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*Book chapter: Connecting Museums*

**Chapter title: The changing shape of museums in an increasingly digital world**

Dr Oonagh Murphy

In less than two decades web 2.0 technologies have triggered a paradigm shift within museums, and seen visitors become active participants, rather than passive observers. Web 2.0 technologies, and the wider digital culture it has spawned has not only changed how we communicate museum practice, but also museum practice itself. These technologies have catalysed the development and implementation of an eclectic range of new modes of museum practice from social media to 3D Printing, to museums opening their own incubator hubs for new creative businesses. Whilst these changes may seem rapid and revolutionary, this chapter argues that the museum is a robust, reflective and adaptive institution, a flowing river rather than stagnant lake. The core function of museums has always been to collect and care for objects, but the ethos underpinning that has evolved from the original cabinets of curiosities, 'look don't touch' mentality, to one of education, public engagement and entertainment.

### **Communicate or die**

In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, John Cotton Dana, a revolutionary museum thinker and founding director of Newark Museum, wrote about similar challenges to those currently facing museums today. Cotton Dana introduced the concept of the 'useful' museum, which he defined as 'The Kind of Museum it will profit a City to maintain'.<sup>1</sup> In his self-published book he argued that museums should not collect objects for rarity and prestige but instead that museums should collect objects based on the relevance to their local community. His four point strategy, which is instrumentalist in nature and founded on the ideals of enlightenment, suggests:

1. Making the city known to itself, and especially to its young people;
2. Presenting one of the City's activities in an attractive, interesting and advertising manner to non-residents;

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<sup>1</sup> John Cotton Dana, *A Plan for a New Museum, the Kind of Museum It Will Profit a City to Maintain* (The Elm tree press, 1920), <http://archive.org/details/aplanforanewmus00danagoog>.

3. Encouraging improvements in manufacturing methods; and,
4. Presenting a modern industry in a comprehensive and enlightening manner to pupils in schools.<sup>2</sup>

Rather than rewriting the concept of a museum, he reflects upon the need to innovate within the existing, and accepted social understanding of the museum concept. He argued 'The traditional conception of a museum is very deeply set in the minds of our people rich and poor, ignorant and cultivated'.<sup>3</sup> In order to gain support from citizens he felt he had to use certain established practices, from creating a grand entrance to having impressive objects in the reception hall. However he also believed that once visitors had crossed the entry threshold they would be more tolerant of the unexpected.

Schubert argues that we can trace the movement of visitors from the periphery to the core of museum practice from the French Revolution to the present day.<sup>4</sup> In stating 'objects do not make a "museum;" they merely form a "collection",<sup>5</sup> Schubert suggests that people breathe life into museums, without people these collections are merely inanimate objects not a museum collection. Rather than a stagnant institution that fears change, Schubert paints a picture of museums as adaptive, agile and socially relevant institutions. Whilst the core purpose of museums (collecting objects), has remained unchanged he notes that museum practice has altered in parallel to the social, political and economic conditions in which museums sit. Whilst recognising the importance of international standards and partnerships Schubert notes a contemporary move towards individual museums, and regional museum sectors developing 'their own answers to particular cultural, national, political and economic circumstances'.<sup>6</sup> Change is at the centre of Schubert's account of the history of museum practice, and whilst recognising that the future relevance of museums is uncertain, he asserts with confidence that

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<sup>2</sup> John Cotton Dana, 24.

<sup>3</sup> John Cotton Dana, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Karsten Schubert, *The Curator's Egg: The Evolution of the Museum Concept from the French Revolution to the Present Day*, 3. ed (London: Ridinghouse, 2009), 66.

<sup>5</sup> John Cotton Dana, *A Plan for a New Museum, the Kind of Museum It Will Profit a City to Maintain*, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Schubert, *The Curator's Egg*, 66.

