' DataPoint is the Met Office's Application Programming Interface (API) providing our weather forecast and observation data. This service was designed for application or website developers, the scientific community or any other member of the public who may wish to use meteorological data in an innovative way' (Metoffice 2015).

Using a landscape collection to illustrate real time changes in weather is an established approach. For instance, the Tate Gallery has since 2010 published the weekend's weather forecast with illustrations from its landscape collections via its Twitter channel.



Figure 6.2: And the weather forecast for the weekend resembles

This is Tate making its collections visible to a public who already follow the gallery online and who may neither have an interest in the weather nor the artwork representing it. In this respect, the Tate is an example of a gallery on the Web but not of the Web, by which I mean the difference between publishing online content compared to opening content into a public space produced by online behaviour, and where the relevance of

collections emerges from the user's online activities rather than from gallery communication.

Fitting this model, the approach to opening the collections at the WAG was to develop a practice for digital engagement which used the principle of space/time compression to identify the different online contexts where landscape data, including geolocate and meteorological fields, would become public. By asking what online networks of social capital would be interested in a data set of this type, the idea was to see how many different online/networked public spaces, temporalities and digital cultures could draw off the same data.

This approach was to bear in mind both Manuell Castells' (2007) idea of mass-self communication, and also group organisations which are contingent on the various technologies and ideologies structuring digital culture. On this basis national, regional, local and hyperlocal news organisations were seen to provide an interface into distinct online/networked public spaces and temporalities. In these media contexts, geolocate and meteorological data fields meant it was possible to offer a unique way to illustrate their online local/national weather news³⁶. Seen from the perspective of public access and engagement, weather combined with geo-location is a cross cutting mechanism intersecting a large social capital network. Thus, by arguing the case that this data could add value to the online news, the WAG's historic collection would by de-facto be public and visible in the same social capital networks produced by weather news production. After all, the weather is both classless and the Great British talking point.

The process of engaging news media organisations to use the WAG's data meant opening up dialogue with different online news editors to explore with them possible areas of mutual benefit. This approach was to argue the case, or sell the idea, that the P2P networks which typify online news production as mass-self communication, as well as the communications protocols that delineate these networks, are beneficial public spaces to open collections into.

Within the organisation of departmental responsibilities at WAG it was the marketing department that had the media contacts; yet managing a working relationship between media businesses and curatorial workflows and collections management seemed more fitting to the type of work undertaken in the department for public engagement. The point

³⁶ It is well known in the news industry that weather and weather services can drive a great deal of online traffic and this usage is increasingly on mobile and tablet interfaces. (Pew 1999, 2015)

here is that the division of labour for this work overlapped marketing, curatorial and public engagement roles.

Working together with the new media officer (NMO) who sits in the marketing department for both MM and the WAG, three online editors were approached in 2011, representing between them network/hyperlocal journalism, local journalism and local/national news media; these were the hyperlocal news service called 'Inside the M60', the Manchester Evening News, and the Guardian Meetings were arranged with all three, who expressed an interest in using WAG data, but only one of these proposals ended up going forward. However, reflecting here on the way the discussions unfolded (before going on discussing the proposal that materialised), is revealing about the motivations, challenges and barriers to putting WAG data in distinct online public spaces.

6.4.1 M60 and Manchester Evening News: reflecting on two (unsuccessful) initiatives to open WAG data in online public space

The first meeting³⁷ was with the editor of 'Inside the M60' (M60), an online news service which reported on the way neighbourhoods in Manchester were using social media and online tools to report on and discuss issues of hyperlocal significance to them. This editor had previously attended the SMC workshop so had some prior context as to why WAG collections data was being offered to illustrate localised weather news.

The M60 website provides an example of network journalism in the sense that it reported on and linked to community/neighbourhood issues being posted on social media; thus the contexts and timings of this online news service came from the social Web. Rather than simply putting content online, it intersected with what the online public posted about their neighbourhoods with the aim of adding value by amplifying local concerns within the wider online network whose social capital shared the same issues. Such journalism is collaborative with professionals and amateurs working together.

Google analytics of the M60 website showed not only that a good percentage of their traffic came from links pasted into social media, i.e shared within Facebook groups, but also that this site was driving traffic back to hyperlocal websites which blogged about their neighbourhoods. The editor described this process as linked-journalism and was proud of the two-way engagement it demonstrated, pointing out that the more localised the content, the greater its value to the M60 network, in which the individual nodes represented distinct localities inside the M60 and where the connection between the

³⁷ This meeting was held at the WAG on the 3rd of May 2011

nodes was their shared social capital. To illustrate the relevance of WAG data to this online public space an example from the digital collections was used which showed a repeat pattern of lightning designed and produced at a textile factory in the Greater Manchester neighbourhood of Hyde in the 1990s.

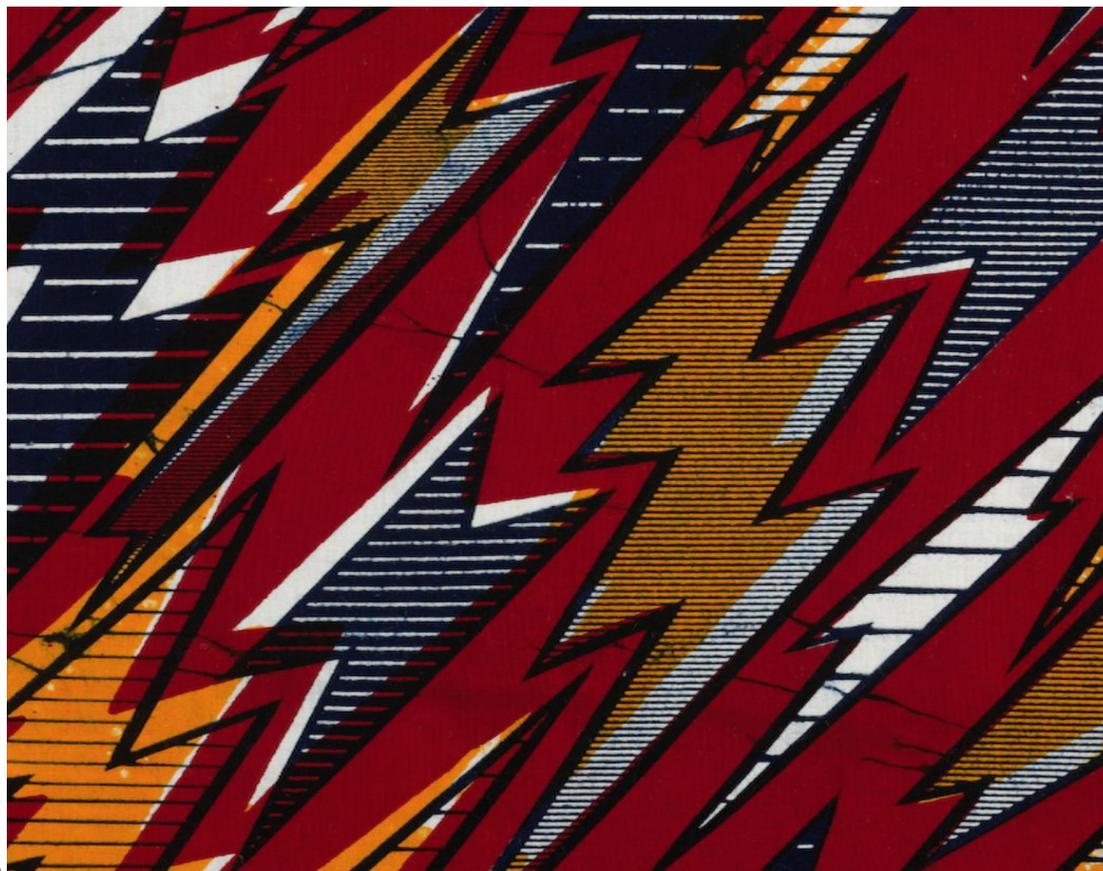


Figure 6.3: Lightning (1990) The Whitworth Art Gallery University of Manchester

In context of this image and its narrative, it was critical to know how much social media activity stemmed from localised weather events and, if the weather conditions were right, would displaying WAG data on the M60 website be picked up and shared in those networked spaces. In other words, would it be visible in the same time as the online public space was being produced. In the editor's experience, new webpages emerge out of other webpages, i.e. for a webpage to be visible in the network, links must first be created that lead from and to this webpage. The M60 approach was to report weather events live by writing stories that linked to the images and narratives people had posted on social media. To use WAG data in this context would be conversational as it would be responding to 'real-time' online behaviour. However, a priority for the editor was that the artworks from which the digital images were taken were also on display in the WAG building as he was convinced that an online conversation, structured by its timely relevance to Manchester and its neighbourhoods and therefore physically close to the gallery building, would likely extend into the building. The point was made that online public space can stay stable although the different actors producing this space might be mobile, meaning social awareness and behaviour can be in cyberspace even though

bodies are in a different public space. Thus online transcends/converges with the gallery and its physical properties.

The editor was therefore concerned that if the artworks were not accessible in the gallery, the M60 would be criticised. It was his belief that online networked social media spaces and Manchester as a physical space were converged and therefore it made good sense that, when collections data was public in the online conversations of Manchester residents, it should also be public in Manchester's gallery spaces. His perspective had thus contradicted any assumed separation in time and space between the collections data and the real art work, yet this was the assumption on which the M60 was being offered collections data.

At this time, the WAG had neither history nor organisational capacity to hang art in the same time/space sharing environment as Manchester's online public. As discussed earlier, Manchester City Galleries' approaches to exhibitions and public access tend to assume that location acts as the bridge between space and time. This cultural assumption is significant as it reinforces the extent to which any real time practice that involved moving artworks in and out of gallery rooms according to online space would be, importantly, outside of the WAG's existing organisation of its departmental workflows. Consequently, it was difficult to give assurances that any collection data used in conversations on the M60 website would also be reflected in artworks exhibited at the WAG. Contributing to this problem was the issue that my research involvement with the gallery was premised on its digital collections and digital access and until this experience it had not been taken into consideration that there would be a crossover into the physical spaces of the gallery. For this reason working with the M60 was put on hold till a later date.³⁸ Nevertheless, from our discussions it was blatant that the way online space/time is instigated or not within museum/gallery process is insightful to both the opportunities and barriers to opening collections to the online public.

