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# Evangelizing the 'Gallery of the Future': a Critical Analysis of the Google Art Project Narrative and its Political, Cultural and Technological Stakes

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EVANGELIZING THE 'GALLERY OF THE FUTURE': A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF
THE GOOGLE ART PROJECT NARRATIVE AND ITS POLITICAL, CULTURAL AND
TECHNOLOGICAL STAKES


(Thesis format: Monograph)



by



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# Abstract

This thesis explores the digitization initiative Google Art Project and the ways in which the Project negotiates its place between rapidly developing Web technologies and the often-contradictory fine art tradition. Through the Project's marketing and website design, Google constructs a narrative that emphasizes the democratization of culture, universal accessibility and a new progressive future for the art world while obscuring more complex political, social and cultural questions. Bringing together scholarship from various disciplines including library studies, digital studies, art history, and cultural studies this thesis highlights how the Project *might* open up a space to talk about art publics and the desire for openness in the art institution while also recognizing how GAP remains firmly planted within that institutional structure.

## Keywords

# Acknowledgments

I would first and foremost like to thank my supervisor Carole Farber who has supported me since the moment I walked into her research methods class and shared that I was interested in the intersection of fine art and the Internet. Thank you for your patience and encouragement throughout this process.

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# Table of Contents

# List of Figures

# List of Appendices

## Introduction

How do we tell stories? Stories about history, stories about the future, fantastical stories about fictional worlds, stories that are painful to share, stories that provoke laughter; we tell these stories through written literature, but also through more casual verbal exchanges with one another, or through music, dance, theatre and visual art. In the thirteenth century artists told religious stories through paintings meant as a pedagogical tool for the public.[1] This kind of storytelling was highly politicized, tightly controlled through laws dictated by the church.[2] In a gallery, curators also take on the role of storytellers by composing a narrative flow from artwork to artwork in an exhibition. This narrative might revolve around a historical period, an artist or group of artists, or a theme such as the Art Gallery of Ontario's (AGO) current exhibition titled "Art As Therapy."[3] If an artist can shape a story through his or her artwork and a curator can form a narrative in an exhibition, what happens when we introduce the traditional fine art world to the Internet, where the public can also contribute voice to the stories shared through cultural objects? To digitize a collection and host it online requires a set of skills and resources quite different from those needed in a brick-and-mortar[4] gallery. Technology giant, Google, with its engineers, its high-resolution cameras, and its web presence stands as an attractive partner for a gallery or art museum looking to bring its collections online. If Google performs the digitization, the website design, and hosts the content under its own domain name, does Google also have a voice in how stories are told through the artworks? Describing itself, the Google Cultural Institute writes, "The Google Cultural Institute helps preserve and promote culture online. With a team of dedicated engineers, Google is building tools that make it simple to tell the stories of our diverse cultural heritage and

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[1] Museum Network UK, "Telling Stories Through Art."

[2] Male, *Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century*, 4.

[3] "Art As Therapy" is an exhibition inspired by Alain de Botton and John Armstrong's text *Art as Therapy.* De Botton and Armstrong identify what they believe to be "universal" themes such as Love, Sex and Nature and select related artworks from the AGO's collection.

[4] Refers to the gallery's physical building.

make them accessible worldwide."[5] Google is cognizant of its role in not only engineering but also storytelling. Google's mission sounds attractive, but is it inherently problematic for a brand as large as Google to take on the responsibility of telling the world's stories? This thesis project will consider Google's recent initiative, The Google Art Project (hitherto referred to as GAP and the Project) as a case study in how business, fine art and technology meet online.

The thesis project, as it appears in the next one hundred pages, is much different from the one I first envisioned when I began my Master's degree. The project naturally shaped itself through discoveries made in the initial research process, the most powerful being my happening upon GAP. In 2010, I worked with a small Toronto-based online commercial art gallery that sold photographic art from young artists discovered through photography competitions and shows like The Magenta Foundation's "Flash Forward Festival." Working on marketing and event planning for this company I found myself intrigued by how artists balance the way they market themselves on both their personal websites and the websites operated by the galleries that represent them. While I was initially pulled to questions about how artist identity is displayed online through website design and content, in 2013 Amazon Art was released and my focus shifted. Only months before Amazon Art premiered, I was looking to compose a paper on the AGO's online database, "CollectionX," but upon inquiring as to why the site had seen little activity in months, was told that "CollectionX" had been abandoned in favor of GAP. Both GAP and Amazon Art point to a clear movement towards the centralization of art, both for educational and commercial purposes, online. Amazon Art is a global marketplace for small and large commercial galleries to sell work, using the Amazon brand and website as a rallying point to reach a new customer base. GAP's aim is different, concentrating on pedagogy and entertainment rather than sales, yet it demonstrates the same increasing infiltration of multinational, cross-market giants into the art world. This thesis project developed out of a personal curiosity and desire to discover why multinational

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[5] Google Art Project, "About."

corporations such as Google were so interested in the art and heritage sectors and how they were expressing that interest to the public.
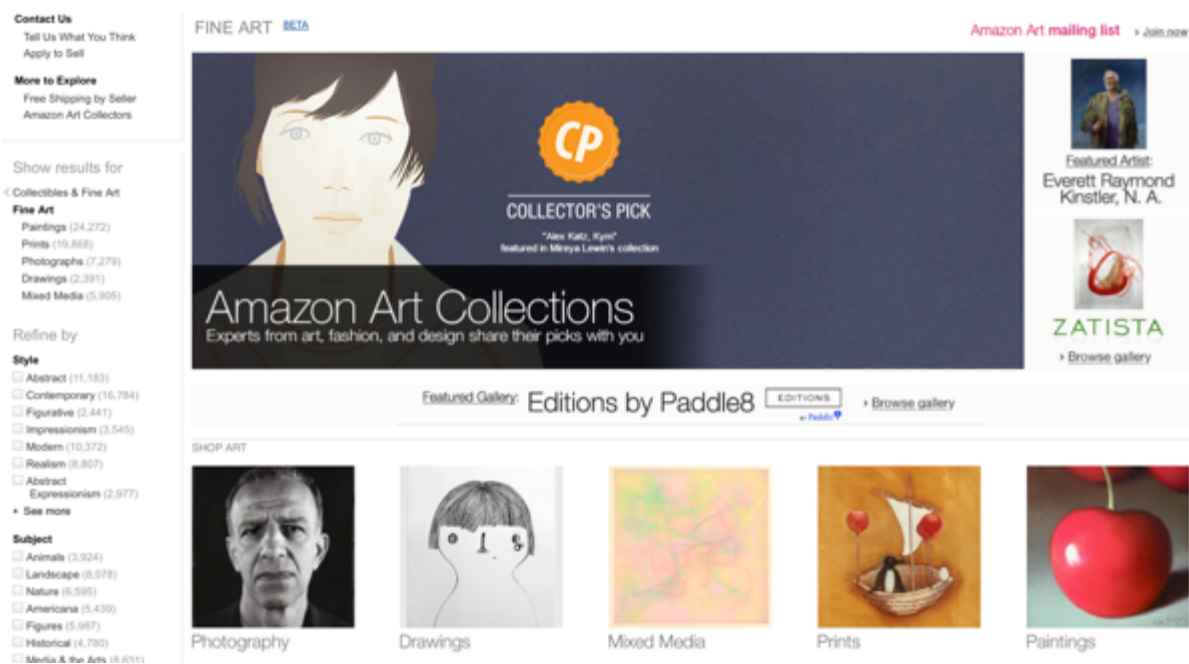


**Figure 1: Amazon Art Homepage**

The title for this thesis is inspired by the term "technology evangelist," something I first encountered in several technology-focused blogs. "Evangelist," in its biblical root, refers to an individual who passionately embraces Christianity and seeks to share this passion with non-Christians, hoping to convert them. "Technology Evangelist" is a buzzword used in the corporatized technology industry to describe engineers, marketers, and business executives who are employed to spread the influence of a particular product or brand. Microsoft, for example, hires individuals with the job title "Tech Evangelist:"

> The mission of the Developer Experience & Evangelism group (DX) at Microsoft is to enable the development of industry leading applications and services across devices. The mission of the Technical Evangelist is to broadly spread the unique value of the Microsoft client platform. This role will spearhead the outbound Evangelism efforts to educate customers & partners in building Windows Modern apps.[6]

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[6] Microsoft, "Tech Evangelist Job."

The rhetoric in this job description is reminiscent of the language used often to describe religious evangelists or missionaries. The Microsoft "Tech Evangelist" "spreads the unique value" of the Microsoft "mission." This language makes the job of marketing a technology firm seem much more grandiose and visionary; it is a "mission" not just a job. I've titled this thesis project "Evangelizing the 'Gallery of the Future'" because of what Hillis et al. have labeled the "Google techno-utopia."[7] In this Techno-utopia, Google's resources can be used to "solve or ameliorate a number of the world's problems and ultimately make the world a better place."[8] Google's director of engineering, Alan Eustace, once stated "I look at people here as missionaries—not mercenaries"[9] painting an image of Google as the moral, benevolent entity sharing its technological prowess around the world. GAP is an extension of this vision of the economically and culturally rich corporation with a soul.

## About Google Art Project

GAP is a large global art digitization initiative funded by the Google Cultural Institute.[10] It was born out of the well-known "20% initiative" at Google, where employees are to dedicate 20% of their time to brainstorming new creative projects. In its first few years GAP's database has expanded to 40,000 digitized artworks from over 250 galleries around the world.[11] The Project initially launched in 2011 with seventeen

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[7] Hillis, Petit, and Jarrett, *Google and the Culture of Search*, 6.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., 7.

[10] The Google Cultural Institute includes a series of projects dedicated to digitizing cultural material and presenting it online in a manner that encourages the viewer to interact with that material. In addition to GAP, the Cultural Institute works with The World Wonders Project, The Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory, Versailles 3D, and Yad Vashem, among others.

[11] This is the number of digitized artworks as reported by Google Art Project in June 2013 but this number will likely change as the Project continues to expand, as is the nature with online projects.

partner museums and galleries[12] including the Uffizi, the Palace of Versailles, The
Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Tate Britain.[13] Working with its partners, Google
captures high-resolution images of a number of the gallery or museum's pieces.  Google
describes their Project as:

> A unique online art experience. Users can explore a wide range of artworks at
> brushstroke level detail, take a virtual tour of a museum and even build their own
> collections to share. With a team of Googlers working across many product areas
> we are able to harness the best of Google to power the Art Project experience.
> Few people will ever be lucky enough to be able to visit every museum or see
> every work of art they're interested in but now many more can enjoy over 40 000
> works of art from sculpture to architecture and drawings all in one place. We're
> also lucky at Google to have the technology to make this kind of project a
> reality.[14]

GAP is designed as an online gallery experience, an education tool, and an extension of
the social networking website Google+. It is divided into four main sections:
"Collections", "Artists", "Artworks", and "User galleries". In "Collections" the user can
alphabetically browse the list of the various galleries and museums involved in GAP, and
then search those galleries' collections. In "Artists" the user can search by a particular
artist's name. The "Artworks" section features a filter to search for artworks by
"medium," "place," "date," and "event." Some of the artwork on the website has been
photographed using Google's high-resolution "Gigapixel" technology.[15] Prominent
artworks from each gallery including Chris Ofili's *No Woman, No Cry* and Vincent van
Gogh's *The Starry Night* are chosen by the galleries to be captured using this technology.

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[12] Throughout this thesis I use "museum" and "gallery" interchangeably. Both are complex labels that are
highly contested in art discourse, primarily the difference between an "art museum" and an "art gallery." I
chose to use both terms because GAP applies them both equally. GAP features the functionality "museum-
view" but also sometimes refers to its partners as "partner galleries" alongside other descriptions such as
"partnering cultural institutions." Also, there is no clear imbalance between the number of partners self-
identifying as a "gallery" (The Art Gallery of Ontario, for example) and those labeled as a "museum" (The
Museum of Modern Art).

[13] A full list of the seventeen launch partners can be found in Appendix A.

[14] Google Art Project, "FAQs."

[15] GAP captures photographs of specific artworks using a high "Gigapixel" resolution camera. The
resulting images contain over seven billion pixels.

The user can magnify the image of the artwork to examine the smallest details including individual brush strokes, hidden images, and damage to the artwork. The user can also visualize the artwork in "museum view," developed from the same technology used for Google street view. In "museum view," the user can virtually walk through the buildings floor by floor, examining works in their gallery context.[16]

For the first year and a half, GAP was housed as an independent project, under its own domain name. Although on the "About" page it stated that GAP was funded by the Google Cultural Institute (hitherto GCI), the two entities were kept separate, on their own isolated websites. In a recent website redesign Google has further cemented itself as playing a central role in digitizing not only artworks but also other cultural objects. GAP thus began to complicate the idea of what constitutes "art" as photographs of jewelry, pottery, household objects and even tutus were soon included. The redesign moved the GAP website so it was housed under the GCI domain. The GCI logo is featured prominently on each page and clicking the "About" or "Education" page leads the user to a centralized space for not only GAP, but also for the Institute's World Wonders Project and the Historic Moments Project.

## Clarifying Language

In writing this thesis project I came upon many terms that I knew I needed to incorporate, as they are relevant to the discussion at hand, but are incredibly complex terms that I would never have the space to fully explore. I have already identified "museum" and "gallery" as two of these terms; their meanings could be discussed for over a hundred pages, space which is not available here and would only serve to distract from my overall argument. When a term appears that requires context for the reader, I have included extra information in the footnotes. Sometimes that information involves me explaining my own approach to the term and sometimes it means that I have cited

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[16] In "museum view" some works are blurred due to copyright issues. This is a major point of criticism leveled at GAP by news outlets and blogs. The issue of copyright in online initiatives like GAP is outside of the focus of this thesis project but is certainly an avenue for future academic inquiry.

other sources for the reader that give more detail than I am able to include in a project of this length. However, the terms "culture" and "art" are so vast in their meanings that they need more space than a footnote to be explored.

**Culture**

The term "culture" appears often throughout this thesis project and it is therefore necessary to clarify my understanding of "culture" and the theory that backgrounds my use of the term. "Culture" is an incredibly broad term and, as Raymond Williams states in *Keywords,* "is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language."[17] As Williams later suggests, the word "culture" today is often used to describe something that is artistic in nature; however, it can also be used in an anthropological sense to describe an entire way of life. It is this complex and indeterminable definition of culture that gives a title like "Google Cultural Institute" such power, because it signifies a simultaneous control over the arts and general daily life. By connecting GAP so prominently to the "Cultural Institute" the artworks are no longer connected to just the Project's website or the galleries where they are housed but also become connected to a larger "culture" that is a Google-produced Culture. "Culture" is linguistically rooted in "Colere," meaning to "cultivate, protect, honour with worship."[18] With such roots it is unsurprising that the gallery or the museum are often aligned with such places as temples or churches.[19] In his historical tracing of the word "culture," Williams indicates how "culture" in the sixteenth and seventeenth century was defined through everyday activities like farming, and tending to livestock.[20] The modern use of the word "culture" often refers to "music, literature, painting and sculpture…sometimes with the addition of philosophy, scholarship, history."[21] Pierre Bourdieu identifies a

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[17] Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, 87.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Duncan, "The Art Museum as Ritual," 117.

[20] Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, 87.

[21] Ibid., 90.

disjuncture between this idea of culture, and the culture of "everyday life." The manner in which "culture" is defined for an individual is determined by their actual and perceived social standing and the "sense limits"[22] of class. When I speak of "culture" throughout this thesis project, it is always in a context that is socially, politically, economically and historically fraught. Culture is a complex term with varying definitions, but as Williams argues, these definitions should not be examined as mutually exclusive:

> We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life – the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning – the special processes of discovery and creative effort. Some writers reserve the word for one or other of these senses; I insist on both, and on the significance of their conjunction …Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind.[23]

Williams stresses the interconnection between varying spheres of what we consider to be culture. An art exhibition, and the manner in which it is curated, says a lot about not only art and art history, but about how meaning, at that historically and socially specific moment, is generated in daily life; the politics of the art gallery are at once the politics of life.[24]

### Art

The term "art" is similarly complex and multifaceted in its various meanings. Clifford Geertz writes, "art is notoriously hard to talk about. It seems…to exist in a world of its own."[25] Part of the difficulty in defining "art" is that the idea of what constitutes "art" changes with history. In *Keywords* Williams describes how art's definition has been associated with mathematics, skilled manual work, science, industry, craftsmanship, and creative or imaginative work.[26] In this thesis I focus on visual art; it often seeks to

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[22] "Sense Limits" are discussed further in 3.5.

[23] Williams, "Culture Is Ordinary," 11.

[24] In 3.5 I discuss the history of the Louvre in the eighteenth century. This is a strong example of how the art world can be intimately connected with issues of class and political power.

[25] Geertz, "Art As a Cultural System," 1473.

[26] Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, 46.

distance itself from other categories including what one might consider "craft." In the past several decades, there has been what Steven Wilson describes as a "radical shift in the boundaries of art."[27] Art practices including new media art, performance and installation challenged the boundaries of the institutional definition of "art."[28] This "institutional definition" is dependent on what Wilson identifies as the "art-world participants"[29] at a particular moment in time.[30] The definition of "art" represents a problematic paradox between the art world's encouragement of "experimentation/iconoclasm and the preservation of historical standards."[31] For GAP, "art" is defined through its partners, all galleries and museums with significant status in the art and heritage sectors. Any artworks added to the website *must* come from these partners. Therefore, art practices and artists not assimilated into these galleries have no presence on GAP, leaving the website with a very narrow representation of art history.

## Chapter Summary

This thesis project will examine the tension between GAP as a potentially progressive project that challenges some of the deeply entrenched structures in the fine art tradition and the Art Project as an example of the continuing centralization and corporatization of the Internet. I am not interested in labeling GAP as either wholly heroic or villainous, but will instead explore the nuances of the contradictory space GAP fills in the online art realm. Upon first reading about GAP in blogs, online newspapers and magazines, it was incredibly difficult to wade through the overwhelmingly positive reviews and find well-composed criticisms of GAP. As a result, I do not attempt to remain objective throughout this thesis. My criticisms of the Project may sometimes outweigh my discussion of its

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[27] Wilson, *Information Arts: Instersections of Art, Science, and Technology*, 16.