'whatever the future holds, the museum remains an exceptionally adaptable cultural construct both deeply vulnerable to outside interference yet of awesome robustness'.<sup>7</sup>

In the UK in the 1980s the Conservative government, led by Margaret Thatcher, shook museum practice to its very core.<sup>8</sup> Rather than recognising the intangible value of museums as educational institutions the Thatcher government sought to exploit the museum sector's ability to generate revenue, through ticket sales. During this time governments '(national, regional, local) began to adopt an economic rationalist approach in relation to museum funding'.<sup>9</sup> Whilst the language may have changed, we still see evidence of this approach with debates and research now focussed on 'cultural value'.<sup>10</sup> As governments strive to measure the economic impact of funding, cultural organisations are seeking to fight back with the development of new metrics, whilst the age-old question of 'what is culture?' remains unanswered. In the 2010 *Measuring the Value of Culture* report, O'Brien seeks to link the academic pursuit of defining culture (from elite to popular) with metrics that government can use to assess the value of culture; and the impact of funding.<sup>11</sup> This report looks at value metrics from other sectors such as healthcare, and concludes by suggesting that DCMS should seek to create value guidelines as a means to streamline the currently ad hoc approach taken by cultural organisations. O'Brien recommends that DCMS take an economic rationalist approach in line with the wider government Green Book, *How to appraise proposals before committing funds to a policy, programme or project*.<sup>12</sup> In essence we see DCMS exploring the

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<sup>7</sup> Schubert, 153.

<sup>8</sup> Nobuko Kawashima, *Museum Management in a Time of Change: Impacts of Cultural Policy on Museums in Britain, 1979-1997*, vol. Working paper / Centre for the Study of Cultural Policy, School of Theatre Studies, University of Warwick ([Coventry]: Centre for the Study of Cultural Policy, School of Theatre Studies, University of Warwick, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Roy Ballantyne and David Uzzell, 'Looking Back and Looking Forward: The Rise of the Visitor-Centered Museum: The Visitor-Centered Museum', *Curator: The Museum Journal* 54, no. 1 (January 2011): 85–92, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2151-6952.2010.00071.x>.

<sup>10</sup> See for example: 'The #culturalvalue Initiative', The #culturalvalue Initiative, accessed 30 July 2018, <http://culturalvalueinitiative.org>.

<sup>11</sup> Dr Dave O'Brien, 'Measuring the Value of Culture: A Report to the Department for Culture Media and Sport' (DCMS, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> 'The Green Book: Central Government Guidance on Appraisal and Evaluation' (HM Treasury, 2018).

language, metrics and rationale of National Health Service Funding with a view to developing policies that will place museums and cultural organisations under increasing pressure to demonstrate their economic and cultural value in order to sustain funding. People not objects are central to this emerging model of cultural value. From the Happy Museum Project<sup>13</sup> to social inclusion,<sup>14</sup> value is determined by visitor engagement not rarity and prestige of collections.

The increasing centrality of visitors to museum practice is a recurring theme across much literature on contemporary museum practice. In *Museums and Their Visitors* Hooper-Greenhill notes how in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century museums moved away from the model of a museum as 'static storehouses for artefacts into active learning environments for people'.<sup>15</sup> For Hooper-Greenhill this move towards a more visitor centric approach was driven by political and social agendas in the 1990s, she argues that political pressure on museums to demonstrate a social purpose influenced museum practice. Competing with other commercial leisure providers, museums were faced with a potentially fatal challenge 'communicate or die'.<sup>16</sup> Whilst competing with other leisure providers, museums needed to safeguard their status as unique and valuable cultural institutions, competing with, but distinct from theme parks and shopping centres. Hooper-Greenhill frames this as a challenge to communicate the museum sectors unique, social, relevant, engaging and experiential offer to visitors in order to sustain funding and increase visitor numbers.

The challenge for museums today, is similar to that faced by Cotton Dana in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, namely the need to create a contemporarily relevant museum experience within the parameters of the socially accepted understanding of what a museum is. Rather than placing this in an academic debate on museology, Roy Clare, former Director of Auckland War Memorial Museum in New Zealand positions this challenge within a business context, focussing on the need for

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<sup>13</sup> 'Home', Happy Museum Project, accessed 30 July 2018, <http://happymuseumproject.org/>.

<sup>14</sup> 'Valuing Diversity: The Case for Inclusive Museums' (Museums Association, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Their Visitors* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1994), 1.