Following on from this discussion, a meeting with the online editor of the Manchester Evening News (MEN) was to make a similar point about the relationship between WAG images on the MEN and what the public could see at the gallery. But, in contrast to the M60, the approach to online weather news at the MEN was not networked with social media but instead acted as a broadcast medium. That said, a broader point here is that any online news service is concerned with telling stories which have real time relevance to people's lives and, because of the distributed architecture of the Internet, these

³⁸ Unfortunately, despite its popularity, this online news service closed before there was opportunity to resolve the issues or contradictions raised by editor.

narrative contexts can convey their story by bridging with relevant collections data. With two million users a month this news website represented a significant potential audience to make the WAG's data/digital collections public. The MEN's online editor was clear that he could see how WAG data might enrich their story telling but felt it would be 'dishonest' if what they put on the website did not correspond with what was viewable inside the Gallery. Both the MEN online editor and the M60 online editor were concerned that what was on the website would be contradicted by public experience at the gallery.

As already discussed, any approach to exhibition of the physical collections that was responsive to the social, temporal and spatial contexts of online public spaces would have contradicted the gallery's established organisation of workflows as well as its organisational culture, assumptions and symbols. These cultures and processes are mostly based on a different space/time to online, one which assumes that the built structure of the WAG mediates the interrelationship between space and time. In this respect, the way the WAG goes about exhibiting is a lengthy ongoing process of managed interrelationships between the objects on display and the permanent collections, touring exhibitions, public engagement and also the broader national and international exhibition calendar; the majority are intended to stand in static space for long periods. In contrast, a gallery-based practice or system of activity that was to exhibit and un-exhibit according to postings on social media about the day's weather by Manchester residents, who may never enter the gallery, was more than a difficult sell as it would have triggered structural tensions in the WAG's established processes.

Contradictions are interpreted as historically accumulating structural tensions that become noticeable in disturbances which question the logic of established processes. Meeting with the two editors produced this type of disturbance. As individual actors and part of the community³⁹ involved in opening WAG data in online space they found themselves in a double bind situation,⁴⁰ meaning that they received contradictory messages to which they were unable to react (Engestrom, 1987, 2005). However, as Murphy (2008) has pointed out, despite the potential of contradictions to result in transformation in an activity system, this transformation does not always occur. In fact, contradictions can either enable development to progress or disable it, depending on whether or not they are acknowledged and resolved. This disabling effect was not only an outcome of the research process but also an unexpected and disappointing barrier to working with 'local' online media due to the contradictions these discussions had

³⁹ This community consisted of two online editors, a researcher in residence, social media officer and the WAG's curator of fine art

⁴⁰ A double bind thus refers to tensions or disturbances caused by contradictions that have to be resolved in order for the activity to progress.

triggered. In this respect, to open collections data in a way that took full advantage of both how online social space is produced and structured and how the distributed architecture of the Internet was negated, it thus followed that the object of the activity/practice and therefore this system of activity needed to modify its approach, i.e. sublation.

This modification was to move away from local and city online media and instead focus on regional and national online news media as they would not have the same concerns with regard to the issue that online public space and gallery exhibits correspond. This transition seemed to mediate a solution or way round this problem, yet at the same time it removed the Manchester relevance which was disappointing.

6.4.2 The Artcast weather project: opening WAG data to the Guardian's online public space

Following a conference call with the Guardian news media's Northern editor⁴¹ about possible uses of WAG collections data, a request was made that we put a full proposal together detailing how and when this data could be used for a short series of timely picture-led articles for the Guardian Northern webpages. By exploring rarely seen archived collections at the Whitworth they would take a look at that great British talking point, the weather. Selection and context would be framed by the paintings' northern location.

The Northern editor's motivation for working with WAG data was to present material about culture in the North in a more interactive and distributed way which was better suited to how the Northern population was using social media and online search engines. In a document entitled 'Adding digital value to regional coverage' for senior editorial managers at the Guardian' he wrote: 'We began to realise that there was a way of reporting the North rapidly, in context and with a diversity of voices - a virtue all too rare in the national media outside the BBC at the moment because of the 'metropolitan grip' (Personal communication from The Northern editor, September 2011).

The transformation of the news media industry from a mass-medium to that of mass-self communication was evident in the way the Guardian Northern approached the co-production of content for its website. Characterised by their live engagement with the content posted on social media, The Northern engaged with the specifics of a networked society by relating to the way social actors produce space through their use

⁴¹ The Guardian is a UK and international news media organisation with a number of regional and country wide editors.

of technology relative to their own histories, objectives and abilities. There is thus an interrelation between culture and technology acting on the way social space is produced and structured.

As the Guardian represented an interface to online space, working with them supported a research practice aimed at tracing the organisational and institutional limitations, opportunities and outcomes that occur when the WAG's digital practices are informed by and address the qualities producing online public space. For example, it was essential that any agreement with the Guardian was in consultation with Helen Stalker, then WAG assistant curator of fine art, in order for her to structure and standardise the data fields within the operational time frame of this media business. Analysis of the process or activity of making WAG data available and usable in a timely fashion to the Guardian was thus insightful as to the sort of structural and cultural issues this type of work produced within the organisational contexts of a working gallery. Key issues that needed immediate consideration were as follows:

- How far in advance would the weather be known?
- How would the location be selected?
- Who would liaise with The Northerner journalists?
- What time of day/week they would be published?
- How would the image be digitised?
- What licences were in place to be able to display the works?
- Would there be any staff/resource costs?

A further aspect to this research practice was the opportunity it offered for comparison between the analytics of page views of the collections pages on the WAG's website and the analytics from the Guardian's webpages, which included the WAG data in a different online context. In other words, the same cultural data in two different online contexts could be analysed and compared. The research significance of this related to the way opportunities for social inclusion and public engagement informed by the qualities producing online public space compare to the WAG's established digital practices and procedures.

Launching a new series for this blog - artcast

Never-before-seen art work revealed for readers of this blog to help us all keep a check on that wintry weather



📍 October Snow, Windermere by Bernard Eyre Walker (1887-1972) Aquatint. Photograph: The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester./guardian.co.uk

Figure 6.4: Artcast on the Guardian Northerner

The series launched at the end of October 2011 using the five day weather forecast for Cumbria. Helen Stalker became the named author of the article and provided a narrative about the particular Landscape and its significance.

The first launch took place on Stalker's own blog in a post titled 'The sky's the limit'. There she stated 'we're hoping this will inspire people to consider their own region in relation to these timeless and unifying images – and will hopefully create some online dialogue. A great way to explore the collection on a daily basis.' (Stalker 2011) The idea was then presented to The Northerner network of readers on 31st October 2011 in this posting:

'In the first digital project of its type, the Whitworth curators will research the collection to bring you weekly images which directly link to the day's weather somewhere in the north - maybe where you are. "98% of the material will have

never been seen before,” explains assistant curator of fine art Helen Stalker.’

‘The challenge is to have everything photographed and digitised. A digital object has the possibility of being seen by millions of people so it’s an integral part of a drive to open up the collection. We’re hoping this will inspire people to consider their own region in relation to these timeless and unifying images – and will hopefully create some online dialogue. A great way to explore the collection on a daily basis.’

Unconnected to The Northerner editors, the Guardian’s London news editor, who had responsibility for the front page of guardian.co.uk, took the decision to include an image and link in a prominent position on their online front page (see Fig 6.6), a move which immediately expanded the audience outside of the north of England and right into the global Guardian network. That serendipitous moment could only have occurred due to the way online technologies and distributed workflows enable a regional/local initiative to be simultaneously global.

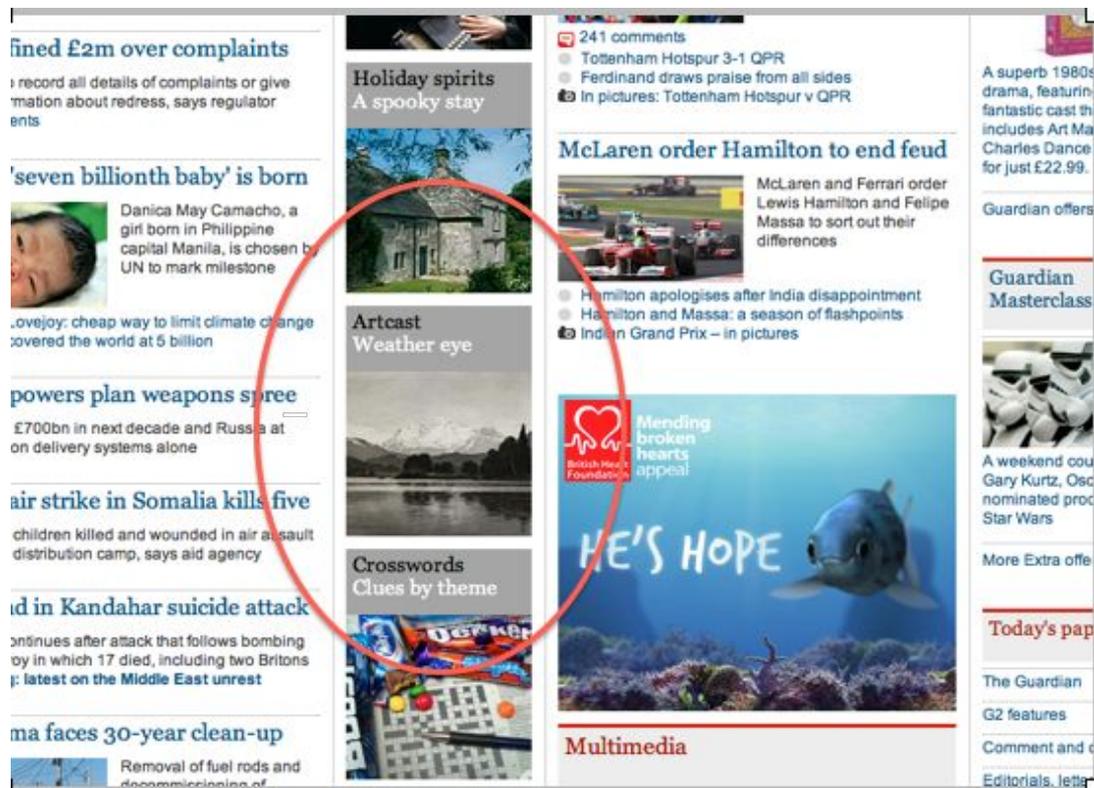


Figure 6.5: Online Front Page of The Guardian

The artcast series progressed throughout the month using a workflow which, by necessity, had to take place outside the normal working hours of the Gallery. It progressed through the following steps:

- A general location in the north was chosen by The Northerner team on Friday

evening. As this was to be a short series, the aspiration was to ensure every part of the north was featured at some point.