[28] Wilson, *Art + Science Now*, 8.

[29] These participants include artists, curators, historians and critics

[30] Wilson, *Art + Science Now*, 8.

[31] Ibid.

promising features. In light of the extremely positive discourses that surrounds the Project, this thesis is designed in the hopes of balancing out those discourses. The following chapter revolve around a central research question: What does Google, through various levels of text, say about its Project's goals and purposes and are those goals realized on the actual website?

Chapter One includes a brief review of the academic literature on GAP. There is very little academic work on GAP available and in turn, the theoretical framework for this thesis project is unique; it is constructed to bring together the most relevant work from several academic fields. The theoretical framework could be a guide for any future scholars looking to write on GAP or similar initiatives like Amazon Art. Chapter Two is a review of what I found when I examined the GAP press releases and website, using critical discourse analysis as my research framework. The chapter is broken into two parts, the first being an analysis of the press releases produced by the seventeen galleries that participated in GAP's launch. This section will consider questions such as: what is the overall tone of rhetoric of these releases? Do particular themes and words appear frequently across the releases and what is the significance of these patterns in vocabulary? The second half of the Chapter consists of an analysis of key webpages from the GAP website. I examine the textual and visual content of these pages and also look at the overall picture that the website presents. How does this website construct a visual and textual narrative for GAP? What does this narrative say about Google and the art world? Chapter Three is a deeper analysis of the key discoveries I report in Chapter Two. In particular, I look at whether GAP represents a departure from the "closed" nature of the traditional gallery. How are users able to work within the website? Does their activity represent a form of user empowerment? I also pay particular attention to Google's role in GAP and the potential consequences of allowing a multi-national corporation to host such a large online collection. Furthermore, what does Google stand to gain from such a project? How might GAP contribute to Google's overarching reputation as a brand?

I hope in the coming chapters to initiate discussion about GAP as an intriguing example of the intersection among business, technology, and culture. GAP has captured the interest of many, myself included, and having watched GAP grow and change over

the last two years I have found that it continues to present an even more complex picture of its purpose and intentions. GAP makes many promises about progress, community, and knowledge and the closer one looks at the Project the more interesting it becomes to watch how promises are played out. These promises represent genuine desires many of us hope to see realized and are what has helped Google achieve so much success online. Society has been willing to "trust Google because such a society wants, even craves to be seduced by the glib premise and easy promise of democracy-as-connection through technology-as-progress."[32] In the next one hundred pages I will examine how the "gallery of the future" discourse is produced and the larger cultural, technological and political significance of this discourse.

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[32] Hillis, Petit, and Jarrett, *Google and the Culture of Search*, 201.

# 1    An Interdisciplinary Theoretical Framework

## 1.1    Introduction

In order to fully explore the complexities of GAP, it is necessary to first contextualize it within the nearly fifty years of passionate debate surrounding the digitization of art gallery and museum collections. These debates are not restricted to the academic community but have taken place between artists, curators, academics and art lovers alike in art gallery boardrooms, on radio and television shows, in classrooms and in government meetings. This thesis is rooted in decades of discussion about the consequences and benefits of computer technology in the art gallery. Ross Parry, a prominent Museum Studies scholar argues that since the 1960s, with the introduction of automated collections management systems, the museum and art community have struggled with how best to consolidate the polarized traditions, practices, and goals of the computer and the museum. The debates often set up a false binary between those advocating for increased digitization of data and those wanting to protect collections and maintain a certain degree of exclusivity. The Internet in this debate is often colored as either a democratizing space that allows for increased access to cultural items, or as a commercializing space that commodifies cultural items, making them suitable for mass consumption. Ross Parry indicates that a similar false binarism has plagued the museum community.[33] In particular he cites a trend towards "apocalypticism," where technological change is characterized as a violent, invading force.[34] One museologist describes how "the 'marvel' of the information technology represented a 'Trojan horse' being wheeled into the 'fortress' of the museum."[35] The language used here is hyperbolic, drawing on a familiar historical narrative oft represented dramatically in television and film. Museum and gallery personnel feared that bringing collections online

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[33] Parry, *Recoding the Museum: Digital Heritage and the Technologies of Change.*

[34] Ibid., 61.

[35] Ibid., 62.

could lead to a decrease in public attendance for physical museum locations.[36] Concern also surrounded whether the quality of images online would be unsatisfactory and that curator authority would be compromised since the public could turn to other sources online for additional information about an artwork.[37] Online "the institution's conventional role as cultural gatekeeper and 'provider' of educational opportunity pulls in one direction, while the radical and messy possibilities of digital ways of working, digital objects, and the foregrounding of the user-learner pull in another."[38] I will argue, however, that structures offline often overlap into the online world, and this is especially evident in the case of GAP.

Rather than embark on a historical account of scholarly discussion about online galleries and museums, in this chapter I will instead endeavor to identify how key works from various academic spheres can be brought together to encourage a more nuanced, complex understanding of initiatives like GAP. I draw from museum studies, art history, media studies, cultural studies and library studies throughout this thesis project, using critical discourse analysis as an analytical framework. I designed my theoretical framework in such a way because GAP, an interdisciplinary research object at heart, falls into each of these spheres.

## 1.2    Literature Review

GAP, launched in 2011, is still a young initiative. As a result, there has been almost no scholarly work published on the project. Kim Beil's "Seeing Syntax: *Google Art Project* and The Twenty-First-Century Period Eye" is one of the only academic pieces of writing published on GAP. Beil situates GAP in the history of art reproductions and explores the way representations shape how spectators look at art:

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[36] McLaughlin, "The Art Site on the World Wide Web."

[37] Ibid.

[38] Bayne et al., "Objects, Subjects, Bits and Bytes: Learning from the Digital Collections of the National Museums," 118.

> Even as photographs—and especially reproductive photographs—claim to represent the visual world with a rigorous objectivity, they make use of pictorial conventions that must be decoded by their viewers. When these conventions are familiar to viewers, they imagine that they can see right through the reproduction to the original that it represents…However, when conventions become outdated, it is the process itself that becomes most visible, rendering the reproduction an opaque representation rather than a transparent window on the original.[39]

Beil's discussion of GAP focuses on the project's high resolution images and its built-in functionalities including the microscopic zoom. She argues that GAP produces a "reality effect" wherein artworks are reproduced with such sharpness and high resolution that they give us a more "perfect" representation of the original work. However, as she states, this "reality effect" is inherently flawed because the qualities for which GAP reproductions are praised, such as sharpness, brightness, and high color contrast are qualities whose value is derived from our past experiences with digital images, not our experiences looking at images in a physical art gallery. She quotes James Gardner who in his own article on the project writes, "reality itself, the real thing, may just be an imperfect medium for looking at art."[40] Beil's paper opens up academic discussion about GAP, but as a result of its short length, its scope is limited. While the paper provides valuable insight into the practice of looking at online images of artworks, the paper never discusses the "street view" functionality, the integration of social media platforms, the "user galleries," or the Google brand. These are all necessary areas for future scholarship, many of which will be approached in my own thesis project. My discussion about how individuals interpret online visual data will be situated within a critical context that questions what is at stake in interpretations of this data, for the online user, Google, individual art galleries, artists, and the larger art establishment.

In her thesis titled "A Rembrandt in Virtually Everyone's Living Room?" Ioanna Panagiotopoulou argues that GAP represents a new era of user-generated content where online interactive tools encourage users to more actively engage with online content,

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[39] Beil, "Seeing Syntax: Google Art Project and the Twenty-First Century Period Eye," 22.

[40] Ibid., 25.

often in turn becoming producers.[41] Panagiotopoulou primarily explores whether GAP is a more democratic method of art consumption. She approaches this central research question through a series of user interviews and surveys. These interviews and surveys include discussion of various topics including the aura of art objects in a virtual museum, the museum's role as educator, and the prevalence of edutainment in initiatives like GAP. Panagiotopoulou also briefly examines the museum's social role in helping to either reaffirm or challenge power structures that privilege some members of the public over others. While there are small critiques woven throughout her thesis, including a small paragraph on the Project's Western bias, Panagiotopoulou largely characterizes GAP as an audience-driven project and praises its democratic potential. GAP and similar initiatives are suggested as potential solutions to help narrow the "'semantic gap' between everyday experience and the knowledge of the general public when it concerns high art."[42] GAP and the features integrated into the interface help to personalize the art experience, inspire excitement about the art world, and through re-shaping the notion of what a museum is, encourage a "deeper and longer lasting relationship with museums."[43] In the text GAP is identified as an extension of the museum community, yet Google's role as a corporation is never questioned. My own thesis project will challenge some of Panagiotopoulou's arguments that Web 2.0 and "virtual environments" create "a new audience of active cultural participants."[44] While I do not necessarily disagree with Panagiotopoulou's assertion that "'virtual' spaces are the chance for the museums to strategically reinvent their identity and democratize accessibility to the museum space" I maintain that GAP must be understood as something entirely different from an initiative like the Virtual Museum of Canada because it is linked so closely to the powerful Google brand.

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[41] Ioanna Panagiotopoulou, "A Rembrandt in Virtually Everyone's Living Room?".

[42] Ibid., 99.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 103.

## 1.3 Competing Narratives: Ross Parry, Museum Studies and Digital Heritage

The majority of the literature that informs this thesis project comes not from specific studies of GAP, but from the vast scholarship on the digitized gallery. Writers including Emma Barker (1999), Judith Burnham (1970), Graham and Cook (2010), Steve Dietz (2003, 2000, 1998, 1996), Charlie Gere (2006, 2004), Lev Manovich (2008, 2002), Christiane Paul (2008, 2003) and Julian Stallabrass (2003) are prominent academic voices whose work has informed the development of this thesis project. Their writing speaks to the interaction between art, heritage and various notions of the "digital." In *The Language of New Media* Manovich examines the politics of code:

> In cultural communication, a code is rarely simply a neutral transport mechanism; usually it affects the messages transmitted with its help…a code may also provide its own model of the world, its own logical system, or ideology; subsequent cultural messages or whole languages created with this code will be limited by its accompanying model, system, or ideology.[45]

Manovich's paper "Database as Symbolic Form," looks at the relationship between database and narratives. Manovich explores databases including some of the first "virtual museums" housed on CD-ROMs. He argues that over time we have projected "the ontology of the computer onto culture itself."[46] CD-ROMs, Video Games, and webpages contain their own narrative flow determined by the database model that is used. Although his analysis of virtual museums housed on CD-ROMs may be outdated now, much of the same broader theory can be applied to a narrower case study of a website like GAP, and can be synthesized with other digital heritage scholars.

Ross Parry is a central figure in museum studies. His texts often center on how the museum has changed over time and continues to change today in response to new technology. In *Recoding the Museum: Digital Heritage and the Technologies of Change,* Parry traces changes in cataloguing practices in the 1960s with an emphasis on the

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[45] Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 64.

[46] Manovich, "Database as Symbolic Form," 67.

proliferation of automated cataloguing systems. He then continues on to discuss more recent technological developments including CD-ROM virtual museums and interactive museum websites. By tracing the recent history of museum technologies, Parry indicates that the conversations museum curators, directors, visitors, and academics are having today almost immediately echo the conversations that were had in the 1960s.[47] Although the technologies may have changed slightly—from automated cataloguing to virtual museums—the language and arguments are nearly identical. Parry opens *Recoding the Museum* with two quotes. The first comes from a speech given by the UK's Cultural Minister in 2005:

> The future coordination of digitization activity […] with the vision of creating a European Cultural Information space […] will provide rich and diverse cultural resources […] to enable digital access by all citizens to the national, regional and local cultural heritage of Europe.[48]

Parry follows this quote with another from the International Council of Museums in 1968:

> This project […] anticipates the eventual recording of all museum collections […] within a single integrated system, it is principally concerned at this stage with designing a national information system for art museum resources which will later serve as a model for compatible 'data banks' covering scientific and historical institutions.[49]

The trends Parry highlights are starkly visible today on a website like GAP. The top of the GAP "About" page reads:

> Google has partnered with hundreds of museums, cultural institutions, and archives to host the world's cultural treasures online. With a team of dedicated Googlers, we are building tools that allow the cultural sector to display more of its diverse heritage online, making it accessible to all. Here you can find artworks,

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[47] Parry, *Recoding the Museum: Digital Heritage and the Technologies of Change.*

[48] Ibid., 1.

[49] Ibid.

landmarks and world heritage sites, as well as digital exhibitions that tell the stories behind the archives of cultural institutions across the globe.[50]

All three quotations, although from vastly different points in time, identify similar goals for museum technologies including accessibility, universality and pedagogy. They each also express a desire for a centralized source housing the world's cultural objects and a mission to digitize not *some*, but *all* collections.

*Recoding the Museum* is dedicated to examining why these conversations about the modern museum are not changing. Parry argues that the rhetoric remains similar because there is still a great deal of uncertainty about *how* to integrate technologies such as automated cataloguing or digitization into the museum without losing the museum's traditions, some of which have existed for centuries. This confusion is partially the result of the incompatibility between established museum practices and computing practices.[51] This incompatibility includes differences in foundational philosophies as well as more practical issues such as gaps in museum staff knowledge and skills. An experienced curator could confidently arrange an exhibition within the framework of the traditional museum but they could not necessarily grasp how that exhibition should be translated into computer code whether it be through cataloguing the show's pieces or digitizing them for a website. The skills needed for curating museum pieces and writing and organizing code are not always compatible. More complex is the gap between the computer and the traditional museum's philosophical approach to knowledge collection:

> People trained in the arts and humanities were not used to the scientific nomenclature and a systems-oriented approach; the approach of systematically codifying and categorizing was, for instance, alien to many art historians and historians. Computers had, it seemed, the potential to 'impose a rigorous and perhaps harsh discipline upon us.'[52]

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[50] Google Art Project, "About."

[51] Parry, *Recoding the Museum: Digital Heritage and the Technologies of Change.*

[52] Ibid., 46.

Of course, museum curators have always engaged in categorizing and classifying items. Parry argues that this classificatory practice became more pronounced in the 1970s and 1980s, when curating became much less fluid. Leading up to the Victorian period curatorship was highly personalized and relied "on curatorial knowledge and memory, on personal strategies for organizing and making meaning of a sometimes chaotic and miscellaneous collection."[53] In the twentieth century, curatorial practices moved towards being much more universal and standardized between museums. The introduction of the computer seemed to impose a more violent structure onto the museum and its collections: "the computer-enabled systematization of documentation in the 1970s was a rationalizing discourse, aiming to bring order to the bricolage of earlier twentieth-century curatorial practices."[54] Classifying practices were forced to adapt to the computer's language. Parry describes how curators were given dictionaries of words that the computer could recognize, and could therefore be used to classify items.[55] The revised edition of Robert Chenhall's prominent text *Nomenclature for Museum Cataloguing* reads,

> *Nomenclature 3.0* is designed to help cataloguers determine the best term more rapidly and accurately and to speed the retrieval of information….When a cataloguer enters a given term in an object name field, most museum collection software products automatically note that all the broader terms in the hierarchy apply to the object being catalogued."[56]

*Nomenclature 3.0* does list instances where it may be best to diverge from the standardized list of terms it provides, including when a regional term may be more appropriate. However, *Nomenclature* describes the best way to incorporate an alternative term so as to still allow for standardization across museums:

> While it isn't necessarily wrong to use nonstandard object names, doing so will make it more difficult to share data with other museums or outside researchers.

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[53] Ibid., 51.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., 53.

[56] Bourcier and Rogers, *Nomenclature 3.0 For Museum Cataloguing*, xvii.

> Museums that choose to incorporate nonstandard terminology into their records should do so in a consistent fashion. The best solution is to use *Nomenclature-*approved terms and place the non-standardized terms in an alternative name data field or descriptive field.[57]

The introduction of automated collections management systems changed not only the medium through which items were classified, but also how curators thought about museum objects. A whole new standardized language like that outlined in *Nomenclature* is now integrated into museum culture. Parry argues that the museum began to function increasingly like a database. The museum as database is a key concept that backgrounds my own analysis of GAP. I will examine how the way we organize information consequently changes how we think about that information. Woven throughout *Recoding the Museum* is the idea that information management is intimately tied to how knowledge is circulated. The logic of automated systems bled into the museum's logic. In the same way, it is important to explore how the logic of the internet might also change the way we think about art, museum objects and history.

## 1.4     Who Curates? Graham and Cook and New Media Art Theory

Two of the most helpful writers in the development of this thesis are Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook and their text *Rethinking Curating: Art After New Media.* This thorough text examines new media art as well as virtual galleries, and how these recent technological movements have troubled the idea of "curating". Historically, art theorists have debated the definition of the term "curator" and considered the curator's role in the art gallery. But more than this, scholars have asked about the curator's politicized role in defining the larger framework of what "art" is, including what artists are privileged over others, what forms of art are privileged and who should be considered art's "audience." Eilean Hooper-Greenhill astutely calls the curator a "power-broker."[58] Curators hold an

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[57] Ibid., xviii.

[58] Hooper-Greenhill, "Changing Values in the Art Museum: Rethinking Communication and Learning," 18.

almost mythical status in the museum and gallery as beacons of academia, tradition, and culture. The curator works within a fairly well defined canon of works, legitimized through art history.[59] There are instances where this might not be the case, but largely art history has neglected to write about "whole categories of visual cultural production" including amateur photography, and most recently, net art.[60] Hooper-Greenhill describes the "mythological art museum" and its reputation as a rigid, tightly controlled environment for the educated and influential to bask in the presence of high art. This myth is certainly not universal in reality, as many museums struggle with underfunding or little public recognition.[61] Stallabrass quite fiercely argues that while many museums and galleries may face a reality that is quite different from this mythological vision of the gallery, "both museums and galleries are committed to the mystification of the objects that they display, holding to the fiction of a distinct realm of high art that stands above the bureaucratized world of work and the complementary vulgar blandishments of mass culture."[62] If the art gallery and the museum are associated with a mythological rigidity, the online gallery is often linked to something quite the opposite.