<sup>16</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, 34.

museums to embrace new technologies, and celebrate their unique selling points, Clare states:

As in most things in life, balance is everything. Museums need to act like museums – retaining their authority as museums – and take care to avoid the ultimately futile tail-chase involved in trying to copy Disney. Audiences are in any case a discerning and prevailing presence; they can tell the difference and they can express their views through the marketplace. So museums need to be business-like, but they are not conventional businesses, except to the extent that they need to be sensitive to their markets.<sup>17</sup>

The shift towards visitor focused practice is perhaps best exemplified by the changing tone in which museum visitors are greeted upon their arrival at a museum. In the 1800s visitors to the British Museum had to apply to visit, with visitation limited to the upper classes, indeed once permitted to attend visitors were met with stern and formal security. It is important to note that many of the same processes involved in entering a museum in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century from buying a ticket to passing through security and bag searches, are still evident in many large museums from the V&A (London) to MoMA (New York) today. What is different is the physical infrastructure that facilitates these processes. Now, reception desks, signage and information leaflets have evolved to create a more visitor focused and friendly first impression. More than, simply 'welcoming visitors in', the contemporary museum is increasingly striving to take account of diverse visitor needs.

### **Communicating (not dying)**

It is useful to link Hooper-Greenhill's 'communicate or die' challenge back to the work of Ballantyne and Uzzell<sup>18</sup> on the economic rationalist approach of the Thatcher era. During this time, the government began to demand that museums communicate their economic and social value in order to sustain funding, the need

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<sup>17</sup> Roy Clare, 'Museum Movement - From Keepers to Sharers: Evolution or Revolution?', *Museum-ID* (blog), 15 November 2017, <http://museum-id.com/museum-movement-from-keepers-to-sharers-evolution-or-revolution-by-roy-clare/>.

<sup>18</sup> Ballantyne and Uzzell, 'Looking Back and Looking Forward'.

to communicate 'value' is a challenge still faced by museums to this day.<sup>19</sup> The work of Schubert,<sup>20</sup> Ballantyne and Uzzell,<sup>21</sup> and Hooper-Greenhill<sup>22</sup> suggests that museums may be more agile than they are sometimes given credit for. Sandell examines this agility in *Social Inclusion: The Museum and the Dynamics of Sectoral Change*, and notes that:

...much of the museum studies literature from the last decades is based upon the assumption that museums are now operating within a turbulent and rapidly changing environment, requiring new approaches to their management, new sources of funding and new and evolving working practices.<sup>23</sup>

Rather than stagnant institutions, slow to change, and conservative in nature, available literature shows that museums are agile and responsive, and at times they act as a mirror to government policy agendas, agendas which can quickly shift the parameters of museum practice. Whilst policy agendas can shape museum practice in a fleeting and short-term manner, museum collections provide us with a tangible demonstration of the impact of cultural, social and political thinking on the museum concept over time. For example imperialist collection policies that brought treasures of the world to the British Museum (London),<sup>24</sup> or the Tate (England) collection, which was bequest to the nation from profits gained from the slave trade. More contemporary examples are the repatriation of human remains,<sup>25</sup> increased

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<sup>19</sup> For context on the creation of a value framework for museums see: : Mark L. Weinberg and Marsha S. Lewis, 'The Public Value Approach to Strategic Management', *Museum Management and Curatorship* 24, no. 3 (September 2009): 253–69, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647770903073086>.

<sup>20</sup> Schubert, *The Curator's Egg*.

<sup>21</sup> Ballantyne and Uzzell, 'Looking Back and Looking Forward'.

<sup>22</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Their Visitors*.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Sandell, 'Social Inclusion, the Museum and the Dynamics of Sectoral Change', *Museum and Society* 1, no. 1 (2003): 45–62.

<sup>24</sup> Emily Duthie, 'The British Museum: An Imperial Museum in a Post-Imperial World', *Public History Review* 18 (2011): 12.

<sup>25</sup> Vicki Cassman, Nancy Odegaard, and Joseph F Powell, *Human Remains: Guide for Museums and Academic Institutions* (AltaMira Press, 2008).

integration of black history into national museum collections<sup>26</sup> and the increased collection of digital culture from computer games<sup>27</sup> to code.<sup>28</sup> Collections are not only fundamental to museums, but they also act as important indicators of how museum practice has changed over the years. The Museums Association for example note that, 'The collections that museums care for, display, interpret and hold in trust for future generations form the basis of all the work a museum does. Without collections museums could not exist'.<sup>29</sup> The shifting parameters of museum practice, from welcoming visitors in, to educational and social agendas, are all built on the strong and indelible foundation of a museum's collection. Perhaps then we can take the stance that, nothing endures but change (and museum collections).