- Once the Met Office had published the five day forecast, the editors forwarded this to the curators for them to research the collection, find appropriate images and then write a short narrative for each of the art works. This cultural data was delivered to the The Northerner team by email before the end of Sunday.
- Between Sunday night and Monday morning, the editors/journalists would make up an online page with the images, descriptions and weather forecasts.
- On Monday morning, an email detailing the publication and advising of the live URLs and the time publication was expected was sent from The Northerner journalists to all the Guardian desk editors in London; the 'artcast' Web pages were published by using a remote Content Management System.
- Using the social media accounts of the organisations - @GdnNortherner, @WhitworthArt, @McrMuseum - and individual accounts from team members, the pages were networked using the hashtag #artcast and the locations.

An example of the outcome of this activity is seen below (Fig 6.5).

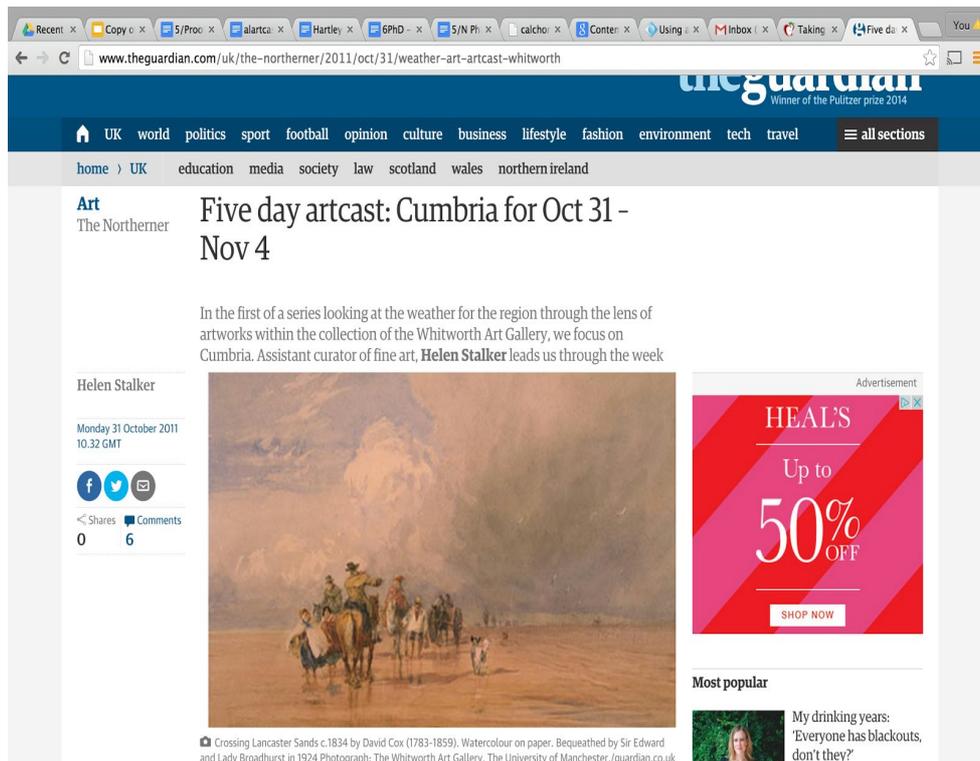


Figure 6.6: Web page showing Artcast project

Analysis of the activity of making WAG data available and usable in a timely fashion for Guardian re-use is revealing of both structural and cultural tensions in the WAG's departmental organisation of its workflows, which simply could not cater for the real time aspect to this work. When the concept of producing a WAG weather data set was first discussed,⁴² the idea was to work with multiple online news media organisations in times of extreme or unusual weather conditions, treating the self-organising online social capital networks emerging from such weather events as public space. Although we knew events of this type, while not every day, occur fairly regularly, their unpredictability contradicted scheduling them into curatorial and social media workflows.

Dissimilar to news media, the WAG's medium has not developed its organisation to be responsive to real time events. In this respect, the analytical methods of CHAT⁴³ draw attention to the way artefacts or tools act to mediate a dialectic movement that resolves the contrary situation; thus, a solution to the unpredictability of the weather was the predictability of 'online weather forecasts'. As a result, it became possible to structure when the data/images would be needed by the Guardian and who would be available to do this work. However, the way mediated solutions acted to structure the remodelling of the practice was to continually compromise the approach of opening data into online space.

For instance, the original motivation for wanting to engage in the social capital/media networks of unpredictable weather events was due to the online conversational spaces these events have produced, as well as the power of networked journalistic methods to expand and open into these timely online public spaces. Here, the project's movement from weather news to weather forecasting provided research data on the organisational and institutional limitations that arose when the WAG's digital practices were informed by and addressed the qualities of the digital public space. This was a dialectical movement between the subject of the WAG's organisation as a public resource and the object of public visibility and access to collections in online space/time. This movement exposed both a limitation and opportunity for WAG to be public in the same space/time as the online public. The limitation was that weather forecasting thus became more broadcast than conversation while this mediation provided a compromised opportunity to open WAG data into novel online public spaces. That said, the predictability and structure of online weather forecasts were a source of further contradictions and compromise. It was the Northern editor's wish that these forecasts were twice daily, morning and early evening. They emphasised the importance of these times relative to page views and social media activity. Be that as it may, when considered in relation to

⁴² This discussion took place in September 2011 with the WAG's Social Media Officer who, at a later date, approached the WAG's then assistant Curator of Fine Art.

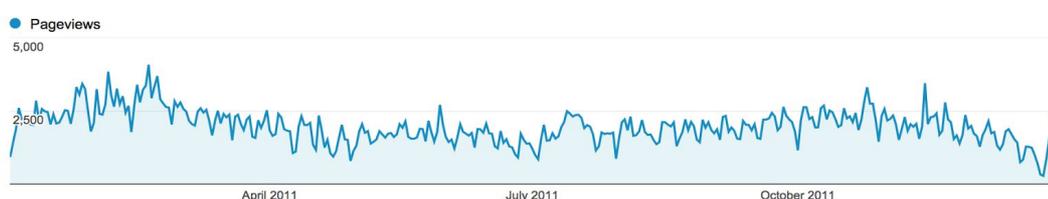
⁴³ See chapter 3.

both the WAG processes and the available resources of this small and experimental project, the Editor's request was not feasible.

The process of matching meteorological data with the collections data as well as producing a digital image and associated narrative twice daily when the only available resource for this project was the WAG staff willing to work in their own time, including weekends, was too much to cope with. It was also the case that the lack of developer resource in the gallery's departmental organisation meant automating this process by mining the collections data was not available and therefore became a further limitation to the WAG being in the same space/time as the online public.

The opportunity offered by Artcast for comparison between the analytics of page views of the collections pages on the WAG's website and the analytics from the Guardian's webpages, which included the WAG data in a different online context, reveal very different patterns of user behaviour. As already mentioned, the research value of comparing these statistics related to the way opportunities for social inclusion and public engagement, informed by the qualities producing online public space, compare to the WAG's established digital practices and procedures.

The collections pages on the WAG website are the online public access point to information on the depth and breadth of the gallery's collection and in the month of November 2011, when the Artcast project took place, pageviews of the landing page of WAG's collections pages were 16,114, representing 23% of traffic for the whole of the Website. This page provided pathways to the specified webpages for the historic, textile, print and modern art collections and also the advance search facility of the digital collections. As the Artcast project only used data from the historic, textile and print collections, the month analytics for these pages, combined with search queries about those collections, provides the basis of a comparison to page views of WAG data on the Guardian.



Page path level 1	Pageviews	Unique Pageviews	Avg. Time on Page	Bounce Rate	% Exit
	716,532 % of Total: 100.00% (716,531)	531,489 % of Total: 100.00% (531,489)	00:00:42 Avg for View: 00:00:42 (0.00%)	39.11% Avg for View: 39.11% (0.00%)	23.06% Avg for View: 23.06% (0.00%)
1. /whatson/	214,421 (29.92%)	164,623 (30.97%)	00:00:44	46.14%	25.36%
2. /collection/	169,373 (23.64%)	114,196 (21.49%)	00:00:31	39.58%	10.01%

Figure 6.7: Analytics of the WAG website from January 1st - December 31st 2011

Throughout November the historic collections on the WAG website had 1156 views, textiles were viewed 1127 times and the print collection had 451 views. The facility for the public to search the digital collections had its own landing page and this was viewed 5273 times with a bounce rate⁴⁴ of 47.37%, which means only half this number actually used the search resource. Of those, the pathway to object data in the historic, print and textile collections is unknown as this measure was not recorded. In total this online content was viewed 5760 times.