In the case of online galleries and museum databases, who are the curators for these projects? The answer to this question is more difficult than searching for an individual with the job title of "curator". Graham and Cook call for a widening of the term's definition, especially in response to online art galleries that incorporate interactive features like tagging, where the user makes valuable contributions that could be considered curatorial in nature. For an online initiative like GAP, the meaning of the term "curator" shifts according to the structure of the underlying database. A database may be fundamentally pedagogic in nature with pre-arranged and pre-organized information for the user, with the purpose to give information rather than to collect and add to its store of

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[59] Stallabrass, "Can Art History Digest Net Art?," 5.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Hooper-Greenhill, "Changing Values in the Art Museum: Rethinking Communication and Learning," 11.

[62] Stallabrass, "Can Art History Digest Net Art?," 7.

information. In contrast, an open database structure features access to the database where the user can adapt the information at any point in time, as many times as they would like.[63] Most online galleries exist at neither extreme end of the spectrum, but somewhere in-between. Graham and Cook, using Kittler (1996) as their inspiration, crucially link database structure to curatorial freedom, suggesting that user contributions can be as valuable as an established curator's might be. Their value may be manifested in different ways, but both the curator and the user in an open database have the power to change information, and thus change how the public perceives a work of art. Beardon and Worden imagine a piece of computer software that completely opens up the museum's inner structures, giving the user full access to the archive to create and organize works as he or she sees fit.[64] They argue for a shift in the conception of the museum as a producer of universal knowledge and primarily focus on "reorganizing the power structure between the curator and visitor, by opening up the store room."[65]

Graham and Cook's discussion of curating is particularly interesting because they examine new media art from a perspective that is not confined within the bounds of the fine art institution. While they tie the history of new media art to the history of fine art, they also indicate where these two histories diverge; immediately in the introduction they write, "new media art forms have suffered in the past from being understood through metaphors that only partially fit"[66] and later continue:

> In order to provide a suitably flexible framework for curators to understand new media art better, this book therefore attempts to identify exactly how new media is 'different,' and to relate these differences as opportunities to rethink curatorial practice.[67]

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[63] Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 218.

[64] Beardon and Suzette Worden, "The Virtual Curator: Multimedia Technologies and the Roles of Museums," 7.

[65] Ibid., 4.

[66] Graham and Cook, *Rethinking Curating: Art After New Media*, 2.

[67] Ibid.

Graham and Cook focus on new media art but their ideas apply well when analyzing GAP. Along with other writers, including Anna Munster and Lev Manovich, Graham and Cook work to carve out a space to talk about new media art that recognizes its roots in the fine art institution while simultaneously escaping those same institutional boundaries.

Like new media art, GAP is a liminal project and any analysis of it must also transgress the boundaries of academic fields. GAP could indeed be considered an online art database, but to think of it solely in that way would be a mistake. It is necessary to step back from the traditional way of thinking about an art gallery or a museum when considering how an online art website should function. This is primarily because the way the art audience interacts with art pieces online differs greatly from how they interact in a brick-and-mortar gallery or museum. Online initiatives like GAP often place emphasis on "interactivity," drawing on a history of interactive art, or exhibitions with interactive features. Interactive[68] or participatory art comes from a tradition which empowers the audience and challenges the gallery's traditional "white cube" model[69]. Through performance art and installation art, artists created works that were more "explicitly participational."[70] New media art especially embraces the principle of variability, wherein each user's interaction with the artwork produces a unique experience, with the artwork's "meaning" infinitely shifting.[71] Graham and Cook discuss how an emphasis on user-interaction in new media exhibitions in galleries as well as online calls the artists'

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[68] The complexity of the term "interactive" will be discussed at length in 3.2.

[69] The "white cube" is a complex term often employed in critical studies of the modernist art gallery. The "white cube" refers to the gallery as a deliberately manufactured space meant to construct specific ideological narratives while eliminating interferences from the external world. Brian O'Doherty describes the modernist art gallery as a quasi-religious space with its pure white walls, tall ceilings, and imposing architecture. Furthermore, "the white cube was a transitional device that attempted to bleach out the past and at the same time control the future by appealing to supposedly transcendental modes of presence and power" (O'Doherty 1976, 11). Christiane Paul argues that the "white cube" model has been particularly challenging for new media artists: "The white cube creates a 'sacred' space and a blank slate for contemplating objects. Most new media art is inherently performative and contextual—networked and connected to the 'outside'—and often feels decontextualized in a white space" (Paul 56, 2008).

[70] Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 56.

[71] Manovich, *The Language of New Media*.

attention to the need for a user-friendly design. Suddenly the user has a much more prominent role in the art world. However, as I argue throughout this thesis, a prominent role for the user does not necessarily mean an active role. While GAP's promises of interactivity may be alluring, Graham and Cook remind us that the user's interactions are always restricted by the system that allows those interactions to take place. For example, in 1971 Robert Morris launched a now infamous sculptural exhibit at the Tate that tested the limits of how much physical interaction an art audience should be allowed to have with an art object. Rather than stand back and look at the art pieces, the patron's bodies were integral to the structure of Morris' sculptures.[72] The exhibit was incredibly physical, with wooden tunnels, seesaws, and ramps positioned throughout the room, prompting patrons to climb walls and lift large planks made of unfinished wood. The exhibition was taken down after only five days; it challenged the limits of the system, in this case, the Tate. The exhibit was dangerous for patrons, and thus practically could not continue within the walls of a major art gallery. These practical system limits restrict user-interactions online as well. Website designers build a system, and the user must traverse within that system. For example, on GAP a user cannot create a "User Gallery" until they have created a Google+ account. I will examine this in more depth in Chapter Three; however, here it is important to note that interactivity always has its limits, and that in the case of GAP, these limits are set by a multinational corporation.

## 1.5    Bourdieu and the Art Audience

So far I have cited texts from such theorists as Ross Parry, Lev Manovich, Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook whose work is fairly recent and focuses on the intersection of technology, art and politics. Manovich in particular highlights how data can be deployed under the name of user empowerment and Web 2.0 to serve the interests of software and hardware business giants.[73] In his study of databases, Manovich examines how the world's information is categorized through database organization, and argues that this

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[72] Graham and Cook, *Rethinking Curating: Art After New Media*, 125.

[73] Manovich, "The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life: From Mass Consumption to Mass Cultural Production?," 321.

categorization is always socially situated and reflects the social, political and economic atmosphere in which it is created. While Pierre Bourdieu was writing at a time when the Internet was in its infancy and was used mostly by universities and large corporations, some of his words complement Manovich's in unexpected ways. Manovich breaks down the vast World Wide Web to its smallest components—to the level of data. While data produces the images and content we see on a website, its underlying structure is invisible to a large fraction of the public who do not possess basic coding skills. Data, and its apparent neutrality and invisibility, thus holds great power to shape the way the public consumes and produces information online.[74] Bourdieu may not speak about data, but he is interested in the way we categorize culture. He lists some of the oppositions including "high" and "low", "unique" and "common" that are often used, almost commonsensically, to classify artistic objects, movements, artists, and publics. Like data, these classifications derive their power from their invisibility and their seeming "naturalness:"

> The practical knowledge of the social world that is presupposed by 'reasonable' behavior within it implements classificatory schemes…historical schemes of perception and appreciation which are the product of the objective division into classes (age groups, genders, social classes) and which function below the level of consciousness and discourse…The network of oppositions…is the matrix of all commonplaces which find such ready acceptance because behind them lies the whole social order. [75]

He later continues: "the seemingly most formal oppositions within this social mythology always derive their ideological strength from the fact that they refer back, more or less directly, to the most fundamental oppositions within the social order: the opposition between the dominant and the dominated."[76] Bourdieu resituates discussion about the art institution so that it always returns to the issue of class. Class, and in turn, education are

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[74] In Chapter Two, for example, I identify how the GAP search engine privileges users with prior art knowledge and in Chapter Three I describe how the simple inability to add a comment or a keyword to an image of an artwork can highlight a fundamental lack of openness in the GAP database structure.

[75] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984). 468

[76] Ibid., 469

crucial elements that determine how an individual might feel encountering a work of art, or approaching the doors of an art gallery.

This thesis is interdisciplinary in nature and therefore draws on scholarship from various fields; this mosaic of scholarship makes it difficult, and I believe unnecessary, to label my theoretical perspective as structuralist, poststructuralist, culturalist, or any of the available theoretical labels. While this thesis often draws upon post-structuralism, there are moments where I will discuss the underlying systems that guide individual actions and this may echo structuralist sentiments. As I have already noted, this thesis is guided, in part, by Pierre Bourdieu's writing on the sociology of art. Bourdieu's early work, in particular his work in Algeria (1958) was heavily influenced by structuralist thought.[77] However, Bourdieu soon distanced himself from structuralism and incorporated more poststructuralist ideas:

> For Bourdieu, any adequate methodological approach must begin with concrete human activity, not idealized, predetermined views of it. The way to proceed is through structural analysis, but not structure in the traditional…reified sense, but structure as both sense activity and objective surroundings—a kind of dialectic between the individual…and what confronts them in culture and the material world.[78]

Bourdieu's discussion of taste, particularly in his widely cited text *Distinction* (1984), helps to form the foundation of the perspective I use to approach GAP. In *Distinction* Bourdieu explores how the education system (for Bourdieu, this is specifically the French education system) and family socialization work to classify individuals through taste. Those individuals from typically upper-class families, who likely possess more cultural capital, come to a work of art with a set of predetermined codes in their arsenal:

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[77] Grenfell and Hardy, *Art Rules: Pierre Bourdieu and the Visual Arts*.

[78] Ibid., 26.

> Consumption is, in this case, a stage in the process of communication, that is, an act of deciphering, decoding which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code….A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded.[79]

Therefore, while the art gallery, especially art galleries with free admission, may seem to be a space accessible to all individuals, it immediately classifies each patron. In *The Love of Art* Bourdieu describes how visitors fear looking at a guidebook or artwork label for too long, in case they might reveal their lack of knowledge to those around them.[80]

Also central to Bourdieu's work is the notion of capital. He differentiates between economic and symbolic capital, while also identifying where the two forms of capital overlap. Economic capital is defined monetarily, through the accumulation of financially valuable assets. Symbolic capital is less quantifiable, and is related to the achievement of prestige in spheres such as art and academia. Symbolic capital is often circulated "in all the markets in which economic capital is not fully recognized…in matters of culture, with the great art collections or great cultural foundations."[81] Cultural institutions thus play a role in not only accumulating symbolic capital, but also distributing symbolic and cultural capital. The distribution of symbolic capital is enacted through the process of legitimization, also called consecration.[82] Hillis et al., argue that Google's model of product diversification is tied to its desire to accumulate symbolic capital: "accumulating symbolic capital is part of the firm's 'higher calling' and is evident in the extensive range of philanthropic, environmental, and social justice issues that Google supports financially and practically."[83] GAP may not be, at first glance a financially lucrative initiative, but with its ties to high art, it is a symbolically valuable asset for the Google brand. Artists are consecrated when their work is recognized by "elite tastes and institutional

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[79] Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, 2.

[80] Bourdieu, Alain, and Schnapper, *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public*, 51.

[81] Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," 84.

[82] Hillis, Petit, and Jarrett, *Google and the Culture of Search*, 43.

[83] Ibid.

formations" and designated as "high art" in the canon.[84] Google has achieved its consecration through recognition by "institutions, mass markets, elite consumers and industry alike."[85] Google, through the years, has created its own "culture of search," and has cemented "search's crucial social role as a cultural and social mediator."[86] Google's technological idealism and corporate image associated with everyday life, gives them the social power to shape how the public understands what it means to "search." Symbolic capital is often unrecognized as capital, because it is not as easily articulated as economic capital: "the social conditions of its transmission and acquisition are more disguised than those of economic capital."[87] It is difficult, and therefore all the more important, to determine how Google, through initiatives like GAP, continues to accrue symbolic capital. Hillis et al., crucially note that Bourdieu uses the term "consecration" to refer to a "form of cultural legitimation…like a feedback loop or virtuous circle, this resulting consecration in turn enables an actor to define what constitutes a field's best practice and in doing so also to influence the field's internal dynamics."[88] Those who maintain dominant positions in the social world construct the parameters of that world, and therefore sustain and extend their power.

Sociologist Paul DiMaggio draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, especially in his various analyses of the way social hierarchies are established in the art institution that exclude some citizens based on class or education level. In the introduction to Bourdieu's text *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* the editor writes, "Although they do not create or cause class divisions and inequalities, 'art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences' and thus contribute to the process of social

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[84] Ibid., 45.

[85] Ibid., 48.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," 84.

[88] Hillis, Petit, and Jarrett, *Google and the Culture of Search*, 43.

reproduction." The distribution of economic capital often means that some individuals have greater access to cultural capital and the codes that come with that capital. While DiMaggio's research focus is fairly diversified, his work is usually structured around one of three areas: class and cultural capital in the fine art institution, issues of access and entrenched hierarchies in cyberspace, and finally, the education system and the role of academia. These three subject areas are generally explored separately; however, there is often theoretical overlap between the subjects. His work on the fine art world is especially valuable as he often incorporates discussion of the term "cultural democracy," a term that has been used by other writers including Alvin Toffler and Jane De Hart Mathews. The definition of the term itself is complex, but it generally refers to a cultural arena wherein creative input from all people regardless of their social status is valued equally. DiMaggio and Useem argue that while individuals like Alvin Toffler have praised the "cultural boom" of the twentieth century, there still remains a large chasm between "high culture" and the general public.[89] Similar to Bourdieu, DiMaggio and Useem point to education as a factor that differentiates the smaller public that frequents theatres and art galleries from the general public. In their audience studies they discovered that a median 54% of the audience attending a ballet, theatre show, opera art gallery, or a museum had obtained at least a Bachelor's degree, in comparison to the national average of 14%.[90] Echoing Bourdieu, DiMaggio and Useem write,

> There are several reasons why the arts audience has a very high proportion of the college-educated. First, understanding most works of art requires a certain amount of familiarity and background information to undertake the decoding that leads to appreciation. As Pierre Bourdieu notes, a work of art 'only exists as such for a person who has the means to appropriate it' (Bourdieu, 1968:594). Higher education provides access to an environment where the means for appropriation can be readily acquired.[91]

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[89] DiMaggio and Michael Useem, "Social Class and Arts Consumption: The Origins and Consequences of Class Differences in Exposure to the Arts in America."

[90] Ibid., 148.

[91] DiMaggio and Michael Useem, "Cultural Democracy in a Period of Cultural Expansion: The Social Composition of Arts Audiences in the United States," 186–187.

These codes that are embedded in works of art are part of not only the consumption of art but also the production. They "fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences."[92] Simply placing an artwork online does not ensure that these codes are opened up, nor does it break down the "social differences" that produce and are produced by coding systems.

## 1.6    Critical Discourse Analysis

The Methodological framework for this thesis is drawn from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA, previously known as Critical Linguistics examines how language is used and how context informs the interpretation of language. Rather than focus on what Wodak and Busch describe as the "syntactic dimension" of CDA, this thesis will instead center on the "semantic dimension."[93] Less attention will be paid to sentence structure and syntax in order to focus on the larger picture of the GAP narrative as it is constructed through Google-produced text. This thesis project incorporates various forms of both textual and visual evidence; press releases, interviews, website pages, videos, logos and artworks are used throughout Chapter Two and Three to explore how GAP represents itself, its gallery partners and its users.  Fairclough describes discourse as:

> An analytical category describing the vast array of meaning-making resources available to us. At this level we can use the alternative term 'semiosis' (encompassing words, pictures, symbols, design, gesture, and so forth), in order to distinguish it from the other common sense of "discourse" as a category for identifying particular ways of representing some aspect of social life.[94]

Critical discourse analysis examines these "meaning-making resources" not as isolated objects, but as pieces of a larger social picture "and all the discursive elements of the situation(s), institution(s), and social structure(s) which frame it."[95] A press release for

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[92] Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, 7.

[93] Wodak and Brigitta Busch, "Approaches to Media Texts," 106.

[94] Fairclough, Mulderrig, and Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis," 357.

[95] Ibid.

GAP should not be analyzed simply within the realm of GAP. Instead, this thesis will explore how the Project fits within the narrative of the art institution and the narrative of the Internet. I will examine how these narratives interweave in websites like GAP and I am especially interested in moments where the histories and values of the art world and the online world conflict with one another.

Under critical discourse analysis it is important not only to explore how a particular event is shaped by the larger social, political and economic landscape, but also how it contributes to shaping that same landscape.[96] GAP holds the power to shape how people understand art, how they see the function of the art gallery or museum, how they define the difference between fine art and popular art, how they categorize artworks and artists, and other significant questions and ideas. GAP also requires one to ask complex questions about corporate power and how it is distributed online. Fairclough and Wodak write,

> Since discourse analysis is so socially consequential, it gives rise to important issues of power. Discursive practices may have major ideological effects—that is, they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people.[97]

The Art Project, a product of the multinational conglomerate Google, brings together not only large-scale corporate power, but also the institutional power from its partners.

When I use the term "power," I am largely drawing on van Dijk's understanding of power and its crucial link to control.[98] For van Dijk, power is always produced by one group's control, through action, talk, and text, over another.[99] Power is exercised both overtly, in obvious ways that we can easily observe, but also more subtly through

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[96] Ibid., 358.

[97] Fairclough and Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis," 258.

[98] van Dijk, "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis," 254.

[99] Ibid.