### **Towards the porous institution**

Fleming observes a move towards porous organisational structures in *Embracing the Desire Lines – Opening up Cultural Infrastructure*. In which he notes that this moves towards open and porous cultural organisations is a radical affront to these traditional temples of power, those grand Victorian buildings that 'for so long have stood steadfast as examples as symbols of cultural continuity and comfort'.<sup>30</sup> For him the need to become more open and porous is centred on the issue of relevance, cultural organisations need to appeal to the public if they are to survive. In a broad sweep he cites approaches ranging from 'co-commissioning and co-curating, connecting the knowledge, content and tastes of different communities' and suggests that this should happen throughout the institution both onsite and online.<sup>31</sup> However again we are reminded that openness, partnership and

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<sup>26</sup> Victoria Walsh, "'Tate Britain: Curating Britishness and Cultural Diversity" Tate Encounters,' *Tate Encounters 2* (2008), [http://www2.tate.org.uk/tate-encounters/edition-2/TateEncounters2\\_VictoriaWalsh.pdf](http://www2.tate.org.uk/tate-encounters/edition-2/TateEncounters2_VictoriaWalsh.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> 'MoMA | Video Games: 14 in the Collection, for Starters', accessed 30 July 2018, [https://www.moma.org/explore/inside\\_out/2012/11/29/video-games-14-in-the-collection-for-starters/](https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2012/11/29/video-games-14-in-the-collection-for-starters/).

<sup>28</sup> 'Cooper-Hewitt Announces Acquisition of Planetary Application and Source Code | Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum', Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, 27 August 2013, <https://www.cooperhewitt.org/2013/08/27/cooper-hewitt-announces-acquisition-of-planetary-application-and-source-code/>.

<sup>29</sup> 'Connecting Collections' (Museums Association, n.d.), accessed 7 January 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Tom Fleming, 'Embracing the Desire Lines – Opening Up Cultural Infrastructure' (Cornerhouse, May 2009), 1.

<sup>31</sup> Fleming, 13.



collaboration in any form is not easy 'to open the doors a little wider is to encourage vulnerability as much as innovation and opportunity'.<sup>32</sup>

Govier also makes the link between the challenge facing museums and cultural organisations in *Leaders in Co-Creation? Why and How Museums Could Develop their Co-Creative Practice with the Public, Building on Ideas from the Performing Arts and Other Non Museum Organisations*.<sup>33</sup> In this report Govier suggests that focusing the co-creation debate on 'power' is a bit of a red herring, she suggests that museums are never going to relinquish all power to visitors so it is more beneficial to move the debate beyond one of democracy versus elitism and towards an enquiry into how museums and their visitors can work together.<sup>34</sup> Govier's report uses the term 'co-creation', however others would describe this as 'co-produced'<sup>35</sup>, 'community'<sup>36</sup> or 'participatory'<sup>37</sup> practice. Govier herself notes that there is no single accepted definition of collaborative working with visitors and suggests 'Co-creation fundamentally means museum and gallery professionals working with our audiences (both existing and potential) to create something new together'.<sup>38</sup> Through a survey of case studies on co-creation Govier notes a trend towards finite co-creation, so for example rather than developing a community of advocates and co-creators museums tend to 'co-create' in a heavily defined bubble 'often in a special community gallery, or a manifestation that is 'safely' (from the central organisation's point of view) kept in the virtual land of cyberspace' she recognises that 'superb projects can flourish online, while changing little in the actual

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<sup>32</sup> Fleming, 20.

<sup>33</sup> Dr Louise Govier, 'Leaders in Co-Creation? Why and How Museums Could Develop Their Co-Creative Practice with the Public, Building on Ideas from the Performing Arts and Other Non-Museum Organisations' (Clare Leadership, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Sue M. Davies, "The Co-Production of Temporary Museum Exhibitions", *Museum Management and Curatorship*, vol. 25:3 (2010) pp. 305-321.

<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth Crooke, 'Museums and Community', in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald, Blackwell Companions in Cultural Studies 12 (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2006), 170-85.

<sup>37</sup> Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz, California: Museum 2.0, 2010).