In contrast, the small amount of WAG collections data that was interpreted and contextualised on The Northerner website as a 5 day regional weather forecast received 36239 pageviews. Although this figure is striking in that it is twice the number of those who viewed the WAG's collections pages and represents a figure equivalent to 25% of the WAG's yearly online views of its collections, certain caveats to this figure should be considered; for instance, on its first day, 'artcast' was linked to the front page of the Guardian online, the highest viewed of all the Guardian pages. This fact helps explain why its first week of page views was 14,666, falling in the second week to 8059, and in the third week achieving the lowest figure of 6513 before increasing again to 7001. As well as a traffic spike stemming from the online Guardian front page promotion, a novelty factor might also explain the first week's viewing figure. That said, a slight lift in page views in the last week would also suggest potential longevity of public interest and engagement. Additional metrics which could have informed a more comprehensive picture of the way the online public were interacting with WAG data were not available, for example, the actual length of time that a visitor spent on the artcast page before returning to the search engine results page.

Without these metrics it is not possible to judge whether visitors spent enough time to read the accompanying narratives to the images. However, public comments left on the Artcast page of the online Guardian as well as social media sharing through Facebook and other associated activity on Twitter⁴⁵ do provide some additional insights. Over the month there were 18 comments; from the four examples below it can be seen that they were unrelated to one another and not conversational.

⁴⁴ The bounce rate, as the percentage of single-page sessions where the person left the collections page from the entrance page without clicking on any of the available content.

⁴⁵ See Appendix

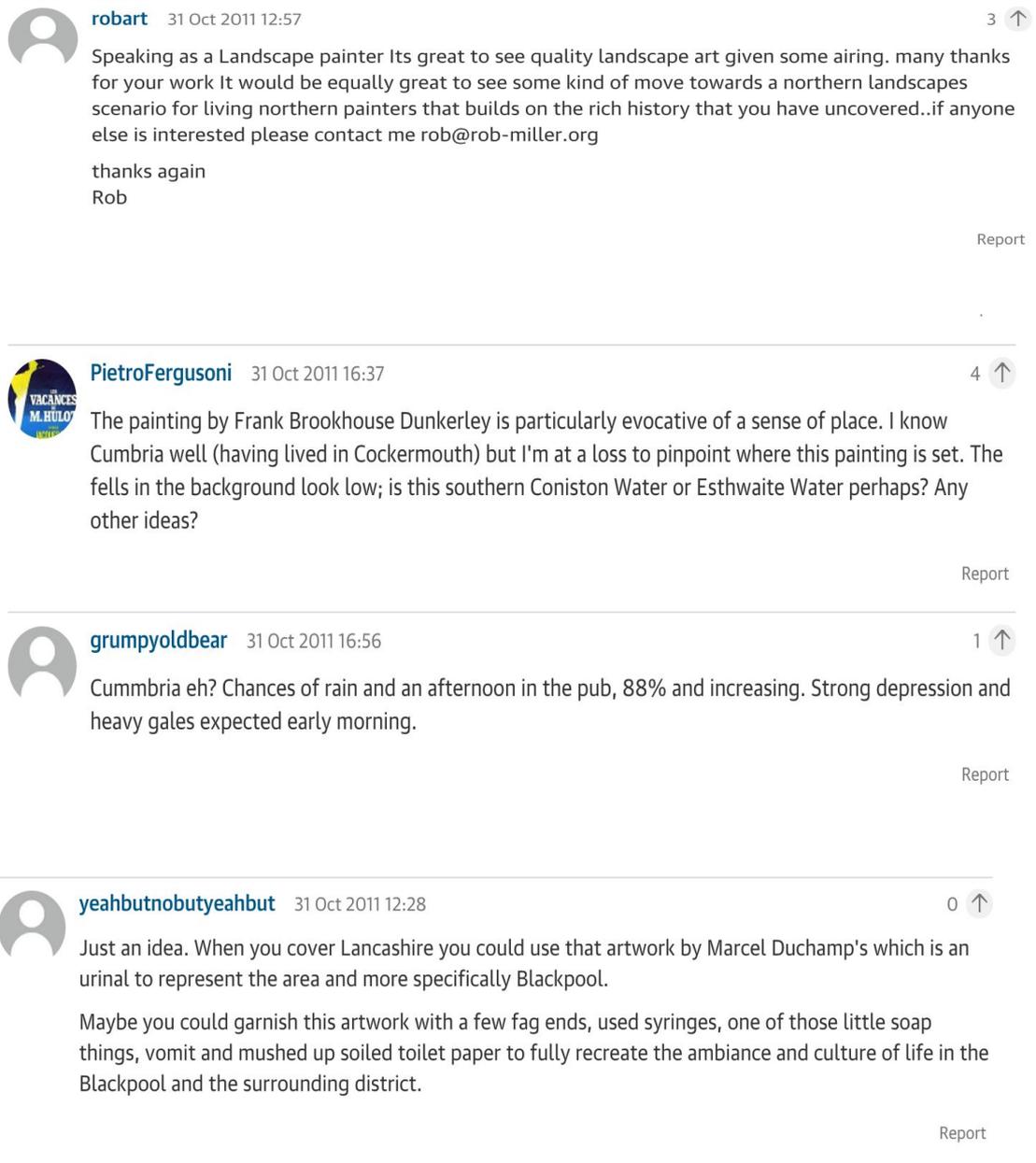


Figure 6.8: Public comments on The Guardian Northerner

However, these comments are revealing of the way location data can be significant to people's interest and engagement with art; they also expose certain attitudes about art and the North of England which are indicative of an uninhibited digital culture of commenting on news websites which, in my experience, is unusual in online gallery and museum contexts. Helen Stalker, who posted⁴⁶ about her ambition for the Artcast project on the WAG's branded blogging platform, described her hope to open dialogue about the collection, yet it is significant that none of the public participation in this project used the WAG's social media platforms. Rather the increased public awareness of the WAG's digital collections, as well as public participation by comments and social media sharing,

⁴⁶ A copy of the blog post, 'The Sky's The Limit' is in the Appendix

show this cultural data to have been public in distinctly different social spaces to the WAG online or offline.

In the final analysis, use of WAG data in non-gallery, time based, online contexts is operating in a discursive space that is unconnected to the gallery as public forum, public space or public medium as these roles become delegated to the Internet.⁴⁷ The gallery is however providing value to these online social capital networks by authenticating the data it opens into these spaces. In this interpretation, opening collections data into the same time/space as the online public contradicted the WAG as a public space or public medium by repositioning this gallery to function as transit centre, managing the intersecting semiotic projects of different online social capital networks.

6.4.3 Culture Hack and the mutability of collections data in different online contexts

Find out more about this [project to explore the Whitworth Art Gallery's collection here](#).

** The full data set from this project will also be made available to the [Culture Hack North in Leeds](#) on November 12/13.*

Figure 6.9: Opening cultural data into different contexts

The WAG data prepared for the Guardian webpages was also made available for 'Culture Hack', a digital development programme for arts and culture. This final section will discuss this smaller in scale piece of practice that the author worked on in collaboration with the MM and WAG NMO.

Hack events are products of a digital culture in which software developers come together to build digital stuff, in a 24 hour period, with the data provided to them. These are social, cultural and competitive events and in this respect represent both a distinct public culture and social space to open collections data into. Inspired by the Hack Day format cultural data was provided on pendrives and handed over to attending developers to see what they could build with it in a fixed time period. When meeting with Steve Devine, the WAG's and MM's NMO,⁴⁸ it was discovered that he had already been approached by organisers from 'Culture Hack' in Leeds (2012) and was considering in

⁴⁷ The final posting was published on The Northerner on the 21st November 2011 and presented a week of images relating to the winter weather: "In the last in this current series exploring the collections of the Whitworth Art Gallery through the lens of this week's weather forecasts, assistant curator Helen Stalker responds to readers' requests to feature the East Yorkshire coast and County Durham."

⁴⁸ There were various online and offline meetings with the New Media Officer, who was the main resource helping with this project.

what way MM collections data could also be made available.⁴⁹ Thus the lead up to this event and the Hack itself provided a further research opportunity to trace organisational and institutional limitations as well as opportunities for museums when their digital practices are informed by and address the qualities of digital culture. In this respect, the WAG and MM were to make available distinctly different types of collections data enabling assessment of their contrasting values to developers.

The small data set that was a byproduct of the Artcast weather project was made available at this Hack as mechanism to research the value of simply interpreted cultural data to developers against larger uninterpreted data. The NMO at MM was also making data available for this event, using its Ancient Worlds collections which include metadata from over 2000 egyptology objects. Also, MM's collections' data is on a completely different magnitude of scale to the WAG. MM's policy is to describe objects using scientific taxonomies as opposed to the more 'subjective' terminology found in the descriptive titles of art works. Therefore a potential impact of MM's culture of documentation is that, without the necessary interpretation, this data would be unusable to developers.

The issues the NMO faced in accessing and preparing this data necessitated him negotiating certain kinds of cultural and organisational disturbances, thus highlighting the tension between digital innovation and established organisational/workplace culture. From the NMO perspective, making data available in this format was a learning exercise to better understand how to prepare and interpret data for external parties. By attending the Hack he was able meet the developers, explain this data in more depth and discuss potential ideas with them. The Ancient World's data generated a lot of ideas and engaged the imagination of the younger participants with a catchy title: 'Pimp my tomb' was a proposed application to use this data with augmented reality software and, by doing so, place some of the ancient world's artefacts in unexpected contemporary settings. Yet, scientific language and inconsistencies in the systems of measurement used to describe the artefacts rendered it useless. A simple but important point to draw out here is about the processes for managing collections documentation, bearing in mind that this data will need to be accessible to the public but also interpretable for different publics. As things were, this public museum's processes for managing collections/data contradicted public access and use of their data.