"persuasion, dissimulation or manipulation…strategic ways to change the mind of others in one's own interests."[100] Power is interconnected with dominance, another term that appears several times throughout his thesis project. Dominance is enacted through social structures and narratives that shape individual action while masquerading as natural, or common sense. Van Dijk argues that it is CDA's role to uncover the "discursive strategies that legitimate control, or otherwise 'naturalize' the social order, and especially relations of inequality."[101] Not all individuals have equal say in how the "social order" is conceived. Individuals and groups which possess greater economic and cultural capital often more actively shape the dominant discourse, while dominated individuals and groups shape smaller counter-discourses.[102] Discourse is always dialogic, but some voices ring louder than others. Van Dijk adds that, "power and dominance are usually organized and institutionalized…ideologically sustained and reproduced by the media or textbooks."[103] Art history for example, remains a powerful force, often determining which works appear in museums and galleries around the world. Internet art, having received little attention in art history, is therefore unable to reach the same level of consecration as a classical sculpture such as *The Burghers of Calais* by Rodin.[104] Art history does not represent a natural progression of all the world's art, but rather a selective group of artists, artworks, and art movements legitimized by historians and academics. Yet it often takes on the appearance of innocence, as if the artists absorbed into the canon naturally fell into place there, neatly arranged in their art periods: "myth has the task of giving a historical intention a natural justification."[105]

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[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.*

[103] van Dijk, "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis," 255.

[104] Stallabrass, "Can Art History Digest Net Art?," 5.

[105] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 254.

As Ruth Wodak describes, "one of the aims of CDA is to 'demystify' discourses by deciphering ideologies."[106] There is a definite need to "demystify" not only the GAP, but much of the discussion surrounding digital heritage and online art. Barthes' work on myth synthesizes well with CDA; similar to many CDA scholars, Barthes is concerned with how politics are obscured through language: "the most natural object contains a political trace, however faint and diluted, the more or less memorable presence of the human act which has produced, fitted up, used, subjected, or rejected it."[107] This thesis works to deconstruct the mythological language and visuals surrounding digital heritage and art in order to recognize how initiatives like GAP might challenge systems of power both online and offline, but how they might also sustain and reproduce those systems. The version of GAP presented to the public through press releases and web content is emptied of these contradictions. According to Barthes, myth,

> abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident.[108]

Fairclough outlines four crucial steps in critical discourse analysis. The first includes identifying a problem with the goal to "produce knowledge which can lead to emancipatory change."[109] This thesis project explores GAP and asks whether the Project is an ideal solution to the problems of access, class division, and preservation that inflict the traditional art gallery. What solutions might the Project offer? But also, where might it falter? In stage two the researcher must "identify obstacles to the problem being resolved in the way in which social life is constituted. The objective…is to understand how the problem arises and how it is grounded in the way social life is organized, by

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[106] Wodak, "Aspects of Critical Discourse Analysis," 10.

[107] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 256.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Fairclough, "Critical Discourse Analysis," 30.

focusing on the obstacles to its resolution."[110] The third and fourth stages of analysis involve finding solutions to the "problem" or as Fairclough writes "possible ways past the obstacles."[111] If GAP is not the best way to bring art online, what other websites (or aspects of those websites) might be succeeding in a way GAP is not? In the following chapter I apply Fairclough's first two stages of CDA, investigating GAP press releases as well as the website itself. GAP is a carefully constructed venture, demonstrative of the Google brand ethos; a close analysis of the Project illuminates how this ethos is played out in text and image.

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[110] Ibid., 31.

[111] Ibid., 33.

# 2     Branding, Structuring and Selling a Global Art Project

## 2.1     Part I: Promoting The Art Project

When Google launched GAP they did not silently allow the website to go live. Instead, they held a large launch party on February 1, 2011 at the Tate Britain where the media and high profile members of the art community could ask Google engineers and executives about the Project and test the website on small computers positioned throughout the room. As is expected, almost all of the initial seventeen participating museums and galleries (Appendix A) also released a press statement on either their official blogs or their website. In some cases, it was this text that first introduced the public to GAP. This first encounter, a press release, can frame the public's future experiences with GAP. Does the press release render people excited to test out the website? Or does it perhaps encourage them to aim a critical eye at the Project? Does the release stress the pedagogical potential of GAP and its use as an extension of the education system? Or is the website framed as a more casual form of entertainment? These kinds of questions are what drew me to press releases as an intriguing and fruitful source of data.

When beginning this thesis project, I considered examining how professional news sources as well as informal sources such as blogs and forums spoke about GAP. However, in the earliest stages I found that most of the texts, especially those released by major news sources, were remarkably similar in both tone and language used. The rhetoric often emphasizes the project as a movement toward the democratization of information, knowledge, education and universalized access to art collections. After examining the first press release produced by Google coinciding with the Project's launch, it became clear that many of the newspaper articles were lightly altered reproductions of this press release. I also found that most of the press releases from the GAP partner galleries also contained similar content. This is unsurprising given the nature and purpose of press releases: "the press release is a genre designed to be absorbed

by others."[112] Press releases are often written in such a way that they can easily be worked into third-party content. In print media the press often takes on a powerful role as gatekeeper, mediating between corporate press releases and newspaper content: "to a large extent, journalists control how much or how little, when, where and how, they wish or do not wish to use the information and the wording from a press release."[113] However, online, corporations such as Google can host their own releases[114] rather than rely on traditional media forms like newspapers.[115] Consequently, Google-produced texts appear online in multiple venues—in third party magazines, blogs, press releases, and in their own blogs and press websites.  My research focus thus shifted to what Google and its gallery partners were saying about themselves, because those words were so often replicated, and therefore crucial in informing public discussion.

This thesis project as a whole is largely based on qualitative methods, but includes a degree of quantitative data derived from the first stage of the textual analysis of GAP's press releases. The quantitative data is produced by categorizing words and themes and tracking their rate of occurrence. This categorization could be considered contradictory to my more qualitative approach in the rest of the study. In my qualitative analysis I actively engage with the larger picture of GAP, paying particular attention to the overall GAP narrative. The coding process for the quantitative data does not necessarily take contextual nuances into account, nor does it always allow the researcher to assess the data from a wider lens. However, a preliminary source of quantitative data is valuable as an initial point of departure in the research process. It serves as a means of identifying patterns within and between the releases. This is a key step for critical discourse analysis as identifying these discursive patterns also works to "identify and analyze discursive

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[112] Coombs and Sherry Holladay, *The Handbook of Crisis Communication*, 443.

[113] Ibid., 436.

[114] Google, for example, hosts its own press site for GAP with an FAQ page, archived press releases, an About page, and other details. When one searches for "GAP Press Release" through Google this is the first option that is presented on the search page.

[115] Coombs and Sherry Holladay, *The Handbook of Crisis Communication*, 436.

strategies, argumentation schemas…and means of realization in verbal as well as in other semiotic modes."[116] I chose to incorporate both qualitative and quantitative data because each method offers a unique perspective of the texts being analyzed, and together help to form a complex picture of how discourses are produced and consumed through text. According to Wodak and Meyer, CDA is "not interested in investigating a linguistic unit per se but in studying social phenomena which are necessarily complex and thus require a multi-disciplinary and multi-methodological approach."[117]

There are many methodological approaches to CDA and there is no agreed upon manner of proceeding through stages of analysis.[118] This diversity in methodological approaches has been labeled one of CDA's weaknesses; it is sometimes argued that CDA as a research approach is too broad to be useful. Conversely, it is also identified as one of its strengths, as CDA recognizes the complexity of methods that must be applied to equally complex texts and social contexts. The methodology used in this thesis project is derived from Fairclough's relational approach to text analysis. Fairclough's approach is "concerned with several 'levels' of analysis, and relations between these 'levels.'"[119] Fairclough distinguishes between the "external relations of texts" and "internal relations."[120] This chapter focuses on the "internal" relations of the texts that construct the GAP dominant discourse. I will remark upon "external" relations as well in this chapter to give important social context, but Chapter Three is dedicated to a fuller examination of the "external" relations. Fairclough identifies three components of a relational text analysis:

1) Semantic Relations: Analysis of how meaning is made between words, expressions and clauses.

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[116] Wodak and Brigitta Busch, "Approaches to Media Texts," 107.

[117] Wodak and Michael Meyer, *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, 2.

[118] Blommaert and Chris Bulcaen, "Critical Discourse Analysis," 450.

[119] Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse. Textual Analysis for Social Research*, 34.

[120] Ibid., 36.

2) Grammatical Relations: Analysis of the grammatical makeup of the text.
3) Vocabulary (lexical) Relations: Analysis of the "Patterns of occurrence between items of vocabulary."[121] The frequency that a particular word is accompanied by another particular word and how meaning is generated through this pairing.

This thesis will deal with lexical relations and semantic relations. Part II examines these relations through traditional text-objects, but Part II also incorporates images as a form of text that also plays a role in producing meaning. An analysis of the internal relations of text also investigates elements like genre.[122] In Part I, the press release, a particular kind of strategic text, is a vehicle for the delivery of words, phrases, and themes that have come to create the GAP narrative.

I examined press releases from fifteen of the seventeen original galleries from the first phase of GAP (Appendix B).[123] This sample was chosen because it was these seventeen galleries that set the initial tone for how gallery partners would speak about GAP. Between the fifteen galleries and museums, twenty-one press releases or formal blog postings were published online for public consumption. Several galleries, including the Frick Collection, Museo Thyssen, Rijksmuseum and the Tate Britain released two or three statements for the press and the public. The research process began with a preliminary reading of each press release, recording any observations of vocabulary repeated from release to release. I then read each release twice over, adding to my list of observations so that I had a comprehensive list of all the patterns identified between the releases. What language was used to describe the Project and its potential benefits? What themes were approached in the content of each press release? After this initial stage of analysis I proceeded to record the actual occurrence of the specific words or short phrases I identified earlier, including: accessible, high resolution, detail, interactive, click of a mouse, over 30,000, and never seen/experienced before. I also identified several more

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[121] Ibid., 37.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid and Museum Kampa in Prague did not openly publish a press release and are thus not included in my research sample.

general themes and recording their occurrence throughout the releases. The themes include:

a) Reference to any social networking websites
b) Discussion about connections between museums, building a museum community or the collaborative process between museums
c) Identifying GAP as a global art project
d) Specific mention of a *partnership* with Google
e) Reference to specifically Google branded technologies
f) Reference to technologies used (but not Google specific)
g) Discussion of GAP as a pedagogical tool
h) Discussion of GAP as democratizing or integral in disseminating culture online[124]
i) Reference to GAP as a means of reaching more users or a wider audience[125]

While these may be larger themes, they are realized through the use of particular vocabularies. For example, the word "partnership" is an important word choice when referring to a museum's relationship with Google. Fairclough writes that "the most obvious distinguishing features of a discourse are likely to be features of vocabulary— discourses 'word' or 'lexicalize' the world in particular ways."[126] Similar ideas run throughout the press releases and the GAP website, but what is most surprising, and illuminating, is how often nearly identical language is used to express those ideas.

## 2.2    Accessibility and Democratizing Culture

Nelson Mattos, VP Engineering at Google, is quoted in Google's press release commemorating the Project's launch:

> The last 20 years have transformed and democratized the world of art - with better access to museums in many countries and a proliferation of public artworks. We're delighted to have been able to collaborate with leading art museums around the world to create this state of the art technology. We hope it will inspire ever more people, wherever they live, to access and explore art - in new and amazing levels of detail.[127]

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[125] See Appendix B for the table used to record data during the content analysis stage of this thesis project.

[126] Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse. Textual Analysis for Social Research*, 129.

[127] Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse. Textual Analysis for Social Research*, 34.

"Access" is a reoccurring term in this statement and other Google-produced press releases. GAP is often painted as an exercise in accessibility with the first goal of bringing art to a larger audience and more specifically, making gallery collections more accessible through the power of the Internet and Google-branded technologies. In the official blog entry launching the Project, Amit Sood writes about GAP's origins:

> It started when a small group of us who were passionate about art got together to think about how we might use our technology to help museums make art more accessible—not just to regular museum-goers or those fortunate to have great galleries on their doorsteps, but to a whole new set of people who might otherwise never get to see the real thing up close.[128]

Sood specifically states "our technology" not simply "technology," stressing once more that this accessibility is enabled only by Google.

First, I want to explore how often the term "accessible" is actually used in each of the twenty-one gallery press releases. Between the twenty-one releases from the fifteen galleries "accessible" appears in ten instances. The releases vary in length, and the word "accessible" appears more frequently in the longer press releases. The State Tretyakov and the Tate Britain use the term three times; their release includes the same two statements by Nelson Mattos and Amit Sood included in the initial release produced by Google.  All instances of the term "accessible" are found in these two statements suggesting that even in releases disseminated by a separate entity, Google language can still be found. This is a symptom of the nature of press releases: "the raison d'être  of the Press Release is to be retold…as accurately as possible, preferably even verbatim."[129] This means that once Google has set the tone and rhetoric for the Project, that same language is reproduced in other releases and even in news articles and blog postings.

It was also important to not only record the reoccurrence of the term "accessible" but also to track how "accessibility" as a broader theme was deployed in the press releases. For each press release I recorded if any reference was made to "disseminating"

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[128] Amit Sood, "Explore Museums and Great Works of Art in the Google Art Project."

[129] Jacobs, *Preformulating the News. An Analysis of the Metapragmatics of Press Releases*, xi.

or "democratizing" culture online, and if the release referred to reaching a wider audience, specifically an audience who might not be comfortable in or have access to a traditional brick-and-mortar gallery. Three of the museums mention the Project as a vehicle to reach more users and four speak directly about the Project's ability to play a role in disseminating art online. The Van Gogh Museum's release includes a section labeled "a broad spectrum of cultures and civilizations" that stresses the diversity of art objects included in the Project:

> Google makes it possible for art lovers to discover all kinds of artworks, from paintings and sculptures to street art and photographs, with a few clicks of the mouse…Besides the art from Dutch museums, visitors can enjoy images ranging from Brazilian street graffiti to Islamic decorative art and ancient African cave drawings…Google's Art Project represents an effort to disseminate culture online and to make it as widely accessible as possible.[130]

For the sake of accuracy in the data collection process, I only recorded those releases which very clearly employed the phrases "disseminate art or culture" or "democratize art or culture." The use of the phrase "democratize culture" is interesting because it reveals a built-in hierarchy between high and low art: "Two assumptions are implicit in the idea of the democratization of culture; first, that only high culture of sacrosanct value is worthwhile; secondly, that once the (undifferentiated) public and the works are brought face to face, cultural development will follow."[131] In claiming that GAP enables a movement towards democratizing culture, both the partner institutions and Google effectively present a narrow, institutionalized definition of "culture;" this definition is associated with consecrated cultural works that exist offline, in the hallowed halls of famous galleries. Furthermore, "culture" as it is represented in many of the press releases, does not spontaneously make itself available to the public, but is rather "disseminated" by authoritative figures. In the context of GAP, these figures are both Google itself as well as its partner galleries and museums. Therefore, to employ the words "democratize culture" is to reinforce the position of cultural institutions as the active "giver" and the

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[130] Van Gogh Museum, "Google Launches New Version of Its Art Project."

[131] Gifford, "UNESCO and Cultural Development: Experience and Policies," 238.

public as the more passive "receiver" of culture: "Ideologies are representations of aspects of the world which contribute to establishing and maintaining relations of power, domination and exploitation."[132]

Fairclough cites a trend that he labels as the "democratization of discourse." "The democratization of discourse" is a movement towards taking discourses usually reserved for "experts" and re-lexicalizing them so they are appropriate for public consumption. The democratization of discourse involves a "tendency towards informality of language,"[133] an emphasis on "user-friendly" websites, and a desire "to appeal to large and diverse audiences by pulling away the mystique of unavailability and inaccessibility."[134] Spencer applies Fairclough's outline of the "democratization of discourse" to her analysis of Ontario school policy and the way these policies are communicated to the public. Spencer argues that Fairclough's term "the democratization of culture" can be re-worded to "label what can be seen as an emerging *discourse of democratization.*"[135] In school policy texts, for example, Spencer identifies a "language of public involvement"[136] wherein words like "voice," "shared ideas," and "partnership" are used frequently to suggest a more active role for the public in policy-making decisions.[137] In the case of GAP, words like "accessibility," "interactive," and "share" construct a "discourse of democratization" that proposes a balance of power between the public, Google, and the partnering cultural institutions. However, Spencer and Fairclough both argue that the discourse of democratization is sometimes a cosmetic fix to a deeper

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[132] Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse. Textual Analysis for Social Research*, 218.

[133] Spencer, "The Seduction of the Subject/Citizen: Governmentality and School Governance Policy," 7.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Ibid., 10.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Ibid.

problem: "the *simulations* of power symmetry 'are widely used techniques on the part of institutional power holders.'"[138]

## 2.3    "Made Possible By Google"

In the introduction to this thesis I began to describe how a great deal of discussion surrounding the technological aspects of GAP often stresses the role Google plays as the altruistic provider of technology for the museum community. In order to ascertain the level of Google brand presence in the press releases the occurrence of the following two themes was recorded:

> 1) Any references to a partnership with Google, specifically employing the word "partnership" or a close synonym.

> 2) Mention of a technology proceeded by "Google's" or described in some way as a uniquely Google technology. In addition, any mention of the well-recognized "Google Street View" was also recorded.

A partnership with Google is referenced nine times. In most cases, the press release describes the collaborative process between the museum and Google. Sir Nicholas Serota Director of the Tate is quoted in one of their press releases:

> This pioneering collaboration between Google and some of the world's leading arts organizations gives us a taste of the digital future for museums. New technology means we can now take these extraordinary art works beyond their individual homes to create the first global art collection…The technology and energy that Google has brought to this project has allowed a group of institutions across the world to collaborate in taking an enormous leap forward.[139]

Serota's language paints an image of GAP as a forward-thinking, entirely new venture laying the foundations for "the Gallery of the Future."[140] There have been many large-

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[138] Ibid., 15.

[139] Tate Britain, "Google and Museums around the World Unveil Art Project."