<sup>38</sup> Govier, 'Leaders in Co-Creation? Why and How Museums Could Develop Their Co-Creative Practice with the Public, Building on Ideas from the Performing Arts and Other Non-Museum Organisations', 4.

museum'.<sup>39</sup> The co-creation that Govier discovered in her review of available case studies and literature demonstrates a trend for co-creation at the edges rather than at the core of museum practice, this short term 'finite' approach seems dated in comparison to the value placed on developing and sustaining online communities. Having finite community projects that lead to a one off exhibition in a community gallery far removed from the curatorial voice of the museum, and then ending a museums relationship with that community is the online equivalent of spending months developing an active and engaged Facebook following through the creation of interesting content, community management and participating in dynamic conversations; and then deleting that Facebook page and starting a new one because the project has ended.

Through her research Govier sought to find co-creative practices that exist at the core rather than the fringes of museum practice. Echoing Gunatillakes writings on 'open innovation'<sup>40</sup> Govier speaks of inviting members of the public in to extend a museums 'collective intelligence pool' but furthers the point by stating that rather than simply adding value to an institution those that want to co-create at the core, those that want to shape how and what museums do are also potential new audiences and markets for museums.

Govier outlines that co-creation is actually an important business imperative. 'In tough economic times, we need to be relevant for and connected to our publics: letting them contribute to our future development makes sense on so many levels economic as well as ideological'.<sup>41</sup> It is perhaps useful with reference to this quote to briefly revisit Gunatillake, as he also places the same emphasis on the importance

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<sup>39</sup> Govier, 'Leaders in Co-Creation? Why and How Museums Could Develop Their Co-Creative Practice with the Public, Building on Ideas from the Performing Arts and Other Non- Museum Organisations'.

<sup>40</sup> Rohan Gunatillake, 'Mission 2.0 Advice for Arts Organisations and Cultural Organisations from the Social Web', Mission Models Money, 2008, <https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:eYN0k8SsX2gJ:https://artsconnect.files.wordpress.com/2009/02/mission-20-advice-for-arts-cultural-organisationsfrom-the-social-web.doc+&cd=2&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk>.

<sup>41</sup> Govier, 'Leaders in Co-Creation? Why and How Museums Could Develop Their Co-Creative Practice with the Public, Building on Ideas from the Performing Arts and Other Non- Museum Organisations', 5.

of innovation: 'innovation is sometimes presented as a desirable extra, something that organisations might do when they have some spare cash...innovation is much more basic than this: it is the condition for survival in a changing environment'.<sup>42</sup> In concluding her review of case studies and literature Govier states that 'the best collaborative work happens within a framework and that it does need management and leadership. You need to plan, design and reflect for effective collaboration'.<sup>43</sup>

In interviewing a range of theatre companies Govier notes that a key trend among these organisations that successfully co-produce content with their audiences are led by directors who strategically and ideologically value this work. Another trend that emerged from her interviews was a desire to make great art, rather than engaging audiences for democratic or social good. The organisations that thrived in the co-production sphere were driven by a desire to make great art, and the ethos that each individual adds value to the artistic output of co-created work. Govier argues that the thriving examples of co-production she witnessed in the theatre sector is not replicated within the museum sector:

If our primary aim in the work we co-create with the public is not to make great art, by which I mean high quality museum spaces, which engage a wide range of people and create all sorts of different, interesting meanings, then I fear we will always limit this kind of work. Doubters will never see its potential, because the results may be a bit mediocre, and will therefore carry on being marginalised in community galleries rather than being highlighted in the central museum space.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the successes she found in the theatre sector she also discusses the need to continually adjust, and adapt how co-creative relationships are developed. One interviewee suggested that cultural organisations had to tread the line between

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<sup>42</sup> Guntallike, 'Mission 2.0 Advice for Arts Organisations and Cultural Organisations from the Social Web'.

<sup>43</sup> Govier, 'Leaders in Co-Creation? Why and How Museums Could Develop Their Co-Creative Practice with the Public, Building on Ideas from the Performing Arts and Other Non- Museum Organisations', 17.