In contrast, the simplicity of the WAG data set made it attractive to the developers to use; moreover, this re-use of the same data set that had been used in the Artcast project illustrates the mutability of collections data in different online and social contexts.

⁴⁹ Opening data for the Culture Hack event was a novel experience as neither the WAG nor MM had previously participated in cultural hacks.

It also helps make the point that the different uses of this data came about through forming relationships and working with different organisations. The process of getting data to be public in online space and time as well as in the public space of this Hack came about by being engaged in digital culture. Although its approach was informed by network theory and the social properties of online space, it was hands-on work in the sense that it was produced through cultural engagement in the same way data is produced through culture and thereby arguably more artisan and handmade than might be assumed.

Yet it is also the case that the Internet's distributed architecture allows collections to travel within networks that transcend their gallery location, placing them in wider flows of interconnected cultural, political, economic and technological ideas, agendas and resources. This distribution has meant social actors online in various locations and contexts are acting on and modifying collections and the application built with WAG data was to illustrate this point. Given a plain CSV file listing the title of a painting, it is possible to geolocate and then plot the paintings on a map, showing where they were painted (fig 6.7). Clicking the pins brings up the paintings and following a Flickr link leads to photos of landscape taken within a couple of miles of the area. The photographic choices make an interesting comparison with the painted scenes; they interpret those landscapes in context of people's direct experience. The developer of this application was interested in the way these landscapes would enter the same social space as those who are also excited by their environment and wanting to capture it. His approach had demonstrated the kind of opportunities that arise when a gallery's digital practices are informed by and address the qualities of the digital public space which requires a shift in emphasis away from gallery practices that are about producing the space of engagement to practices that open collections into social space.

Whitworth Art Gallery UK Landscape Paintings. Flickr Photos

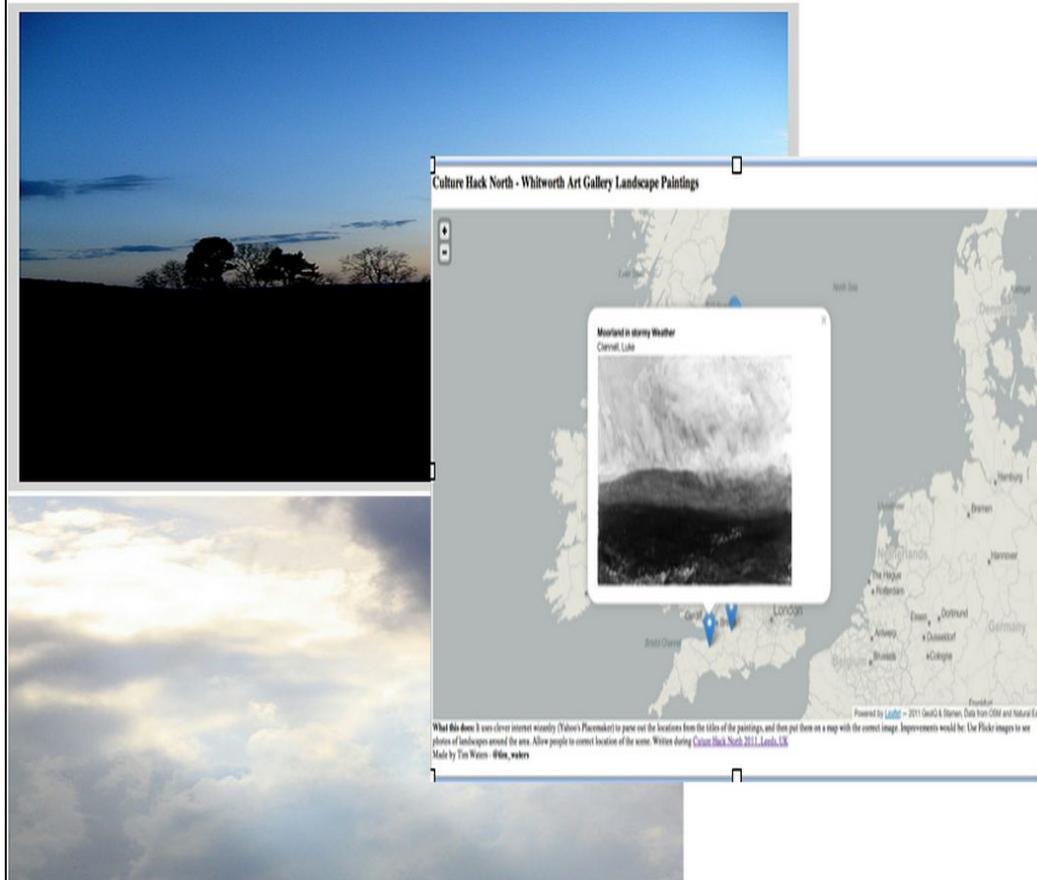


Figure 6.10: Mapping landscape paintings with Flickr

6.6 Conclusion

By tracing the way the WAG understands and practices public engagement in an institutionalised network of agencies for local governance, healthcare and education services, as well as neighbourhood groups and families, it was seen that these structures act as a bridge organising people in space and time. It follows that as, an agent of social inclusion, the WAG's practices for developing community partnerships and for the co-creation of exhibitions and other processes of co-production, are mediated through these societal structures.

However, this chapter has laid out a case that the distributed architecture of the Internet has the effect of compressing time with space, enabling group organisation and public spaces to bypass society's structures and place the individual at the centre of a network of relationships that self-organise according to the social capital displayed in online behaviour. A practice that aimed to open the WAG's digital collections into the same time and space as the online public and relative to digital culture was seen to be both

organisationally and culturally difficult due to the fact it contradicted their existing departmental organisation and symbolic representation of public access and engagement. Yet the structure of online space was seen to correspond with Bourdieu's analysis that people self-organise in space according to their social capital networks; consequently to make digital collections public in online space and time requires a practice to intersect those networks.

In the digital public space the ideals of 'open' and 'public' become redefined to be about the process of distribution, opening the flow of museum activity into social space as it is produced in real time, which is distinctly different in method to networking, interfacing and engaging publics whose organisation is mediated by societal structures. The problem identified through following this chapter's analysis is that, when digital practices of a public gallery are attuned to the ecology and spatial structure of the online public, the outcomes are misrecognised as unrelated to the gallery's core practices in social inclusivity, an effect that is a form of symbolic power holding back digital innovation. As Wacquant (1996:210) identifies, 'the capacity that systems of meaning and signification have of shielding, and thereby strengthening, relations of oppression and exploitation by hiding them under the cloak of nature, benevolence and meritocracy'. This is a significant barrier to public access to digital collections. The possible implications of this analysis is to draw attention to the risk that museum and gallery development is not corresponding with emerging concepts of public space and publicness, which would imply a loss of their social relevance. In the following final chapter conclusion will be drawn clarifying the significance, implications and limitations of this argument.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

Following an extensive review of literature showing museum development from a broadcast and mass media to a distributed and social medium (Chapter 2) and then juxtaposing this with the development and sociology of the Internet's public medium (Chapter 3), two perspectives emerged that have the appearance of being related to one another, but are in fact unconnected. From the one perspective, the museum as a social or participatory space can be compared to the way the Internet's distributed architecture democratises public space (Gere 1997, Simon 2010, Hodgson and Poulter 2012). From the other, the participatory museum emerges from the cultural turn of the 1970s, a date which pre-dates the social web as a late 1990s technology (Clifford 1997, Bennett 1998, Fyfe 2006). By juxtaposing these two perspectives, cultural, spatial and temporal distinctions are seen to exclude museums' digital practices and online resources from distributing in the digital public space. In Chapter 5 the digital practices of the Whitworth Art Gallery and the Manchester Museums and Galleries partnership were seen to map against society's institutions for organising people in time and space, such as the primary relationships embodied in families, community groups and neighbourhoods, as well as Manchester city's institutions for governance, health and education. Yet, crucially, when museums and the Internet are treated as distinct public media and juxtaposed in this way, it was revealed that they function on completely different concepts of space and time and presume different forms of social organisation in society.

For this reason, the broadly accepted assumption that museums, the Internet and social media are complementary and convergent cultural technologies is problematic. Even when online platforms encourage new ways of working and adaptation within the museum, the underlying principles of existing museum processes remain intact and residual practices continue, because they are enshrined in dominant professional and social approaches to heritage management. The rationality for the participatory museum and the nature of public space produced through the Internet's medium are, from this viewpoint, mismatched; any idea of their convergence would therefore be contradictory and require systemic change in the processes and organisational cultures of the museum. In this analysis there is an argument that cultures of museum practices, as they have emerged through the aesthetic of the participatory museum as well as the departmental organisation and workflows that support public participation, also present various organisational and institutional limitations to museums being in, and thus

participating in, the online public space. On this basis the hypothesis was formed that museums largely fail to follow and materialise their principle of social inclusion in their interaction with online publics, as a result of ignoring the complex and socially diverse social space of the Internet. This research has drawn out a cultural and historical explanation as to the reasons why museums on the Web act, albeit unconsciously, to exclude the online public. The research questions were designed to reflect this evaluation:

- What are the organisational and institutional limitations, opportunities and outcomes that arise when the museum's digital practices are informed by and address the qualities of the digital public space?
- What are the digital practices that allow museums to adapt to and address the Internet's social structure?
- In what way would museums need to reform culturally and organisationally in order to open into 'digital flows'? and
- What challenges would this reform face against established organisational structures and practices of museums?

The answers to these questions that this practice-based research tried to give are summarised and reflected upon in the following sections of the Conclusion. The practice unearthed both cultural and organisational issues; these became visible when it was found that the activity needed to open collections' metadata into digital public spaces contradicted the WAG's established cultures and processes, particularly those framed and normalised by nearly forty years of the participatory museum's re-articulation of museum space as public forum. Practically and theoretically this research activity addressed the institutional logics and organisational issues that barrier museums from being in the same time/space as the online public. Its method explicated the relationships between practice, on the one hand, and the cultural, organisational and historical contexts in which this practice occurs on the other.