[140] It is quotations such as this one that informed my choice of title for this thesis Project "Evangelizing the 'Gallery of the Future.'" GAP is not characterized as simply another digitization project – it is something entirely different. It is the new template from which future digitization projects will be born. In

scale digitization projects put into place in the past few decades including The British Museum's online archive, The Museum Of Modern Art's online archives, and The Art Gallery of Ontario's CollectionX. However, Serota heralds GAP as something more unique, more revolutionary and more powerful due, in large part, to the technology provided by Google. Serota's quote is indicative of a larger tendency to depoliticize technology, and to focus instead on technology as a driver of progress. Google's history and reputation as a trendy, innovative corporation that hires young and bright individuals further helps to obscure that Google is always first and foremost a business:

> The 'Mad Scientist' and 'tech geek' images give an impression that technology is developed to fulfill humans' natural quest for more knowledge. Furthermore, technological development is seen as a linear process, that is, more technological development means a better society.[141]

Serota is not alone, as a great deal of the rhetoric surrounding the project is highly celebratory. In their coverage of the launch event at the Tate Britain the *Curator Journal* quote a discussion with Sheila Brennan of the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University: "It really did take an outside company like Google to produce such a project as they are doing with Google Books. And they will be able to sustain and continue to broaden the scope, which is very exciting."[142]

In the twenty-one press releases Google-branded technology is referenced twenty-one times. The Tate's press release for the Project's launch involves an extended discussion of the Project's Street View technology:

> Explore museums with Street View Technology…the info panel allows people to read more about an artwork, find more works by an artist and watch related YouTube videos. A specially designed Street View 'trolley' took 360 degree

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Chapter Three I carefully outline some of the more troubling concerns with GAP and argue that a more critical eye must be directed at it before it is labeled the "Gallery of the Future."

[141] Lee, "A Political Economic Critique of Google Maps and Google Earth," 910.

[142] Nancy Proctor, "The Google Art Project: A New Generation of Museums on the Web?".

images of the interior of selected galleries which were then stitched together, enabling smooth navigation of over 385 rooms within the museums. The gallery interiors can also be explored directly from within Street View in Google Maps.[143]

In this short paragraph, three recognizable Google branded items are referenced including Street View, YouTube and Google Maps. The Tate also produced a lengthy blog post on the behind-the-scenes process of capturing Chris Ofili's *No Woman, No Cry* using Google's Gigapixel technology. The Google and partner releases are not simple arrangements of words on a screen. Press releases can be powerful tools, especially at the start of a new initiative, because they may shape the discourse that will surround that initiative. GAP press releases take the best qualities from the discourse surrounding the WWW (user empowerment, accessibility, and democratization) and the best qualities from fine art discourse (consecration and pedagogy) and blend them together into a unique GAP narrative. The technical buzzwords like "Gigapixel" and branded technologies like "Google+" are an essential part of the narrative and the press releases instruct the public how to understand and discuss the technological aspects of the Project: "Discourses provide the language for talking about a topic, for presenting knowledge and views…they construct the lived reality."[144] As the Project continues to grow, the language used to talk about it may change. Press releases and promotional objects like YouTube Videos and blog posts can keep the public updated on this language, ensuring that the Project is spoken about in the way Google desires.

## 2.4    Part II: Investigating The GAP Website

In contrast to the more structured research process applied to analyzing the press releases, the method used to explore the GAP website is more fluid. A flexible method was necessary because of the ever-changing nature of websites. For example, in early 2013 GAP launched a redesign that changed the website address, the overall branding, the color scheme, the search functionalities, and the design and accompanying text on

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[143] Tate Britain, "Google and Museums around the World Unveil Art Project."

[144] Talja, "Analyzing Qualitative Interview Data: The Discourse Analytic Method," 469.

key pages such as "About" and "Education." This thesis project will predominately study the GAP as it appeared from June 2013 to April 2014.
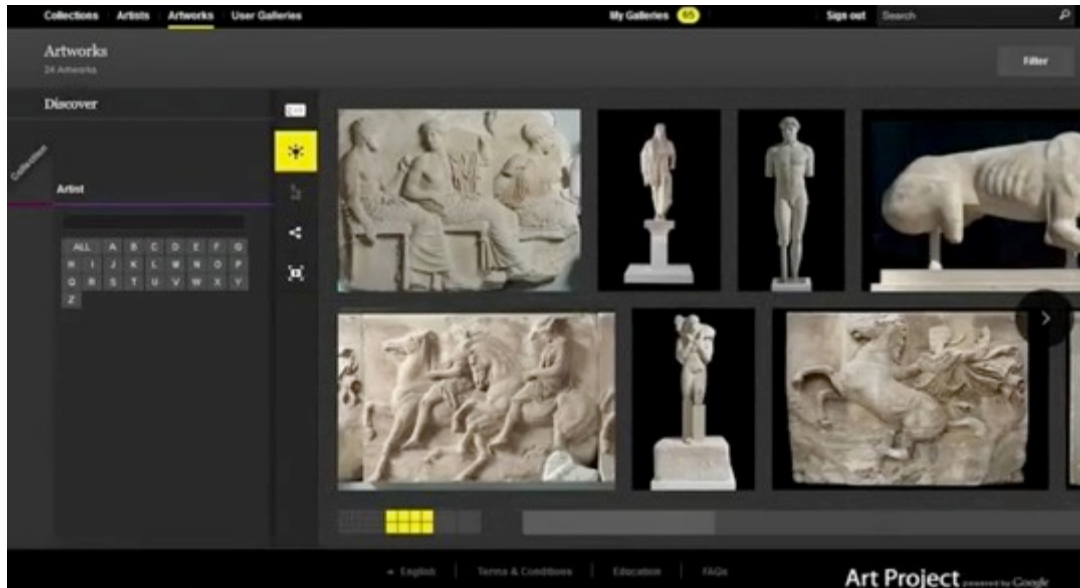


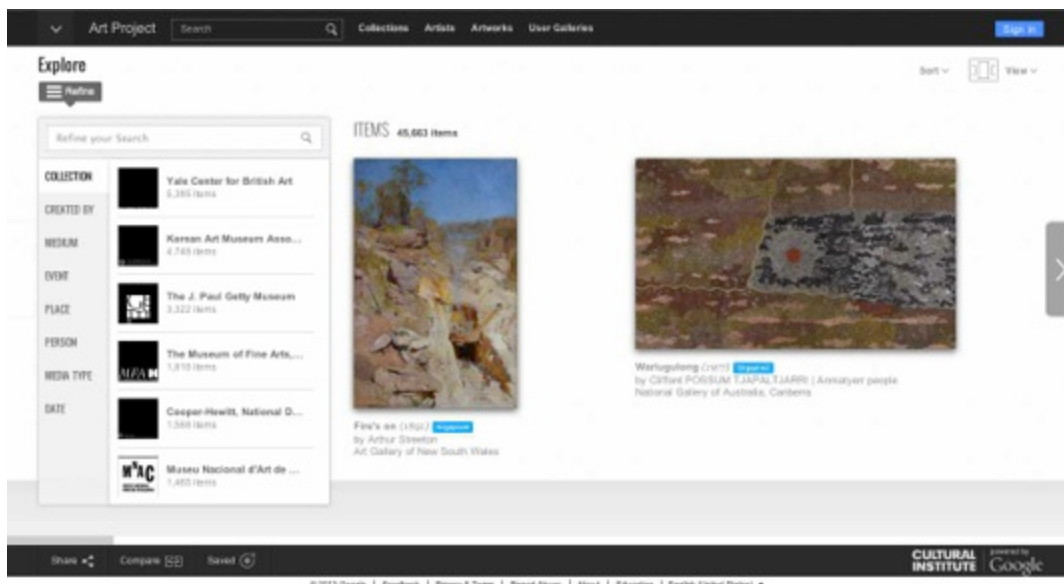**Figure 1: The "Artworks" page of the original GAP**



**Figure 2: The "Artworks" page from the GAP redesign**

While websites are an intriguing source of data, they also pose unique problems for the researcher. Websites are not static, and therefore have to be monitored regularly.[145] This concern was built into my methodology, knowing that changes in the website can reveal a great deal of valuable information if tracked correctly. In order to track any changes made to the website I identified eight key pages, and recorded a screen capture of each page every two months from June 2013-April 2014:

- The main home page
- A sample artwork page
- The "Collections" homepage
- The "Artists" homepage
- The "Artworks" homepage
- The "User Galleries" homepage
- The "About" page
- The "Education" page

However, even this method has its flaws. While it may be a solution for the ephemeral quality of webpages, the solution is fundamentally artificial. Once a screen capture of the website is recorded and saved as an image on a desktop, the source of data is no longer a website but a static image: "the 'frozen' version of the corpus, it must be said, is inevitably a distortion of the dynamic original (not least because its interactivity and substantial parts of its multimodality have been lost.)"[146] To remedy this problem, a great deal of time was spent every month during the research process using the website, testing its functionalities, and recording any notable observations while doing so. This was done to understand the overall flow of the website so that I could appreciate how a user might traverse the site.

Using critical discourse analysis as my research framework, the website's design was examined to determine how images of artworks are presented, how the Google brand is integrated into the design, and how the partner institutions are incorporated alongside the Google brand. Elements such as logos, navigation panels and icons were also

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[145] Sade-Beck, "Internet Ethnography: Online and Offline," 47.

[146] Mautner, "Time to Get Wired: Using Web-Based Corpora in Critical Discourse Analysis," 818.

analyzed individually to explore how even the smallest elements play a large role in meaning-making on the website. Online, "interaction design, interface design, and content on websites" work as an "integrated textual whole that mediates meaning."[147] A successful analysis of the GAP website must not only take into account individual webpages or the content contained within them, but also the relationships between webpages. In Part I, the internal relations of the text strictly involved the arrangement of words. In this section of the chapter, images, interface design as well as written text make up the internal relations. The press releases, in cooperation with public discussion about GAP, and the content of the website itself, mediates the user's experience with the website and with the art world as a whole. According to Fairclough, "much action and interaction in modern societies is 'mediated'…mediated (inter)action is 'action at a distance', action involving participants who are distant from one another in space and/or time, which depends upon some communication technology."[148] In this section I will examine how the internal relations of the text (the text being the GAP website) make meaning for the user, how this meaning is tied to the overarching GAP narrative, and how user interaction with the website and also with other users is mediated by the text. It is important to note, however, that while CDA provides a framework to recognize how mediation is played out through texts, it also maintains that this mediation is negotiated on an individual level. CDA always assumes that "media texts are perceived as dialogic, and the readings depend on the receivers, and on the settings."[149] The purpose of this chapter is to identify patterns in the production of specific discourses, not to claim any uniformity in the way discourses are lived.

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[147] Sade-Beck, "Internet Ethnography: Online and Offline," 206.

[148] Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse. Textual Analysis for Social Research*, 34.

[149] Wodak and Brigitta Busch, "Approaches to Media Texts," 106.

## 2.5     The GAP Homepage and a "Google Gallery" Aesthetic

The homepage (Figure 3) is a vital page for a website. It has the ability to attract or deter a potential user. In the simplest of terms, according to website usability research a homepage's role is to: "establish the identity and mission of the website, to show visitors its main parts and preview any popular or timely information, and to reveal how the site is structured and what options for navigation it offers."[150] When users enter the GAP website they are greeted by a distinctive template. The window is largely dominated by a single image titled a "featured item."[151] As Beil argues, the Project concentrates on producing "perfect" representations of artworks, with a technical focus on sharpness, color contrast, and resolution.[152] It is unsurprising then that the Project's homepage is filled with an image large enough to demonstrate these features – the high resolution photo of an artwork shining against a crisp background, with shortcuts for the Project's many features visible around the page. Upon entering the website the user has already encountered an artwork in a manner they likely never have before. The extraordinary quality of the images, the Project's focus especially in the first launch, is what sets the Project apart from other digitization initiatives; Google's Picasa technology, which is responsible for the high resolution images, shines on the homepage, demonstrating the valuable "resources" Google brings to GAP.

The GAP website is unique because it borrows elements from the aesthetics of the gallery as well as the aesthetics of popular websites, including other Google applications. The modernist art gallery is as much known for its white walls and sparse rooms as it is for the art contained within those rooms:

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[150] Djonov, "Website Hierarchy and the Interaction between Content Organization, Webpage and Navigation Design: A Systemic Functional Hypermedia Discourse Analysis Perspective," 146.

[151] Because of confidentiality issues, Google cannot reveal their algorithm that determines which artworks appear as a "Featured Item."

[152] Beil, "Seeing Syntax: Google Art Project and the Twenty-First Century Period Eye," 22.

> The white wall's apparent neutrality is an illusion. It stands for a community with common ideas and assumptions. Artist and audience are, as it were, invisibly spread-eagled in 2-D on a white ground. The development of the pristine, placeless, white cube is one of modernism's triumphs – a development commercial, esthetic, and technological.[153]

The design of the GAP template is clearly inspired, in part, by the visual composition of a gallery. The homepage is composed of a largely grey, black and white color scheme, which allows the colors of the featured artwork to stand out. The "Artwork" (Figure 6), "Artists" and "Collections" pages feature a stark white background with a large proportion of white space and clean typography. GAP is also opposite in color composition to Google's other applications including YouTube and Gmail. While Gmail features an all-white interface with bursts of bright red, yellow, and of course the colorful Google logo, the GAP interface is comparatively somber in its colors. However, the template's color scheme is interrupted by the bright blue "Sign in" button at the top right of the window. This blue button is a signature Google design and appears in the same spot on several of their websites including YouTube, Google+ and the Google search engine. It is a sign that the frequent Internet user is likely familiar with. The colour, font, and placement ensure that the "Sign in" button is instantly recognizable as a Google-branded graphic. A matching blue "g" logo appears beside the website address at the top of the window. Therefore, while the website template may not at first appear to align with the colourful branding that appears on a page like the Google search engine, it soon becomes apparent that the project is indeed distinctly Google. GAP does not entirely abandon the Google aesthetic in favour of a cleaner, gallery-inspired template, but rather finds a compromise between the two.

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[153] O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, 79.
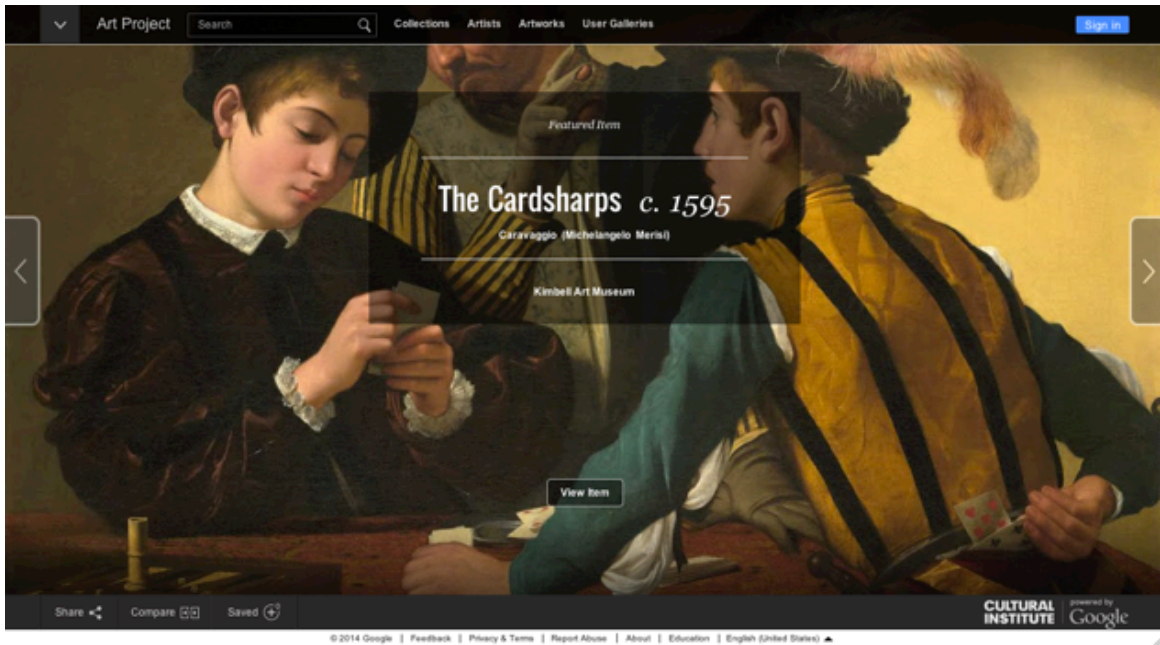
**Figure 3: The GAP Homepage**
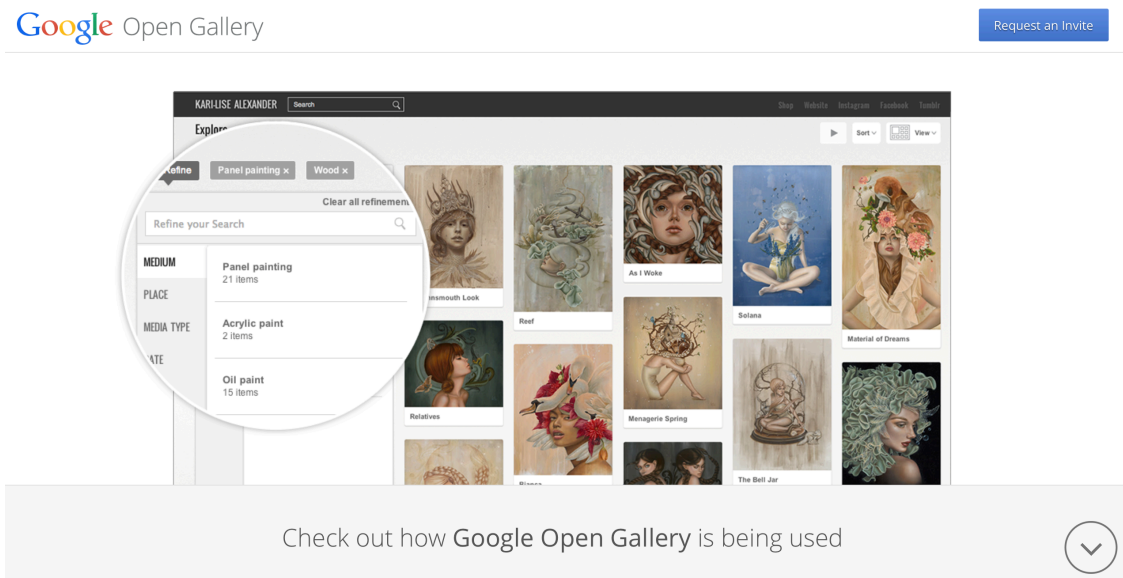