<sup>44</sup> Govier, 36.

providing opportunities for co-creators to develop skills, whilst allowing their voice to be heard. There is an ethical argument for the inclusion of participants as they are, to allow diverse voices in, rather than shape those voices to mirror the already dominant voices that exist within an organisation. Kerry Michael (artistic director and chief executive of Theatre Royal Stratford East) explained to Govier this is 'different from 'inclusion', because it is not about including the community in our vision, but is instead about letting them shape the vision for themselves'.<sup>45</sup>

Govier concludes by suggesting that museums need to look at themselves before they can look out to the world. It requires a confident institution, comfortable with its values, and secure in itself to manage these new communities, communities that no longer exist in a finite programme or workshop, but instead through digital culture are becoming active communities of creators, co-creators and cultural advocates – advocates that museums badly need in this difficult economic climate. The challenge for museums is to develop new forms of institutional knowledge, both by employing specialist staff with digital skills, and providing existing staff with opportunities to develop the skills required to be a confident, innovative and efficient museum professional in this digital age.

### **Museum practice in an agile, open and participatory museum environment**

Available literature shows us that museums have moved visitors from the periphery to the core of museum practice over the last 100 years, and that Web 2.0 and digital technologies have pushed this change deeper and faster in the last two decades than any other force in the last century. However, there is very little discussion of how museums are equipping staff with the skills, and support required to develop and grow as professionals within this agile and fast evolving climate.

Unlike other areas of museum practice there are no agreed sector wide standards for what has loosely been termed 'digital engagement'. In recent years a number of attempts have been made to outline what 'digital engagement' might look like.

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<sup>45</sup> Govier, 25.

From *The Digital Engagement Framework*,<sup>46</sup> produced by Richardson and Visser, to *The Digital Engagement Strategy* produced by Derby Museum (England)<sup>47</sup> each takes a different approach to defining digital engagement. Jane Finnis, Director of Culture24 argues, that nobody under 20 talks about 'digital' and as such we should be talking about, engagement (without the digital prefix). For Finnis. 'Engagement is fundamentally about attention, inspiration or connection'.<sup>48</sup> Mia Ridge, (former chair of the Museums Computer Group), also argued that engagement should come before digital. 'Digital strategies should be embedded within a wider public engagement strategy, and decisions about audiences and goals should always come before decisions about technology'.<sup>49</sup> The exact definition of digital literacy, digital strategy, and digital practice are yet to be defined into a taxonomy as readily accepted as say that, that exists around collections management.

As such, digital engagement could include the development of a new App, but it could also be the acknowledgment of digital culture within a traditional exhibition.

Instead of embracing all technology and copying what the latest 'cool' brand from Adidas to Apple are doing, museums need to strategically engage with the opportunities that new technologies provide. Without such a strategic approach museums could lose their place as unique cultural intuitions and become nothing more than a showroom for the latest technology. It takes a confident institution to recognise that whilst digital technologies are quickly becoming an imperative to

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<sup>46</sup> Jasper Visser and Jim Richardson, 'DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT IN CULTURE, HERITAGE AND THE ARTS', 2013, [http://digitalengagementframework.com/digenfra3/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Digital\\_engagement\\_in\\_culture\\_heritage\\_and\\_the\\_arts.pdf](http://digitalengagementframework.com/digenfra3/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Digital_engagement_in_culture_heritage_and_the_arts.pdf).

<sup>47</sup> 'Digital Engagement Strategy' (Derby Museums, 2013), <http://collectionstrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Derby-Museums-Digital-Engagement-Strategy1.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup> 'A Think Piece on Digital by Jane Finnis « 2014 Let's Get Real Conference', accessed 30 July 2018, <http://letsgetrealconference.com/2014/blog/2014/05/24/a-think-piece-on-digital-by-jane-finnis/>.

<sup>49</sup> Mia Ridge, 'Digital Participation, Engagement and Crowdsourcing in Museums – London Museums Group', 15 August 2013, <http://www.londonmuseumsgroup.org/2013/08/15/digital-participation-engagement-and-crowdsourcing-in-museums/>.

contemporary business, these technologies must advance a museums strategic and business plans if they are to truly add value to the work of museum.<sup>50</sup>

Rather than categorising the museum experience as time spent 'visiting' a physical museum, Falk and Dierking define the museum experience in a much broader way. Their definition of the museum experience spans from the first thought of attending a museum, the decision making process, the journey to the museum, the museum visit itself, social experiences around the visit for example going for lunch, but this definition also extends to include memories of visiting a museum.<sup>51</sup> Whilst not written within the context of museums in a digital age, this idea of the museum experience extending beyond a visitors interaction with a physical museum space is one that maps neatly on to the emergence of the museum as a multi-platform institution. The museum as an institution now mirrors the museum experience in that it exists beyond a physical building.