The study indicates that online and offline museum practices in public engagement are recognised through particular symbolic schemes that mis-recognise the complex structure of online public space - a form of symbolic power holding back digital innovation. Misrecognition is the operation of 'symbolic power' (Bourdieu 1977) and the 'symbolic' accumulates primarily from the fulfillment of social obligations embedded and rationalised within the museums' organisational culture. Against these symbolic schemes, and following the principle of dialectics in research methods, practices that do not symbolise established values in the museum can trigger contradictions by questioning existing beliefs, destabilizing the institutionalised logics of museums so they

emerge into new forms, i.e the principle of contradiction in dialectical movement which was discussed in Chapter 4.

The opportunity for digitised museum content to be public and socially relevant in the same 'real time' capital networks structuring the online spaces of the most disenfranchised publics in some of the hardest to reach neighbourhoods, has the potential to destabilize existing digital practices and to develop them into new forms of public access. In the research practice, to have been able to open the WAG's appropriate digital collections into the same production of online space/time as that being generated by the social capital network of interest in Ricky Hatton would have classified and interpreted them for their relevance to a contemporary working class discourse. From the stance of a gallery aiming to engage publics in the more deprived neighbourhoods of a city, whose demographic classification showed them as non visitors, the social capital network and online public spaces generated by interest in Hatton were uniquely interesting as they returned the significance of class as an issue of social exclusion to the museum. Yet the research revealed symbolic, cultural and structural barriers to recognising this and similar digital practices as acts of public engagement, thus hiding contradiction in the way many museums have institutionalised their understanding of social exclusion. In this respect, established cultures of practice and departmental organisations that act to maintain certain symbolic schemes and exclude others are a cultural barrier to the online public.

The roots to this institutionalised logic are evident in the museum literature of the late 1980s and early 1990s.⁵⁰ This was a time before the current discourse on the sociology of the Internet and refers to Bourdieu's contribution that, although museums are often free to enter, this does not mitigate the fact that free entry is also optional entry. Rather, the preference or choice to visit can only be explained by the position the agent holds in social space and, for many in society it is unnatural to visit. In progressive⁵¹ museums and galleries, such as the WAG, structuring their work with the public stems from many decades of discourse triggered by Bourdieu's contribution. As we saw in Chapter 2, Fyfe (2006) goes as far as using Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' to conceptualize the museum's internalisation of a sociological imagination as a mechanism through which to overcome the public's self-exclusion. In this respect, habitus reminds us that museum professionals select and build meaningful courses of action and thereby actively contribute to determining those very social factors that motivate them.

⁵⁰ See Vergo 1989 and Merriman 1991.

⁵¹ Here 'progressive' is meant to indicate institutions that believe in reform rather than maintaining the status quo.

The way this logic frames museums' digital practices is often contradictory due to the fact that data from online user behaviour can be used to describe the Internet as an online social space. This context of understanding is often missing in current literature and discourse surrounding digital innovation in the collections management and public engagement work of museums and galleries, as argued in this thesis. However, social data would seem an obvious starting point to then consider who, why, when and for what purposes accessing the digital collections of museums can add value in different online spaces. The context of social data here is that the daily use of Web technology is closely tied to everyday life. As Castells puts it, it 'extends the reach of communication media to all domains of social life in a network that is at the same time global and local, generic and customised in an ever-changing pattern' (2007: 242).

7.2. WAG residency: limitations and reflections on a practice-based research

As detailed in chapter 4, the aim of the research was to document and analyse the contradictions that arose when I worked with WAG staff and other parties to develop practices for opening the gallery's collection into the same time/space as the online public. This allowed me to analyse how the gallery's organisational culture and professional practice impacted the research residency and vice versa. In this respect, the practice to open the WAG's collections had to find a way to fit within that organisation's established processes. This was attempted via a research residency at the WAG that included structured interviews and informal conversations with WAG staff and a number of digital engagement-related projects and initiatives, as outlined in Chapter 4 and analysed in Chapter 6. The design of the research methodology and the analysis and discussion of the data produced was facilitated by the use of CHAT. CHAT, as argued in Chapter 4, was a theoretical and methodological approach particularly geared towards identifying and unpacking the emergence of contradictions and, where possible or relevant, the process or limitation of the contradictions' resolutions.

Reflecting on the residency and the use of CHAT, it is important to identify the limitations of this research. First of all, the particular arrangements of my residency (i.e. dipping in and out over a period of six years) presented several challenges; both for the research design and progress and for my role in the organisational structure of WAG. The length and irregularity of my in-residence activity meant I never really became part of the WAG team and I was never perceived as such. Even more, my role as a researcher-in-residence was more often than not unrecognised by most WAG staff. Although this liminal state of my residency was also positive as it helped to avoid being fully embedded, if not absorbed, in WAG's organisational culture; nevertheless, it led to delays and, in some cases, confusion, if not tension with WAG staff, who were not

always clear about my capacity, the aims and scope of my research and how all these were relevant to them. On reflection, it might have been useful if I participated more actively in WAG's institutional life and contributed to aspects of WAG's work that might not relate directly to the aims of my research. This might have offered more opportunities to explain to WAG staff my research and role in the institution. Also, it would have been useful to pursue more opportunities to brief and report back to WAG about the progress and, indeed, the outputs, outcomes and results of the research. Although the WAG staff I worked closely with in the development of the digital engagement activities had a good overview of these, a more active reporting process to WAG would have led to a more organic feeding of those outcomes throughout the residency. As it happens, most of them will find out about the results and arguments of my research in their institution by (hopefully!) reading this thesis.⁵²

On the other hand, I do not consider the non-materialisation of some of the digital engagement projects (such as the M60 and Manchester Evening News initiatives) as limitations or problems of my research. From the outset, the aim of the residency and its activities was not to produce 'successful' digital engagement projects, but study any contradictions arising during the process of trying to set them up. In other words, the process was more important than the outcome of those projects. This also explains why this research did not attempt a more traditional evaluation of the outcomes, reach and benefits of these projects; this was never the aim, nor was important in the context of this thesis and its scope. If anything, the projects that did not materialise offered perhaps more to the development and arguments of this thesis than, say, the Artcast project that did materialise: firstly, because they allowed me to trace the contradictions that emerged during them; and secondly, because in the context of action research they led to consequent actions and new projects, namely efforts to bring resolutions to the arising contradictions. That said, I should acknowledge that specific events and results, such as the SMC's Hatton proposal not getting funding or the fact that WAG exhibitions did not reflect the interests of M60 or Manchester Evening News in the context of the projects were discussing did have implications for this research: firstly, they led to delays in the research residency and secondly they raised expectations among WAG and external partners, which were not met. As a result, those discontinued collaborations, although not specifically damaging for the PhD research itself, may have impacted negatively on WAG's external network building and sustainability (though I do not have evidence of such outcomes).

⁵² That said, I am currently discussing with WAG additional ways to disseminate and share my research outcomes with staff and other stakeholders of the Gallery.

7.3. Contribution of this research: online social exclusion, hidden contradictions and the institutional mediation of digital practices

This research has contributed to literature in museum studies, digital heritage and social sciences that is concerned with issues to do with social exclusion and social responsibility in the digitally produced public space, as well as understanding the cultural and organisational barriers to fully participating in the space we all contribute to by being online. Furthermore, it offers the professional museum sector a localised study of contradictions between their established cultures of practice and the nature of organisational reform needed to open museums to the digital public; and a close reading and examination of the structural constraints and symbolic schemes that barrier museums from online publics that can inform how museums' develop the relevance of their digital practices to their public mission.

This research differs from existing analysis of the institutionalised logics which underlie museums' digital practices by offering a complex understanding of the social structure of online public space against which to evaluate museum processes. Scrutinising the digital practices of museums from the perspective of when and who is involved in producing online public space has meant that the cultural parameters and protocols of the online public's organisation and language provided the benchmark against which museums' digital practices were evaluated for their social relevance, reach, visibility and accessibility. This evaluation was critical of a prevailing logic in the museum sector to resource websites and mobile applications that assumes museums on the Web are a destination or space of engagement; instead, it promotes developing the online principles of openness, distribution or travel into clearly defined and established communications spaces produced, in real time, by the online public.

Examining this notion of digital openness and engagement with online public spaces, including those emerging from ubiquitous mobile computing, contributes to developing an understanding of social inclusion and exclusion relating to the Internet's structure as social space. From the perspective of this structure it was evident which online publics and networked spaces exclude museums on the Web. Also, the nature of digital practices needed to open in the same time/space as the online public become apparent.

The thesis made also an innovative contribution to practice-based research in arts and humanities, especially in museum studies and arts management. This was achieved not only by the development of a research residency as the context of a practice-based research, but also by the use of the notion and theory of 'contradiction' and Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as the methodological framework of this residency.

The application of those theoretical and methodological concepts have allowed me to develop a piece of research that was both specific and, to an extent, generalisable: drawing on CHAT allowed me to trace the emergence and resolutions of contradictions in digital engagement practices within the parameters of the institutional policies and realities of WAG (and its network of partner organisations); this provided specificity and depth in the analysis of these contradictions. But, by relating those local contradictions to broader policy realities and related histories, debates and examples of practice in museums, it is arguable that the answers to the thesis' research questions are not only relevant to WAG but the museum sector more broadly. The issues that this thesis identified and unpacked with regards to museums' understanding of online public space and online publics are not unique to WAG, but endemic to the sector as a whole, as I have tried to argue in this thesis. The research residency in WAG gave this thesis the opportunity to make this visible. Finally, this study has also shown the potential applicability of CHAT and 'contradiction' as methodological tools in analysing institutional life and organisational practice in the arts and heritage sectors. Through a detailed description, justification and analysis of the mechanics of this methodology, I hope that I have been able to offers other researchers a case study on how CHAT can be practically used and applied to design and analyse a piece of research (practice-based or otherwise).