**Figure 4: The Google Open Gallery Website**

**Figure 5: The Belgian Comic Strip Centre's Open Gallery**



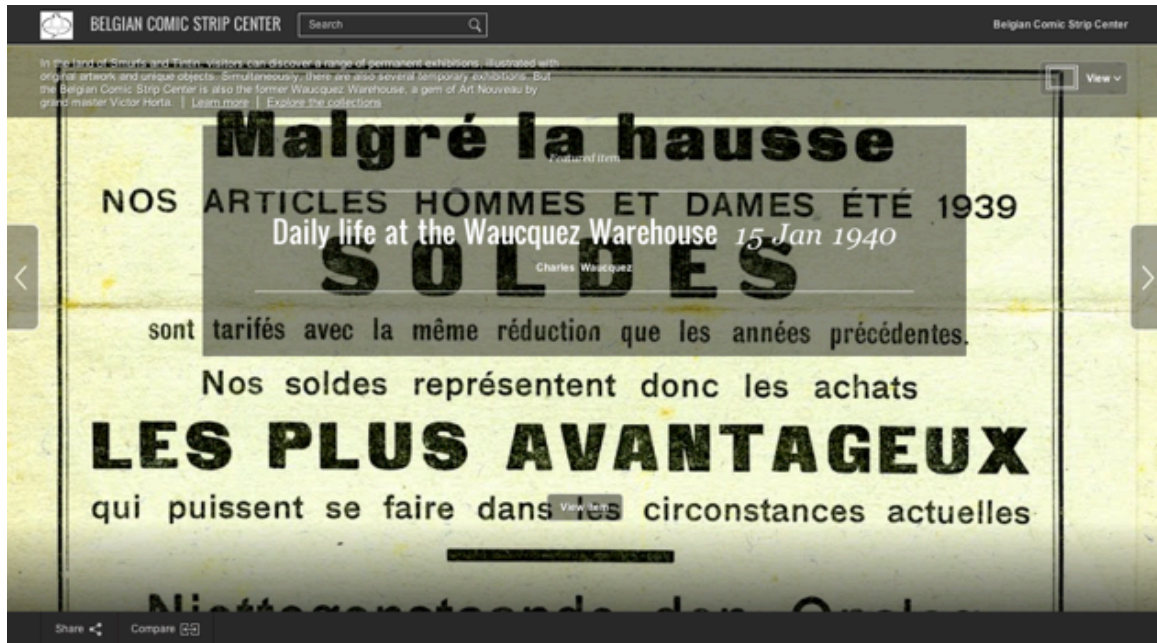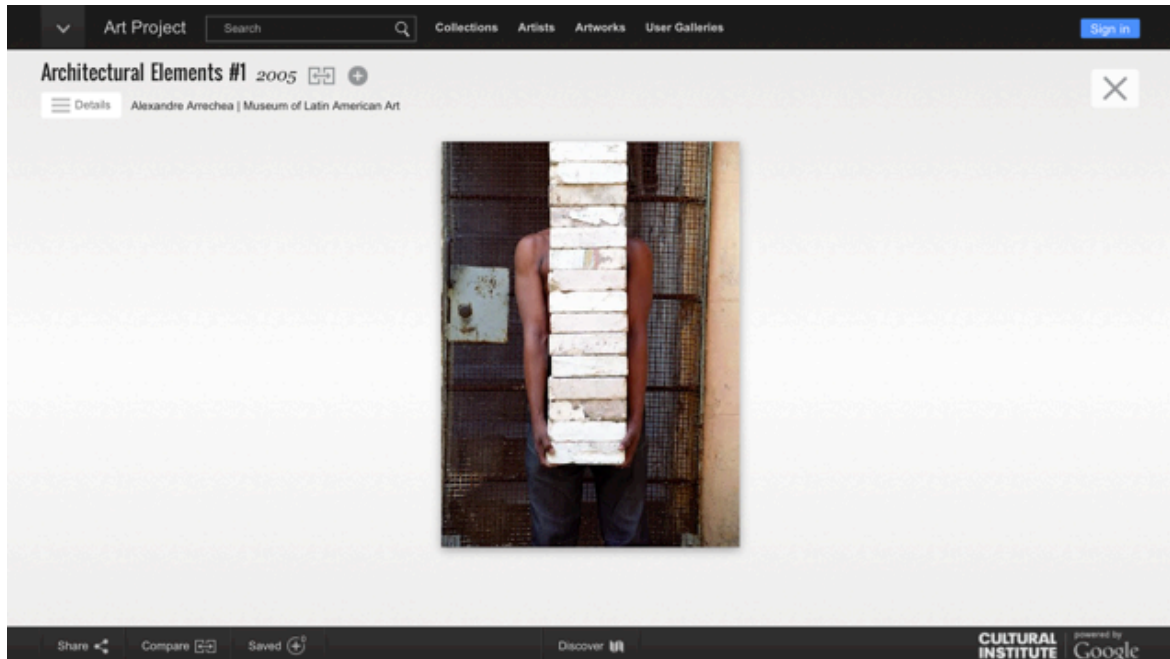**Figure 6: An Artwork page on GAP, for comparison with Open Gallery**

What is most significant about the GAP homepage is not necessarily its layout or its color scheme, but how the template is so easily replicated in Google's new project, Open gallery. The aesthetic of GAP thus transforms into the aesthetic for many other online art databases. With the very recent introduction of Google's Open Gallery in December 2013, more artists, museums, and other cultural outlets now have websites that almost identically resemble GAP. Open Gallery is an online platform that allows galleries to upload their own content into a template similar to GAP. They can include a "street view" tour of their gallery and allow users to zoom into artworks. The template also integrates a similar search mechanism to that included on the GAP "Collections" page. Describing Open Gallery, Google writes, "Google Open Gallery makes the technology behind Google's cultural projects Art Project, Historic Moments and World Wonders freely available to everyone to publish and share their artwork, archives, and other cultural content."[154] The GAP website has almost been replicated in its form and then opened up to the general public. The name "Open Gallery" immediately connotes a relation to the open source movement. However, while Google might make some of its tools available through Open Gallery, this is done only with a restricted template users can upload content to. There is no freeing of source codes, or opportunities for users to creatively alter the template's underlying data structures. In their official Google blog entry announcing Open Gallery Robert Tansley writes, "Do you own a small gallery and would like people to be able to dive into the hidden depths of your artworks with a powerful zoom?...Or are you an artist and want to show the evolution of your work but are not sure you have the technical expertise? Help is now at hand with Google Open Gallery."[155] One of the initial critiques of GAP was that although it hosted vetted content from galleries around the world, it offered no options for users to upload additional content that could be remixed with artworks from collections. The Art Gallery of Ontario's CollectionX incorporated this functionality before it was abandoned as the AGO moved entirely to GAP. While Open Gallery does offer artists and small galleries

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[154] Google, "About Google Open Gallery."

[155] Robert Tansley and Laurent Gaveau, "Online Exhibitions Made Easy with Google Open Gallery."

the option to host their content online, and Open Gallery is associated with the Google Cultural Institute, Open Gallery content is still kept separate from GAP content. There are no options for users to add artworks found on Open Gallery to their GAP user gallery. In fact, there are no links on the GAP website to Open Gallery. While Open Gallery provides the user with the illusion of empowerment—the chance to share their work with the large internet audience—Google still maintains a great deal of control. Interested parties must first request an invitation to Open Gallery and then be approved by Google in order to start their website. They must use Google software, their website is hosted on a Google domain, and their final website closely resembles the aesthetic of GAP. An area for future scholarship would be an investigation into how software like Open Gallery influences artist identity online. How is the tension between the artist and Google over authorship played out in Open Gallery websites? There are many other online resources like the popular Cargo Collective that provide templates for artists to create online portfolios. However, for the sake of this thesis project I am interested in how Google amasses symbolic capital through their initiatives like GAP and Google Open Gallery, and how both projects claim an "open-ness" that is not necessarily realized.[156]

## 2.6 "About:" Branding the GAP

Like the homepage, the "About" page is an important component of a website because it clearly outlines in more detail the website's mission and additional information about the group that operates the website. Quite obviously, it tells the visitor *about* the Project. Perhaps more than any page on the website, this one is the most strategically constructed because it must at once synthesize the GAP, Google Cultural Institute, and Google brands, creating a brand network; in this brand network each project's mission, its values and its aesthetics must support the others. Branding is a "semiotic device able to produce

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[156] In Chapter Three, I will consider how "open" GAP truly is. Google Open Gallery is not the focus of this thesis project and will therefore not be discussed in as great of detail. It is a very new feature that deserves to be mentioned here, however briefly, but would also be a valuable topic in itself for future scholarship.

a discourse, give it meaning, and communicate this to the addressees."[157] The GAP mission statement, for example is a mirror of the Google mission statement to "organize the world's information and make it universally accessible."[158] The Google statement even appears on the "About" page in the Frequently Asked Questions. Branding produces texts with a purpose; these texts are designed to construct a dominant discourse that legitimizes how power is distributed.

On the GAP website, the "About" page link can be found in the template's bottom navigation. The user is linked to a more generalized information page about not only GAP, but also several other projects that fall under the GCI umbrella. A large GCI logo is prominently displayed at the top of the page with the following text describing the Institute's purpose:

> Google has partnered with hundreds of museums, cultural institutions, and archives to host the world's cultural treasures online. With a team of dedicated Googlers, we are building tools that allow the cultural sector to display more of its diverse heritage online, making it accessible to all. Here you can find artworks, landmarks and world heritage sites, as well as digital exhibitions that tell the stories behind the archives of cultural institutions across the globe.[159]

When the GCI website was first launched the New York Times released the article "Quietly, Google puts History Online." In it Eric Pfanner claims that the Google branding is minimal on the website, with the traditional Google logo missing and replaced by a more innocuous "powered by Google" logo at the bottom of the page.[160] Although the colorful logo may be absent, Google elements are present everywhere, from the website

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[157] Scolari, "Online Brands: Branding, Possible Worlds, and Interactive Grammars," 170.

[158] Google Art Project, "About."

[159] Ibid.
You can find a more in depth analysis of this text on page 79.

[160] Pfanner, "Quietly, Google Puts History Online."

address[161] to the branded links to the GAP, YouTube and Google+ pages, to the multiple references to Google in the short paragraph quoted above. Google is partnering with the museums, Google is hosting the content, "Googlers" are creating tools, and it is not just the "Cultural Institute" but the *Google* Cultural Institute. The term "Googlers" is a subtle effort to lexicalize the Google brand, giving the user an approachable and fun term to refer to Google engineers, but also a term that the user can appropriate for him or herself. "Googlers," like "Googling"[162] is part of the language of the Google universe: "Each narrative world has its own dictionary….A brand that ends up on the tip of its users' tongues—often in a creative way, as we have seen in the case of "googlossary"— and becomes part of their everyday language can be considered to be a successful brand."[163]



**Figure 7: Three varying iterations of the GCI logo, found throughout the GAP website.**

GAP is the first initiative GCI lists, and its most popular initiative. Van Gogh's *The Starry Night* is used as the representative icon for the Art Project, displayed alongside a short paragraph describing the Project. In the first GAP promotional videos, *The Starry Night* is often used as the star artwork, and therefore it is unsurprising that it appears on this page as well. The painting is instantly recognizable by a large proportion of the

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[161] The website address for the Google Cultural Institute is "google.com/culturalinstitute" and the address for the GAP is: "google.com/culturalinstitute/project/art-project." Both projects fall under the Google domain name, once again reiterating that this is Google's project.

[162] "Googling" was added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2006. The term "Googleable" was also added.

[163] Scolari, "Online Brands: Branding, Possible Worlds, and Interactive Grammars," 184.

public. When a user enters GAP and turns to the "About" page a familiar artwork can create a sense of comfort and approachability: "the feeling of confusion when confronted with works of art decreases as soon as its perception is equipped with a certain amount of pertinent knowledge, no matter how vague."[164] In his study of the French gallery public, Bourdieu found that patrons often used famous painters as markers for helping to categorize other artworks: "it looks like a da Vinci."[165] These painters were often painters referenced in school art classes, or whose works often appears as reproductions on souvenirs, or posters. At the same time that *The Starry Night* is familiar, it is also consecrated by its reputation in art history. It therefore lends its own form of cultural capital to the Project as a whole, suggesting that within the website the user can find other famous works from equally famous museums. The "Learn More" link in the GAP description leads the user to a new page with a more detailed breakdown of the Project's functionalities and history. At the top of the page a large photograph of a "museum view" perspective of *The Starry Night* appears. Branding uses sets of icons, images, vocabularies and values that can be easily understood and absorbed by the public. *The Starry Night* is an icon for GAP and consistently appears throughout the website, on Google blog postings, and in promotional videos for the Project. It is immediately recognizable and the opportunity to study an undeniably famous painting at such a close level is impressive. *The Starry Night,* as an icon, encompasses the GAP brand; it is impressive yet approachable.

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[164] Bourdieu, Alain, and Schnapper, *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public*, 55.

[165] Ibid.
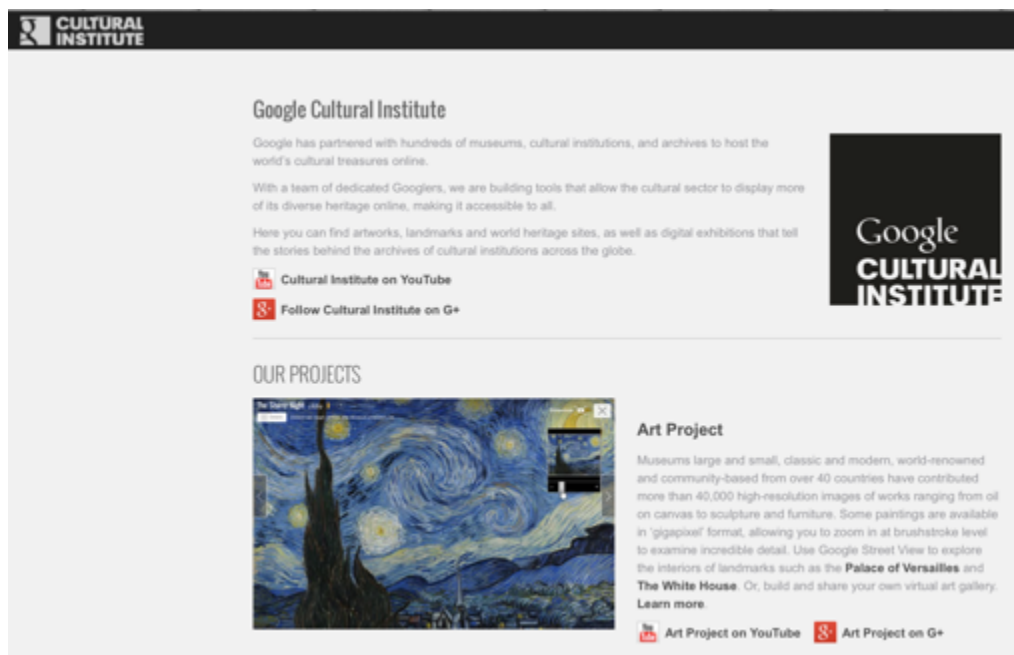
**Figure 8: The "About" page on the GAP website**

Since the Project's relaunch, another critical component of the GAP brand has been its scale. This scale is often expressed numerically, but it is also expressed geographically, branding GAP as a massive global initiative. On the "About" page, the "Overview" describes what makes GAP unique and lists some of the participating galleries and museums a user can explore. Of interest in this overview is the emphasis on numbers that help to quantify the Project's size, and overall reach in the art world. In promotional texts like press releases, a common technique is to employ numerals to indicate a corporation's power, or the positive impact of one of their projects.[166] The phrase "over 30,000", for example, is used often throughout the GAP press releases, and this practice is mirrored on the GAP website. The overview cites the 250 partner museums, the 6,000 artists, the 45,000 objects in comparison to the 1,000 from the initial launch, and the 60 museums. "45,000 objects" is mentioned twice more on the page, reiterating the Project's sheer size. In a piece on the Project's expansion, Roberta Smith of the New York Times writes,

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[166] Pander Maat, "How Promotional Language in Press Releases Is Dealt with by Journalists: Genre Mixing or Genre Conflict," 70.

> The first time around, the dazzlement of the Google Art Project lay especially in its fantastically magnified mega-pixel images of 17 paintings — one from each museum — and gallery views that enabled visitors to take virtual tours. You either zoomed in on magnified surfaces of paintings and brush strokes or zoomed through galleries. These options still exist (although not all the partners have them yet), but now it is the sheer plethora of images of art objects that dominates.[167]

The magnitude of the Project is part of its allure. An ever-growing Project is a necessary quality to promote in order to fully demonstrate Google's mission to "organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful."[168]

The Project's scope is also demonstrated, more qualitatively, by highlighting its global scale. In a piece commemorating the expansion of GAP, the Google Canada blog writes:

> Have you ever wanted to explore the art world without having to travel far and wide? Or to have a particular piece of art in front of you to talk about and share when you're miles from where you saw it? Google Art Project is a unique online platform for museums across the world letting visitors inside their doors and into their galleries with a little help from technology.[169]

Here, "travel far and wide" and "share when you're miles from it" emphasize distance as an obstacle that stands in the way of the public's ability to enjoy art; GAP eliminates distance as an obstacle. Quotes like this one, and the text on the "About" page work to brand GAP as a global museum community. In their press release for the project, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza writes, "the project constitutes a meeting place for museums and for the exchange of knowledge."[170] The final paragraph of the GAP "overview" on the "About" page describes the Project's diversity, both in the kinds of art included and the locations this art heralds from:

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[167] Smith, "An Online Art Collection Grows Out of Infancy."

[168] Google Art Project, "About."

[169] Wendy Bairos, "Canadian Museums Continue to Go Digital with Google Art Project."

[170] Museo de Arte Thyssen-Bornemisza, "Art Project Powered By Google."