In an increasingly digital world, technology and remix culture has opened up the avenues to participation. No longer do visitors need to be invited to participate, nor does participation necessarily need to exist within the scaffolded confines of museum practice. Increasingly participation is becoming self-directed with visitor-generated participatory practices existing in parallel to facilitated participatory opportunities offered by an institution. For some visitors, this means a quick snap on their phone, the addition of a funny comment, a physical response such as copying the pose in a painting or editing a work of art using digital filters and text overlay. While for other visitor's participation can be more sophisticated, longer term and strategic from dedicated blogs to websites and apps.

One such example is *Nipples at The Met*, a blog created by an artist, documenting a project which sees him photograph every nipple on display at the Metropolitan

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<sup>50</sup> For context on the emergence of new business models in a digital age see: John H. Falk and Beverly Sheppard, *Thriving in the Knowledge Age: New Business Models for Museums and Other Cultural Institutions* (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2006).

<sup>51</sup> John H Falk and Lynn D Dierking, *The Museum Experience*, 2016.

Museum of Art in New York.<sup>52</sup> Another example is that *Ugly Renaissance Babies*, a blog which invites people to take photos of 'ugly babies' in renaissance paintings and then submit them with satirical descriptions. The blogs tag line sums up both its irreverence and cultural relevance – 'The Kids Aren't Alright'.<sup>53</sup>

These examples demonstrate that not all visitors engage with museums solely through the interpretive lens of the museum. Instead they use their own creative vision to interpret, reinterpret and engage with museum spaces and collections. It could be argued that all visitor experiences are inherently participatory since visitors always add their own layer of content and narrative to museum collections. Perhaps it is how visitor participation is mediated and not the intellectual exchange itself, which has been radically changed through digital culture.

In the Netherlands, the Rijksmuseum has made 125,000 high-resolution images available online, inviting visitors to use them freely for both personal and commercial purposes. This open invitation to participate can be as a radical approach to participation since the openness of the invitation lays the foundation for both 'tyranny' and 'chaotic' storytelling<sup>54</sup> Providing access and removing traditional rules for the use of images arguable helps challenge the power imbalances of participatory practices. Taco Dibbits, Director of Collections at the Rijksmuseum, suggests images could be used to create such things as tattoos, iPad covers and more:

'If visitors want to have a Vermeer on their toilet paper I'd rather they have a very high-quality image of Vermeer on toilet paper than a very bad reproduction'.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> 'Nipples at the Met', accessed 31 July 2018, <http://nipplesatthemet.tumblr.com/?og=1>.

<sup>53</sup> 'Ugly Renaissance Babies', accessed 31 July 2018, <https://uglyrenaissancebabies.tumblr.com/?og=1>.

<sup>54</sup> Jenny Kidd, *Museums in the New Mediascape: Transmedia, Participation, Ethics* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2014), 13.

<sup>55</sup> Grischka Petri, 'The Public Domain vs. the Museum: The Limits of Copyright and Reproductions of Two-Dimensional Works of Art', *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies* 12, no. 1 (28 August 2014), <https://doi.org/10.5334/jcms.1021217>.

Whilst the approach taken by the Rijksmuseum may seem radical or revolutionary, it reflects the increasing pressure on museums to justify their value not in terms of their ability to collect and care for objects but also 'their ability to take such objects and put them to some worthwhile use'<sup>56</sup>. By moving towards a collaborative model of management and programming, museums can take steps towards becoming 'useful' and 'active' places. Facilities which can be used rather than just visited.

## Conclusion

New modes of visitor participation challenge the traditional power relationships that have underpinned museums from the enlightenment to the present days. The challenge for museums is to work with, rather than for visitors, to define and redefine their approach to collecting and exhibiting relevant and engaging stories. To respond to the growing digital culture in which they now operate and to look beyond the work of what we would traditionally define as artists, to contemporary makers, creators and influencers and to accurately connect, collect, record and preserve contemporary culture for future generations.

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