7.4 Re-thinking digital engagement: Bourdieu as both bridge and barrier to online publics

Bourdieu's influential, and now institutionalised, theory of social exclusion was modeled on a concept of space based on data from individuals who were geographically distributed throughout France. His model traces space as a structure made up of relative socio-cultural distances between different classes of people. Space is the degree of difference between us and others, somewhere where there cannot be empty space because space cannot exist other than in relation to, and between, the things that are in it. This layout of space is one in which the distance between classifications of people is self-determined by the different volumes of economic, social and cultural capital they are able to accumulate, as well as by the relative weightings in the overall capital holdings of their classification (Bennett 2006). On using geographical distance as a metaphor for social space, Bourdieu (1984: 271) writes:

 this idea of difference, or a gap is at the basis of the very notion of space, that is, a set of distinct and coexisting positions which are exterior to one another and which are defined in relation to one-another through their mutual exteriority and their relations of proximity, vicinity or distance, as well as through relations of order, such as above below and between.

He goes on to explain that the experience of the particular cultural condition that characterizes a given location in social space imprints a particular set of dispositions upon the individual. It symbolises the way social order is culturally inscribed as a 'sense of one's place' and from his idea we can conceptualize the relation between self-perception and social organisation. Accordingly, our individual sense of place in society is coded in our tastes and dispositions. He argues that the cohesion of 'social space' is a balancing of different perspectives, which requires the different groups to be self-aware of their relative positions to one another, i.e the protocols that keep the structure of space stable.

However, Bourdieu was particular to emphasise that he was not describing the 'real' world in which social groups are bound by the particular characteristics of their location; although as we have seen, the way museums understand social exclusion is inherently forged on identifying and segmenting communities within the local structures and spaces of their neighbourhoods. There is seemingly an inherent misunderstanding in the way museums' have interpreted Bourdieu's theory of social exclusion in their programmes for public engagement. He goes to some pains to clarify that fact (Bourdieu 1989: 17)

The misunderstanding that the analyses proposed particularly in *Distinction* elicit are thus due to the fact that classes on paper are liable to being apprehended as real groups. This realist (mis)reading is objectively encouraged by the fact that social space is so constructed that agents who occupy similar or neighboring positions are placed in similar conditions and subjected to similar conditionings, and therefore have every chance of having similar dispositions and interests, and thus of producing practices that are themselves similar. The dispositions acquired in the position occupied imply an adjustment to this position, what Goffman calls the "sense of one's place".

The issue here is that these real publics, which MM, the WAG and other museums work hard to engage, have no place in Bourdieu's structure of social space. As place-based institutions with a local public remit, the way museums understand social exclusion is inherently forged on identifying and segmenting communities according to their physical location in time and space.

Ever since the Museum Act of 1845 gave town councils of larger municipal boroughs the power to establish museums, the museums' relevance to the governance of the local population has rationalised their existence. In Chapters 4 and 5 the network of institutionalised relations structuring the WAG in the same time and space as Manchester's institutions for organising people in the neighbourhoods close to the

gallery illustrated how their organisation in society is biased to a particular concept of space. It was also the case that, in nearly all the discussions with museum professionals, any rationale for additional staff or financial resource for digital projects needed to be justified by demonstrating their relevance to the museum's local population, schools and neighbourhoods.

Although both established and recent literature⁵³ show sustained and progressive engagement with Bourdieu's social theorisation of social exclusion to museums, a gap in this discourse is its application to the realm of the Internet. This gap is significant as Bourdieu's (1984) model of social space is far closer in theory as an explanation of the way networked space acts as a communications space than its more common application to real place-based communities. Deeply fractured with a great deal of cultural diversity differentiating the many distinct clusters of people and networks found online, this complex space is challenging to the notion of the inclusive online museum.

In this context, the research practice at WAG was informed on the way comparisons can be drawn between Castells' theorisation of networked space and the way Bourdieu (1984) mapped the structure of social space. According to Castells, the specifics of networked space relate to the way social actors use technology relative to their own histories, objectives and abilities. Put simply, he notes 'there is no theory of space that is not an integral part of a general social theory' (Castells 1996 cited in Stalder 206:142).

In this respect, it is crystal clear that the social patterns Bourdieu mapped through distributed lifestyle data, showing us that people unknown to one another could be categorised in relation to each other due to similarities in their taste and dispositions, came close to modeling the social structure of online public space. The distributed architecture of the Internet means the social and group organisation of individual actors bypasses society's structures for organising people in time and space, such as the family or neighbourhood group, and instead produces Castell's notion of the networked individualism or Shirky's (2008) notion of 'The Power of Organizing Without Organizations'. However, as this research has argued, there is a mis-match or contradiction between the museums' institutionalisation of Bourdieu's sociology and the way his theory of social space shows museums' digital practices to be excluding the online public.

As things stand, the structure of online space and the way this network of social distances and diverse temporalities can be read to reveal those online publics most excluded from the digital practices and Web resources of museums is largely missing in

⁵³ See Merriman 1991, Prior 2006, Barrett 2011

the discourse of museums on the Web. That said, the existence of this thesis alongside other literature⁵⁴ which is questioning the effectiveness of museum practices in engaging social media spaces, or criticising the findability of digital collections online, indicates the beginnings of a critical discourse in the digital practices of museums. Moreover, this research practice has generated evidence that the seeds of museums reforming their digital practices are sector-wide. For example, in-depth discussions with museum professionals revealed ongoing experimentation, with museums using their digital collections to respond online to real time events trending on social media. However, it should also be noted that these were sideline projects and there was confusion about the value of such practices.

This research would suggest it is only by first establishing within the museum sector's institutionalised logic an understanding of the social/temporal complexity of online space and the issues of social exclusion this presents that museum processes will begin to evolve to resolve these issues.

7.5 Avenues for further research

In order to model an approach to digital engagement this thesis has argued the case for breaking away from the assumption that museums and the Internet can converge as public media and instead draws attention to the cultural differences that separate them. In this section, avenues for further research are discussed in context of the way the research practice, and the nature of online space/time compression, combined with moving bodies and mobile technologies, produced various contradictions, questions and challenges for the 'public' museum. The broad issue addressed here is that online public space can remain stable although the different actors producing this space might be mobile, meaning social awareness and behaviour can be in cyberspace even though bodies are in a different public place.

A consequence of mobile technologies is that the socio-physical context of our immediate material environment cannot be taken for granted in our online and social interactions. This is the point that Wellman makes by drawing attention to the issue that, when people talk loudly on their mobile phones in public they are not being anti-social: the very fact of their conversation means they are socially connected. Rather, people's awareness and behaviour are in private cyberspace even though their bodies are in a different public space (2002). In the production of online space, physical surroundings

⁵⁴ See chapter 2 (Mimas 2013, Finis *et al* 2012, Kidd 2011, Russo and Peacock 2009, Cameron 2003)

must be described rather than assumed as people have uncertain knowledge about the immediate whereabouts and social contexts of their mobile network members.

Any connection between space and place is, in this analysis, collapsed due to fact that the bodies of the different individuals whose online actions produce, in real time, their social space are likely to be mobile and in various distributed locations. Incidentally, a social space made up of distributed bodies interlinked into a coherent structure by individual holdings of social capital is Bourdieu's model of space; as such it reflects a set of particular challenges to the notion of the online inclusive museum. These issues became apparent through the research activity and its efforts to open the WAG data into the same time/space as the online public. For instance, discussions with local news media about using collection's data for enriching their conversations and interactions in social media space exposed certain contradictions between the WAG as public space and the online public space. In this context, the editors insisted that any images and texts they used from the data made available to them would refer to real objects exhibited in the public spaces of Gallery. The social media communications spaces that these news media interacted with were real time and hyper-local to Manchester, meaning they stemmed from a shared disposition or interest in the city and its neighbourhoods.

For the editors, the simple fact that the WAG and MM is a material visible assets of the city and physically close to the mobile bodies producing the online communication spaces, to open WAG data into same time/space as this online public could easily transcend the walls of the gallery. Dismissed is any distinction between gallery space and the online space as there is only the online public. At the time of these discussions, any exhibition of the physical collections that was responsive to the social, temporal and spatial contexts of online public spaces was deemed to be difficult as the WAG's cultures and processes for collections management were based on a different temporality.

In this context, avenues for further research would continue to develop Bourdieu's model of social space for its relevance to understanding social exclusion to museum online resources but expand this analysis to be inclusive of the way online public space transcends the boundaries of the museum building. Moreover, this research would examine digital practices that open into the same time/space as the online public that are local to those neighbourhoods museums are funded to engage. In this respect, further research could begin to investigate the properties of digitally produced space for their relevance to public policy and for public engagement.

7.6. Conclusion

The Internet is fundamentally comprised of flesh and blood, millions of people with varying degrees of technological sophistication, of different ethnicities, with a variety of beliefs and values, who are users of the Internet. It is through the complex interrelations among the assorted human actors and the machines by which they are interlinked that the Internet self-organises. (Granic & Lamey 2000 *cited in Fuchs 2003: 63*)

This distinction between museums on the Web and the online public follows Castells' (2007) argument that the twin processes of globalisation and the rise of online communal identities challenge the boundaries of the public state, or the museum, as the relevant unit with which to define a public space. As society is organised in space and time and networked computer usage has resulted in real-time globalisation of social relationships, this technology changes the structure of public space, enabling the way museums work with the public to be re-imagined. Just consider the way the globally available information on the Internet is embedded into local cultural contexts and shared within localised networks of social capital.