> Take a look at the **White House in Washington D.C.**, or the **Museum of Islamic Art in Qatar**, or explore the collection of **São Paulo Street Art in Brazil** or the **Musée d'Orsay, Paris** in France before diving into the incredible detail of the **Japanese national treasure by Hideyori Kano**. Continue the journey in India, exploring the **Santiniketan Triptych** in the halls of the National Gallery of Modern Art, Delhi [emphasis in original].[171]

This text is a new addition to the website, added after the redesign. This reconfigured text is meant to reflect the GAP's new global nature. One of the first critiques directed at GAP concerned its failure to truly represent the world's art. Various media outlets including TIME argued, "the site represents a deeply Eurocentric idea of 'fine art.'" In the first launch, the seventeen participating museums hailed from nine countries but only three continents with absolutely no collections from Asia or Africa. This issue was partially rectified in the Project's second launch where the number of participating museums rose from seventeen to 150. Unfortunately, there are still no collections on the website representing the continent of Africa outside of South Africa. Brands are not stagnant; they shift in response to the larger cultural context. While the press releases and website text have always labeled the project as a global initiative, the new branding promotes the Project's global reach with renewed vigor.

## 2.7    Classifying Artworks, Artists, and Collections

The organizational structure of the GAP website and the manner in which a user locates a specific artist, collection, or artwork plays a subtle role in constructing the GAP narrative. The "Artists" and "Artworks" pages are some of the more sparse sections of the website. There is very little detailed descriptive text on these pages and most of the content is presented in simple grids of artwork images (Figure 9). The lack of descriptive text does not mean that these pages do not say a lot about GAP, about the GAP audience, and about the art world in general. Wodak and Busch, speaking about how language is used in the mass media, write, "media institutions often purport to be neutral, in that they provide space for public discourse, reflect states of affairs disinterestedly, and give the

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[171] Google Art Project, "About."

perceptions and arguments of the newsmakers."[172] The simplistic list of small images and accompanying names on the "Artists" page gives the impression that the page is a neutral transport for information; it simply provides the user with the names of artists, alphabetically. However, in the same way that CDA can be used to examine written text and images, CDA can be applied to filters and other methods of search. Algorithms are a form of text, and are therefore inherently political, although they may masquerade as neutral. To reiterate part of a quote I introduce in 1.2: "a code may also provide its own model of the world, its own logical system, or ideology."[173] CDA provides a framework to uncover how search mechanisms produce specific discourses.

In CDA, it is often equally important to determine what is *not* said, as it is to determine what *is* said. In the press releases and the text on pages like the "About" page, very little is said about the search pages. The releases simply claim the user will "explore the art world"[174] without detailing how he or she will actually go about finding familiar artworks and discovering new work. Through conflating the search process with "exploring the art world", the search process is oversimplified and depoliticized. "Exploring" suggests naturally finding objects—just "happening upon them." In the Project's most recent promotional video, artworks simply appear on the screen before the user. The camera travels through several artworks and into museum halls but the actual search mechanism that might call up these artworks is never shown. Relevant artworks magically appear and present themselves to the user. In contrast to this video, the actual search process on the GAP is very deliberate; algorithms "are like an invisible architecture that underpins almost everything that's happening."[175] Filters hierarchize and sort results based on data structures determined by the website engineers. In the case of GAP, the search structure is constructed by Google, with the metadata provided by the

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[172] Wodak and Brigitta Busch, "Approaches to Media Texts," 110.

[173] Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 64.

[174] Wendy Bairos, "Canadian Museums Continue to Go Digital with Google Art Project."

[175] Cairns and D. Birchall, "Curating the Digital World: Past Preconceptions, Present Problems, Possible Futures."

partner institutions.[176] Introna and Nissenbaum describe how search is often considered a "technical matter," obscuring its more political nature.[177] Similarly, Hillis et al. argue that the act of "searching" is so pervasive in online culture and "their very ubiquity has quickly naturalized them into the backgrounds, fabrics, spaces, and places of everyday life."[178] Larger search engines like Google's, and smaller filters like the ones that appear on the GAP website tend to be conceived of as "purely utilitarian and therefore, for many publics, as politically neutral…as if the sociometric search algorithms had somehow designed themselves."[179] I argue that, despite their utilitarian appearance, on the "Artworks" and "Artists" pages, some artworks, artists, art practices and art audiences are privileged by the filter.

The "Artworks" page is the most complex way for users to search for artworks. The page is dominated by a filter that allows the user to search by collection, artist, medium, event, place, person, media type, or date. When the user selects "Collections", results are filtered according to how many artworks fall under the collections, with the largest collections appearing first. "Medium" is organized similarly, with "Oil Painting" including 11,404 items and appearing first in the search results, immediately betraying the Project's bias toward painting. While photography is fairly well-represented, near the middle of the "medium" list, the user must scroll down to the bottom to find video-based artwork, with only sixty artworks falling under this category. On the "About" page, Google lists "Brazil Street Art" as one of the attractions of the redesign, demonstrative of the Project's apparent new focus on diversity. However, "Street Art" appears at the bottom of the very long medium list with only seven artworks. The length of the list means that the user is unlikely to scroll to reach the bottom and therefore the categories

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[176] In 3.2 and 3.3 I will argue that one of the biggest flaws of the search functionalities on GAP is the lack of input users have in the search structure. For example, there are no opportunities to contribute to the metadata through features like tagging.

[177] Introna and Helen Nissenbaum, "Shaping the Web: Why the Politics of Search Engines Matters," 181.

[178] Hillis, Petit, and Jarrett, *Google and the Culture of Search*, 5.

[179] Ibid.

near the bottom may be ignored by most users. "Brazil Street Art" does not, in actuality, have the privileged position the "About" page suggests. The "Artworks" page, upon careful examination, displays several other hierarchies that emphasize some artworks or artists over others. Pieces already established in the fine art canon, like Vincent van Gogh's *The Starry Night* are made to look more significant than lesser-known pieces. The technology used to digitize the gallery collections is time-consuming and expensive. These material realties mean that a gallery's entire collection cannot be digitized. Specific works are chosen to be digitized for the project's website, with many of them captured and uploaded in high resolution. Some artworks, usually the more publicly recognized works, are captured using GAP's Gigapixel technology. Resolution is a quantifier for the status of the artwork, teaching the user what artworks are the most "valuable". When the "Artworks" page opens, before the user begins to filter content, the page displays a list of artworks the user can scroll through. However, all the artworks that appear first on the list are Gigapixel works. Only once the users have scrolled through over one hundred Gigapixel artworks can they look at the other artworks. Unless users spend a great deal of time scrolling, it is likely they would only look at the Gigapixel artworks and therefore interact with a very limited picture of the art GAP offers. Hillis et al. argue, "different codes enable the visibility of different kinds of knowledge."[180] On GAP, some art practices are more visible than others, with this visibility often linked to their level of consecration in art history discourse. The user recognizes that if an image has been captured using Gigapixel technology, and is consequently displayed first on the "Artworks" section of the Project's website, then the artwork must have some importance attributed to it. In *Culture* Williams writes that the history of art is founded on "systems of social signals" that "constitute the practical societal organization of that first deep cultural form in which certain arts are grouped, emphasized, and distinguished."[181] He identifies predominant signals such as "occasion" and "place", specifically citing the art gallery as a place that signifies that what is contained within the walls is "art." The

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[180] Ibid., 63.

[181] Williams, *Culture*, 131.

gallery walls separate "art" from ordinary images. Online, new structures that determine value are instituted in lieu of place. In the case of GAP, image resolution is a signal that tells the viewer what to look at, and how to look.

Using Fairclough's relational text analysis approach as a framework, throughout this chapter I have outlined how the internal relations of texts produce specific discourses about GAP. Through examining the internal relations of the search filter, for example, I have described what Google says (or does not say) about the complexity of the search process and how the search filters hierarchizes art practices and audiences. The internal relations of the search engine indicate external relations including how hierarchies between art practices are sustained in the art world by making some practices more visible than others. This Chapter began to highlight how power and dominance are performed discursively, but in order to fully ascertain how GAP reproduces power structures, the social and cultural atmosphere surrounding GAP must also be considered. The external relations of the texts explored in this chapter will be analyzed in greater detail in Chapter Three. I will contextualize my preliminary analysis of the GAP website and press releases in the theory outlined in Chapter 1.
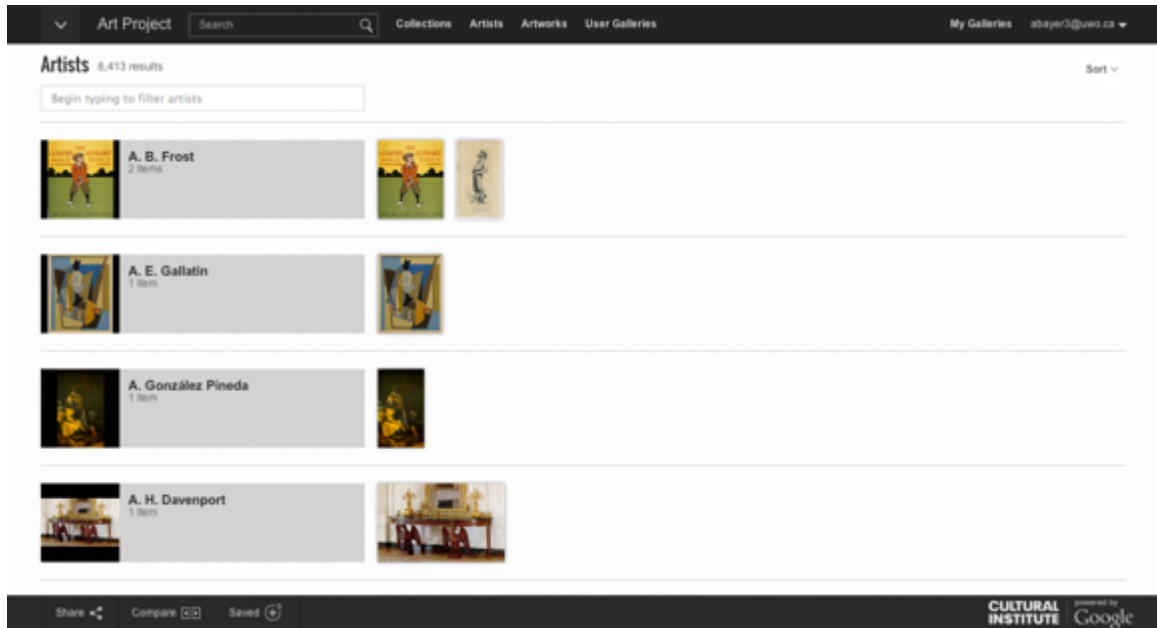
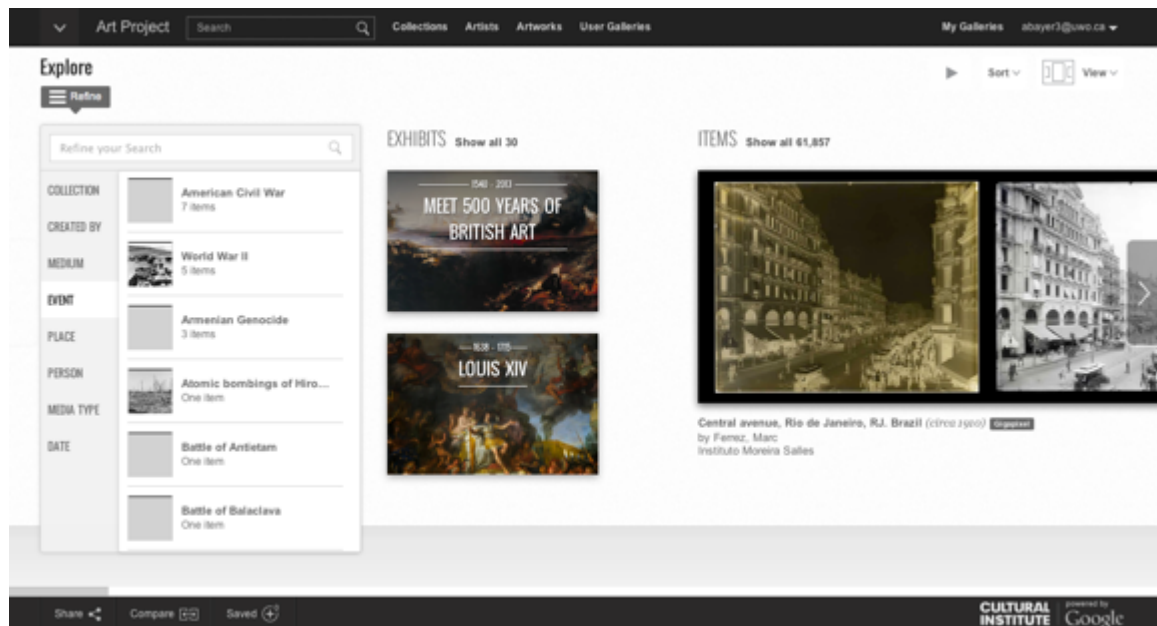**Figure 9: "Artists" page on GAP**



**Figure 10: "Works of Art" page on GAP**

# 3 Revolutionizing It All? Audiences, Interfaces and The Google Art Project Narrative

## 3.1 Introduction

What is Google Art Project? This deceptively simple question is what first drew me to this thesis as I truly struggled to label GAP and identify its significance in the art world and beyond: is it an online exhibition, an online catalogue, an educational tool, a form of online entertainment, an advertisement for Google designed to increase its symbolic and economic capital, an advertisement for the galleries and museums involved, a preservation project, or perhaps even a community for art lovers around the world to share their stories, opinions and talents? GAP is at times all of these things, but as identified in Chapter Two, when Google talks about itself some of these roles are praised loudly in press releases, blog posts and website content, while some of the messy and potentially unfavorable elements of GAP disappear from its rhetoric. From its position as a large corporation online Google possesses the power to shape the dominant discourse of GAP. Describing external relations Fairclough writes, "think of power and discourse. The power of, for instance, the people who control a modern state (the relation of power between them and the rest of the people) is partly discursive in character. For example, it depends on sustaining the 'legitimacy' of the state and its representatives."[182] There are always counter-discourses that intersect a dominant discourse, but the dominant discourse works to reproduce itself, ensuring that it maintains its position of privilege. Repetition of vocabulary and overarching themes in GAP press releases establishes consistent discursive patterns that become so pervasive and familiar to online publics that the dominant discourse masquerades as truth. A theme that appears frequently throughout the press releases is that GAP offers a service that has "never been seen or experienced before." This cult of the new inspires blind excitement, often masking contradiction and deterring critical thinking. William Leach describes how the cult of the new played a large role in the spread of capitalism in the early twentieth century. The cult of the new

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[182] Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, 4.

was intimately tied to ideas about American progress: "phrases like the 'New World,' 'new heaven on earth,' and 'new nation' were common currency; and everyone seemed to boast of the country's 'innovative ways.'"[183] We see a more distilled version of this trend appearing in the GAP discourse, where GAP is often touted as a solution to the problems and limits of the traditional museum or gallery. Google often appears at the center of this, as a beacon of progress while GAP simultaneously supports Google's overall brand image. Brin and Page remind employees and customers in their "Letter from the Founders" that:

> Google is not a conventional company. We do not intend to become one. Throughout Google's evolution as a privately held company, we have managed Google differently. We have also emphasized an atmosphere of creativity and challenge, which has helped us provide unbiased, accurate and free access to information for those who rely on us around the world.[184]

This Chapter is dedicated to identifying and analyzing the external relations of the GAP website and press releases and the discursive patterns surrounding GAP. In Chapter Two I began to outline some of these patterns, describing how Google has strategically used language, website design and branding to construct a project that presents itself as "a game-changer for the way that museums approach the web."[185] Google's mission, technology, and marketing are represented as a guiding light for the museum and gallery sectors, driving progress forward and leaving behind the institutions' reputations for elitism and inaccessibility. The discursive patterns identified in Chapter Two can be summarized through three major claims about GAP that are intricately woven within the GAP narrative:

1. GAP, its sharing functionalities and social networking integration empower the user to "interact" with art more actively than what is possible within the traditional art gallery or museum.

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[183] Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchant, Power and the Rise of a New American Culture*, 4.

[184] Hillis, Petit, and Jarrett, *Google and the Culture of Search*, 48.

[185] Wolly, "Google Art Project Comes to the Smithsonian."

2. GAP as an online art database, works against the hierarchies that are often criticized in the traditional art world.
3. GAP democratizes culture, making it accessible to all. Once again, GAP's successfulness at making art accessible is always placed in opposition to the comparatively closed-off traditional gallery.

The art gallery has been understood as an archive (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000), a monument (Duncan, 1994), a classroom (Eisner, 1990) (Hooper-Greenhill, 1991), a sublime space (Duncan and Wallach, 1978) and a marketplace (Stallabrass, 2004) (Chin-Tao Wu, 2003). The gallery shifts between these roles in response to transition periods in society as a whole. At the same time, the art gallery is not simply determined by material changes in society, but actively takes part in producing those same changes. While the art gallery has traditionally been associated with the vision of a single curator, or group of curators, GAP potentially follows a larger cultural movement away from the singular authoritative voice, toward a more democratic curatorship.

## 3.2    Interactive Users?

The GAP "User Gallery" page and sharing functionalities are continually emphasized through press release and website text as a pedagogical tool as well as a chance for the user to "interact" with art. It is necessary to place quotes around the term "interact" here because its definition is complex. "Interactive" is often used as a buzzword to signify a level of user empowerment, placing the user in a more active position than that of passively looking at an artwork, or listening to an expert share their perspective. While GAP creates opportunities for forms of user engagement, what is the depth of this engagement? In the modernist conception of the museum or gallery, interactivity was understood quite differently. Benjamin Gilman, Director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston in the 1920s argued that the gallery should be a "state of withdrawal from the day-to-day world, [that] passage into time and space in which the normal business of life is suspended."[186] Thom Collins further describes,

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[186] Collins, *Somewhere Better Than This Place*, 27.