The way this cultural shift can be used to model museum programmes for digital engagement was illustrated through the example of the Manchester boxer Ricky Hatton opening up a social media or communications space that was local to Manchester but, as Hatton was fighting in the States, existed in a North American time zone. This communications space fits Ronalds Robertson's (1992) notion of 'glocalization' but also makes Castells' broader point that, in the industrial society, public space was built around the institutions of the nation-state like the museum that, under the pressure of democratic movements and class struggle, constructed an institutional public space. This space was based on the articulation between a democratic political system and a civil society connected to the state, whereas digital communications flows produce a public sphere detached from the institutions of nation state.

Apply Castells' thought to the museum's assumed function as a public space and it brings into question its relevance as a spatial technology when the space of digital communication flows now serves that public purpose. Yet, the continual positioning of the museum, on and offline, as a technology of space would explain a cultural divide between museums on the Web and the online public. This leads to the conclusion that the museums' organisational history and symbolism as a public space is blind to the social patterns people generate using social and mobile technologies and therefore excludes those online publics. Such exclusion contradicts the museums' public remit and democratic ethic and thus becomes an argument for museums to adopt a novel

concept of online space and time. In the end, this thesis puts forward the argument that in order for museums to engage with the publics online, they need to abandon their current approach as 'publics online' and rethink and reimagine them as 'online publics'.

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Appendix

1. Personal communication

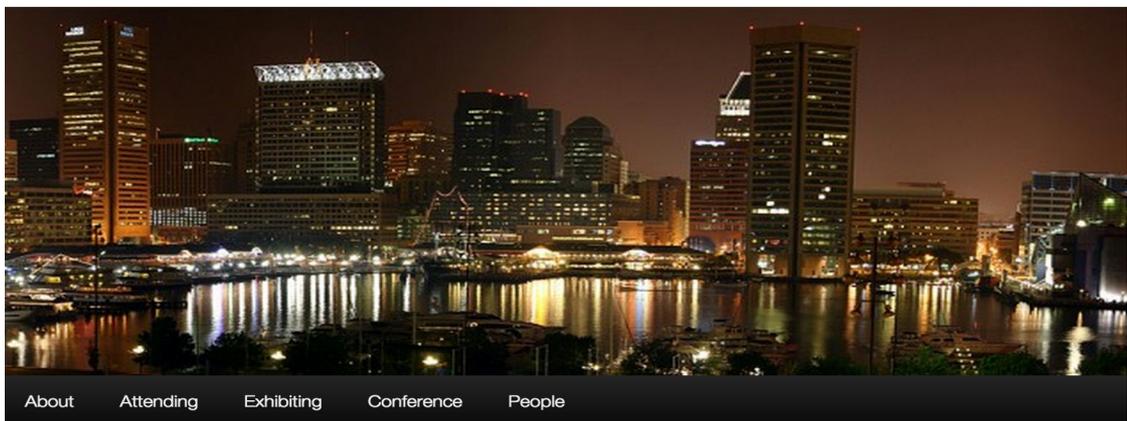
- Skype conversation with Esme Ward, head of learning and engagement at Whitworth Art Gallery and Manchester Museum July 2015

2. Research as practice

- Professional forum MW2014

MW2014: Museums and the Web 2014

The annual conference of Museums and the Web | April 2-5, 2014 | Baltimore, MD, USA



Disrupting the distributed museum: coping with cultural and organisational tensions when opening collections data for public engagement.

[Steve Devine](#), The Manchester Museum / The Whitworth Art Gallery, UK , [Julian Hartley](#), Centre for Museology, U K

[Steve Devine](#), The Manchester Museum / The Whitworth Art Gallery, UK , [Julian Hartley](#), Centre for Museology, U K

Drawing on practical experience from opening and working with collections data for public engagement, this Professional Forum explores why 'digital cultures' are often neglected in museum programs for social inclusion.

The session will trace the organisational and cultural challenges our work at Manchester Museum and Whitworth Art Gallery brought to bear, identifying institutional tensions that needed to be overcome and why digital cultures remain a difficult and often excluded or misunderstood audience in regard to museum programmes.

- **Comments on Mapping Creativity project**

As a young person (20), i often feel that museums as public spaces are heavily centred around the interests of the old and wealthy, who have a rarified set of tastes and expectations that established physical museums like the tate and the v and a successfully pander to. the internet, conversely has revolutionised the control and flow of information and ideas for my generation. i manage my life and connect with different and diverse people through facebook, never have to pay for music because of downloading and have just seen the power of the internet in mobilising my generation to help to elect barack obama as president of the usa. the influence of the net is clearly indisputable and here to stay and this idea seems to make full use of the technological changes that have changed all of our lives and will continue to do so. i think that the art world should utilise the net in order to reach out to majority of people that feel totally disengaged from art world and through these communites can take collective ownership over creativity instead of being at the whim of what nicholas serota wants to put

on or who saatchi is prepared to spend millions on. it seems to me that this idea, which seems quite egalitarian and democratic, would be a massive step forward in connecting people to the art world. ideas, like this one, that seem to help to create social capital can only be welcomed in these apathetic and financially unstable times. finally, i believe this idea would be for the benefit not just of manchester and salford but, because of the global reach of the internet, the entire world

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-
- [Login](#) or [register](#) to post comments



Tony (1 week ago)

The point we're trying to make is that museums are great places to visit. By experiencing the physical nature of something we understand it better. I agree with Giovanna about the community thing. If this proposal relies on like-minded people to contribute it will probable end up being clusters of disparate groups not necessarily connected, which I sure isn't the aim of the brief. Also with regard to the community aspect, the whole point and benefit of cultural interaction is that it has to be "real". You say that the fact you don't know the sex, age or creed of someone will create conversations that would not exist normally. I don't think this is a good thing. Meeting people from different cultures and demographic backgrounds is the most effective way to connect people.

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Julian Tait (4 weeks ago)

I agree Tony at first glance this project idea doesn't seem to match the Mapping Creativity brief. I think what it does do though is create a space for creativity that hadn't originally existed. Hopefully by allowing people to casually interact with content through personal sharing and distribution opportunities for creativity will be encouraged and enhanced. In this way I think that the project will not only Map Creativity, in providing the framework for interaction across multiple channels, but also provide the environment for new forms of creativity.

There is a pan-european project between libraries and museums under-development at the moment <http://dev.europeana.eu/home.php> Cultural Institutions are starting to understand the concept of archive, sharing and the creation of spaces for creativity. Hopefully Community as Curator can link into this.

People need to be able to do social stuff like comment, rate, reference, blog about, embed and mash-up the materials. That's re-use. It requires interoperability.

Herbert Van de Sompel, Los Alamos National Laboratory, USA.
European digital library conference, Frankfurt, January 2008

- [Login](#) or [register](#) to post comments



Julian Hartley (1 month ago)

@Tony, The point of this is the user's serendipitous exposure to museum collections. That the online user makes the exploration through their everyday search and share activity. They don't need to know anything about museums or even have an interest in them - their participation in community activity does the curating. Hope that clears it up a bit.

- [Login](#) or [register](#) to post comments

- Comments and votes for Artcast

Artcast poll: Vote for your choice of final location

The final post of this series exploring the collection of the Whitworth Art Gallery through the lense of the region's weather will be selection by users

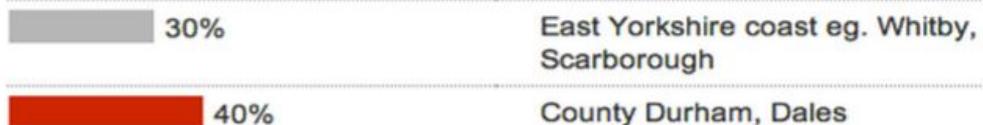


A Woman Seated Above the Sea at Whitley, Northumberland 1871 by Alfred W. Cooper (1850 - 1901). Pencil and watercolour. Photograph: Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester/guardian.co.uk

The artcast series has been running since the start of November. As it draws to a close we're asking readers of the Northern blog to chose the location which will be featured in next week's final posting.

** Find out more about this project to explore the Whitworth Art Gallery's collection [here](#).*

Which location should the final artcast feature?



Public sphere... Educating Rit... Gmail - Inbox... Google Docs...

twitter **artcast whitworth** Home Profile Messages

 **DimensionsCC** Elaine Sutton
 Education News: Five day **artcast**: Manchester for Nov 7 – 11
bit.ly/rDGUjj
 7 Nov

 **EducationPR** M&M Communications
 Five day **artcast**: Manchester for Nov 7 – 11: In the second of this series looking at the weather for the region ... bit.ly/vrKe0T
 7 Nov

 **ILoveArt7340** ILove Art
 Five day **artcast**: Manchester for Nov 7 – 11 j.mp/sSOSj8
 7 Nov

 **sarahgalligan** sarah galligan
 Five day **artcast**: Manchester for Nov 7 – 11. Cute - and inspired to put together a 5-day poetrycast: gu.com/p/337xk/tw via @guardian
 7 Nov

 **allpoints_north** All Points North
 RT @mswainwright: Five day **artcast**: Manchester for Nov 7 – 11 gu.com/p/337xk/tw via @guardian << #artnorth
 7 Nov

 **Make_K12** School Projects
 Five day **artcast**: Manchester for Nov 7 – 11: In the second of this series looking at the weather for ... bit.ly/rDGUjj #education
 7 Nov

 **kharinchafal** Russy Kharlmaswari
 Five day **artcast**: Manchester for Nov 7 – 11 #education
bit.ly/vqiHFD
 7 Nov

 **segalarupa** Amir Sidharta
 #R2D2 : Five day **artcast**: Manchester for Nov 7 – 11 - In the second of this series looking at the weather for the re...



@janetedavis

Janet E Davis

Five day artcast: Northumberland for Nov 14 - 18 gu.com/p/33bhh/tw via @guardian
#CHN11 (Love the Howard w/colour)

14 Nov via Tweet Button ☆ Favorite ↻ Retweet ↩ Reply