> The museum facility was still conceived as a secular 'temple'; the presentation of isolated art objects as icons was still intended to encourage intense private contemplation; and the near absence of didactic materials in the exhibition space was meant to encourage attention to the formal aspects of the work on view, suppressing all other meanings.[187]

In the modernist gallery space, "interaction" is understood as a form of private contemplation. The gallery visitor is meant to look at and consider the work on view, using only the work itself and perhaps a small didactic panel as visual cues.

Comparatively, on the GAP website, interactivity is defined by one's ability to not only look at and contemplate an artwork, but also to share one's perspective with other users within the Project's website as well as in the wider online community. Private contemplation is then encouraged to become public. Lev Manovich writes in both "On Totalitarian Interactivity" (1996) and *The Language of New Media* (2001), artwork was interactive for centuries before the advent of the Internet. In *The Language of New Media,* Manovich identifies a series of myths about what new media is and is not. One of the myths Manovich dedicates a great deal of attention to in his book is:

> New media is interactive. In contrast to old media where the order of presentation is fixed, the user can now interact with a media object. In the process of interaction the user can choose which elements to display or which paths to follow, thus generating a unique work. In this way the user becomes a co-author of the work.[188]

Computers are by nature "interactive", simply based on the fact that users must manipulate information on the screen to operate a computer. This kind of user involvement might be built into the activity of using a computer, but Manovich reminds the reader that this does not mean that other media forms that preceded the computer are not "interactive" as well. The computer physicalizes many of the interactive processes that already occur when we do something like look at an artwork in a gallery:

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[187] Ibid.

[188] Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 79.

> Now, with interactive media, instead of looking at a painting and mentally following our own private associations to other images, memories, ideas, we are asked to click on the image on the screen in order to go to another image on the screen and so on.[189]

If an individual visits Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* in the Uffizi Gallery there is a didactic panel and aside from this information the individual must fill in any other gaps in information using cues from the room, the building, any interaction with the painting they may have had in an educational setting, any portrayals of it in popular culture, references to it in other artworks and a myriad of other sources of knowledge. When a user visits the GAP artwork page for *The Birth of Venus* they are given a much more lengthy description of the artwork's provenance and the iconography represented within it. Other details including the painting's measurements, the medium and its current location in the world are also listed. For this painting there are also links to the GAP YouTube video series "ArtSleuth" produced to show "that there is more than one expects in the pictures. It encourages the audience not simply to admire artworks, but to watch them more closely and to think critically about them."[190] If the Modernist art gallery is characterized by its isolation[191] of art, patrons, and information, then the online gallery is celebrated for its ability to connect information from various sources, externalizing the interactive process through hyperlinks.[192] Online, the user is encouraged to follow hyperlinks that join together various websites, images, videos, people, and ideas. Hyperlinking is more than a simple connection of text between two websites:

> That which binds together the nodes of the web, websites, can be social networks as well as technological components (Kling 2000). From this perspective, we can potentially discern fingerprints of social relations through the analysis of

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[189] Manovich, "On Totalitarian Interactivity."

[190] Google Art Project. 2014.

[191] Thom Collins argues that the physical and social structure of the art gallery encourages various forms of isolation: "In her book *Civilizing Rituals,* Carol Duncan points to the isolation both of artworks (from other artworks, obtrusive architecture, and didactic materials) and individuals (from other visitors and the world outside the museum) as the essential function of the White Cube" (Collins 2003, 22-23).

[192] Park and Thelwall, "Hyperlink Analyses of the World Wide Web: A Review."

configurations of hyperlink interconnections among Web sites that represent a social system's components such as people, private companies, public organizations, cities, or nation-states.[193]

The hyperlink paradigm inspires images of a "cybermuseum of the future, with 'an inexhaustible image file and multiple paths that allow navigation through the archive.' In this vision the centralized, institutionalized, physical exhibition space gives way to the personal, digital, desktop museum, and the viewer becomes a collector/curator."[194]

For Manovich, the myth of interactivity is problematic in the way it obscures contradiction with exuberant rhetoric. Vincent Mosco writes on myth: "myths are important for what they reveal (including a genuine desire for community and democracy) and for what they conceal (including the growing concentration of communication power in a handful of transnational media businesses)."[195] Mythologized interactivity provides users with an illusion of power under the banner of Web 2.0, while simultaneously delivering them into the hands of giant hardware and software corporations. However, the discourse surrounding interactivity also suggests a desire to open up institutionalized spheres like the fine art world, enabling a more personalized, shared experience with art. This movement towards a more active art experience is mirrored in the growth of "participatory art" from the Italian Futurists' carnivalesque events[196] to Harrell Fletcher and Miranda July's *Learning to Love You More*:[197] "The individual tendencies of participatory art—the playful and/or didactic, the 'pastoral' and the 'sociological'—have at least one thing in common: the background of institutional criticism, the criticism of the socially exclusionary character of the institution of art,

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[193] Ibid.

[194] McLaughlin, "The Art Site on the World Wide Web."

[195] Mosco, *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace*, 19.

[196] Ibid., 24-25.

[197] Graham and Cook, *Rethinking Curating: Art After New Media*, 121.

which they counter with 'inclusionary' practices."[198] While the term "interactivity" may be deployed incorrectly in Web 2.0 and online art discourse, there are genuine opportunities to incorporate functionalities online that can rework institutionalized power structures.[199]
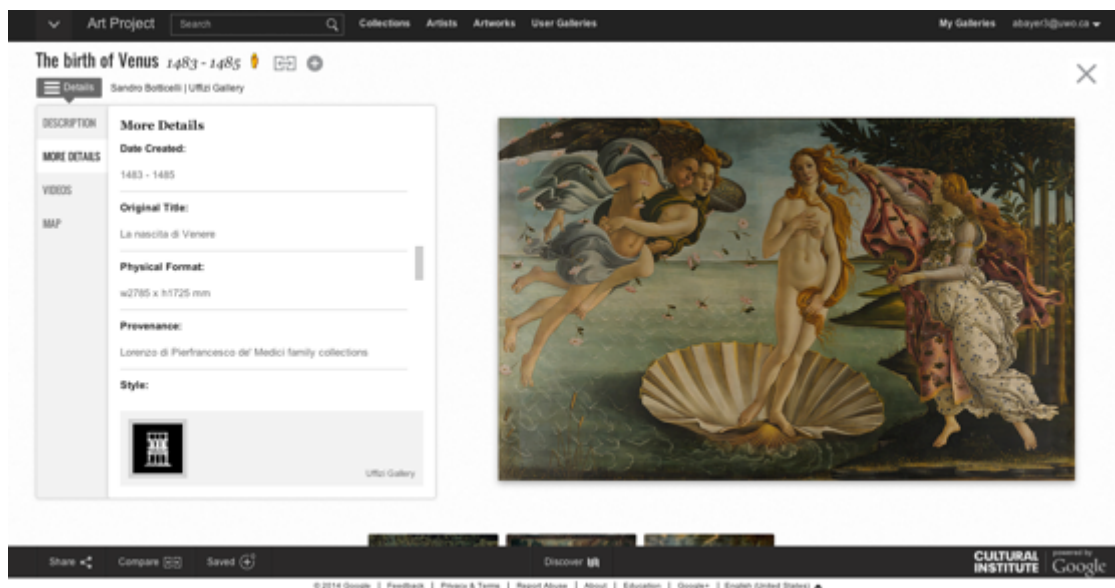


**Figure 11: The Artwork Page for *The Birth of Venus* on GAP**

Discussions about the Internet and particularly Web 2.0 often cite how the Internet complicates the division between producers and consumers. In Christian Fuchs' "Web 2.0, Prosumption, and Surveillance" he cites Tim O'Reilly's popular definition of Web 2.0:

Web 2.0 is the network as platform, spanning all connected devices; Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an "architecture

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[198] Christian Kravagna quoted in Graham and Cook, *Rethinking Curating: Art After New Media* ,111.

[199] In 3.3 I will however, identify the limits of this potential "reworking."

of participation", and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences.[200]

It is not to say that the relationship between users and producers was mono-directional until new media, nor is it to say that the relationship is now always equal and bidirectional. For example, Henry Jenkins describes how a letter column in the pulp magazine *Astounding Stories* became the source of a science fiction postal network for fans to communicate with one another, socialize, and discuss writing ideas as well as popular culture in general.[201] The Internet therefore, does not represent a complete break from what came before; it can sometimes help to reshape relationships between producers and consumers, but it can also maintain the same power imbalances that structure the offline world. What can users *really* do on GAP? How much can they add, remix, share, and what are the limits of this activity? One of the features cited often in the press releases and highlighted in GAP's "Education" section is the "User Galleries" functionality. The user can collect any number of art pieces from various galleries and arrange them in an order of his or her choosing. Users can also add comments to each piece and share the gallery through Google+, Facebook, Twitter, Google Hangouts and email. This is a unique idea and it gives users the ability to re-contextualize artworks, remixing ideas from various time periods, media, and artworks to form a new story. The value of the User Galleries feature is that the individual can customize it to his or her own liking. Some users might collect sculpture from a particular time period while other users might simply collect works that appeal to them with no conscious order.

However, the User Gallery functionality has many limits. Most obviously, although the User Galleries functionality does allow users to share their collections through social networking outlets like Facebook or Google+ there is very little opportunity for user-to-user interaction within the GAP interface itself. An individual can view other user galleries but cannot comment in any way on these galleries. This severely limits user-to-user interaction, restricting any form of deep community building. A press

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[200] Fuchs, "Web 2.0, Prosumption, and Surveillance," 289.

[201] Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*, 137–138.

release quoted in Chapter Two reads: "the project constitutes a meeting place for museums and for the exchange of knowledge."[202] On GAP there is a clear knowledge flow from the gallery partners to the user, but this flow follows the traditional educator-student paradigm of the art institution. Although users can become "producers" through taking on a pseudo-curator role in "User Galleries," without any dynamic comment functionalities or inter-community sharing possibilities, the "interactivity" GAP allows is shallow. Users can share their gallery with their Facebook friends, or on Twitter, but any interaction those external friends have with the content is not fed back to GAP. All interactivity on GAP is fairly mono-directional, with a user being able to create something, but never able to do much with what they have created. Web 2.0 technologies are often praised for their ability to create communities.[203] The GAP launch press release claims that their "Create Your Own Collection" feature is an "ideal tool for students or groups to work on collaborative projects or collections."[204] But once more, the GAP interface does not fully support "collaborative projects." Users cannot create joint collections in a manner similar to the popular Google Documents. They cannot add to one another's collections nor can they create a group of linked collections. If users cannot respond to one another's content, or directly respond to gallery content, the GAP community cannot truly achieve the "community building" celebrated in Web 2.0 discourse. In fact, many of the functionalities and qualities Web 2.0 is largely known for are absent in the GAP interface.

One of the popular attributes of Web 2.0, tagging[205], is surprisingly absent from GAP. Ross Parry describes how Web 2.0 technologies changed not only the way

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[202] Museo de Arte Thyssen-Bornemisza, "Art Project Powered By Google."

[203] Mason, "Using Web 2.0 for Learning in the Community," 202.

[204] Google, "Google and Museums around the World Unveil Art Project."

[205] Moulaison cites Guy and Tonkin's (2006) definition of tagging as, "any word that defines a relationship between the online resource and a concept in the user's mind." Users label an object, using the website's tagging functionality, and this new label becomes visible to others users.

museums functioned online, but also how they integrated participatory practices in brick-and-mortar museums. He cites Chun et al.:

> Tagging lets us temper our authored voice and create an additional means of access to art in the public's voice. For museums, including these alternative perspectives signals an important shift to a greater awareness of our place in a diverse community, and the assertion of a goal to promote social engagement with our audiences.[206]

Tagging allows for a more collective form of categorization. Ross Parry continues on to describe *LIVE!Label,* a research project between the University of Leicester and the Digital Heritage Research Group, that worked to create a more flexible idea of the traditionally authoritative museum label: "it, too, worked to temper the voice of the curator-author in an exhibit's labels, to turn the label into a space for other voices to be heard. *LIVE!Label* represents the ways digital media are allowing the narratives of the museum to become more fluid, more responsive and more polyvocal."[207] *LIVE!Label* imagined a fluid digitally networked museum label that could change constantly based on new interpretations of artworks and historical objects by individuals in the public.[208] After considering examples like *LIVE!Label*, it also becomes increasingly clear how inflexible the GAP interface truly is for users. Web 2.0 discourse often celebrates co-authorship and remixing (Miller, 2005); however on GAP little of this is actually built into the website's organization. Museum voices still ring loud and true, whereas user voices are barely a whisper.

## 3.3    Branding Interactivity

An underlying concern in both this chapter and the thesis as a whole is not only with the complexities of digitized art collections, but with the fact that the particular one being studied here is operated by Google. The press releases discussed in Chapter 2 claim that

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[206] Parry, *Recoding the Museum: Digital Heritage and the Technologies of Change*, 110.

[207] Ibid., 111

[208] Ibid., 112.

GAP might represent a movement toward the democratization of art collections. To use the term "democratization" to suggest an escape from traditional gallery control is misleading: both systems exert restrictions of some kind. In the case of GAP, the user cannot partake in the potential empowering or "democratizing" effects without entering into a relationship with Google, the business. Google reminds its GAP users on the "Education" page: "don't keep all the fun to yourself. Make your own quizzes, and share your User Galleries and your DIY creations on Google+."[209] The Project's name itself highlights that this is not only an "Art Project" but it is Google's "Art Project." Because the cost of entry for new businesses is lower online than in brick-and-mortar markets, there is often an assumption that the World Wide Web distributes ownership more evenly than in the offline world. As large multinational corporations continue to purchase smaller competitors, this assumption becomes increasingly untrue. As of 2013 Google purchased and absorbed over 150 other companies including YouTube for $3.1 billion and Double Click for $12.5 billion.[210] With Google already in control of Google Search, Google Books, Google Maps, and their many other platforms, what does it mean for GAP to be added to this roster?

In "Art After Web 2.0" Manovich describes how the social networking and blog culture that is the hallmark of Web 2.0 does not always transform a consumer into a producer.[211] Users are always negotiating with subtle forms of control including computer hardware, software, and web interfaces that limit and shape what kinds of content are produced. In the early stages of GAP, some forums cited users having problems accessing the website; once they opened the website they were prompted to download Google Chrome for the website to function. The Dutch National Museum of Antiquities even mentions in their press release: "You need Google Chrome browser to view the Google Art Project. If this browser is not installed on your PC, when you open

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[209] DiMaggio and Michael Useem, "Cultural Democracy in a Period of Cultural Expansion: The Social Composition of Arts Audiences in the United States," 179.

[210] Hillis, Petit, and Jarrett, *Google and the Culture of Search*, 50.

[211] Manovich, "Art After Web 2.0."

the website you will be asked whether you wish to download it. Just follow the simple instructions."[212] GAP, only a part of the Google brand, can be a gateway to Google's other services. An individual who creates a Google account to use the User Galleries functionality is linked into the chain of Google online outlets including Gmail, YouTube, Blogger, Google Drive, Google+ and Google Hangouts. One account can link a user to every Google platform, ensuring that the user is not only turning to GAP to look for images of artworks, but also looking for videos on YouTube, talking to friends and interest groups on Google+, sharing documents with peers on Google Drive, and sending email through Gmail. Each platform the user networks with gathers more data about his or her online activity. Fuchs outlines Google's foray into social networking with their service Google Buzz. This service has since fallen into obscurity but has been replaced by Google+. Fuchs describes how Google Buzz was created in order to directly compete with other services including Facebook and Twitter for not only user attention, but user data:

> Popular social networking platforms attract millions of users, who upload and share personal information that provides data about their consumption preferences. Therefore, commercial social networking sites are keen on storing, analyzing and selling individual and aggregated data about user preferences and user behavior to advertising clients in order to accumulate capital.[213]

Google's DoubleClick collects data about its users and synthesizes it with information about user behavior on other online platforms. Technically, users can opt out of DoubleClick, Fuchs adds, however the option to opt out is hidden within the other account settings, and it is always automatically turned on until a user opts out. Many users have been opted in without ever really knowing. GAP users cannot fully engage with the website's functionalities without surrendering their own data to Google. Google's online services are advertised as "free," tools for online publics to make use of. Users are valuable and so is the data they generate online when they enter keywords into the Google search box, or upload a video to YouTube, or add personal information to

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[212] Dutch National Museum of Antiquities, "Major Works on Google Art Project."

[213] Fuchs, "Web 2.0, Prosumption, and Surveillance," 289.

their Google profile. GAP users are not simply "users," but are always also products. The "empowerment" GAP facilitates serves the business and the market first. Daniel Palmer argues that we encounter "the paradox of user control" online:[214]

> The paradox of user control, in fact, becomes that of the illusion of choice within which the user is offered up for a form of soft domination. Thus not only are discourses of consumer empowerment embedded in a neo-liberal political agenda—embodied by its pillars of individualism, freedom and self-expression—the "performative subject" produced by most existing forms of participatory real time media is arguably the ideal flexible subject position enabled by contemporary capitalism.[215]

In this paradox, the user is given the opportunities for new forms of expression and communication but in ways that are fundamentally beneficial for the big players in the cultural industry: "corporate media 'has its own reasons for encouraging active, rather than passive, modes of consumption.'"[216] Customization, a feature of Web 2.0 that we see exemplified in the "User Galleries" functionality on GAP, is a strategy often used to keep users engaged and consuming. It is also a method for recording data about user preferences, using this data to "customize" the website content as well as the advertisements offered to them. Rather than the web presenting a new paradigm of user control and creation, it is simply a new iteration of many older forms of domination not unlike what we are accustomed to seeing offline.

Google, a large multinational corporation with impressive technology in its hands offers resources not always accessible for museums or galleries. For example, in a *Globe and Mail* news piece on the Art Gallery of Ontario's participation in the Project, Jim Shedden, head of digital content at the AGO, describes how the resolution of Google images are higher than what most museums are able to achieve. A Tate gallery press release reads: "The technology and energy that Google has brought to this project has allowed a group of institutions across the world to collaborate in taking an enormous leap

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[214] Palmer, "The Paradox of User Control."

[215] Ibid., 162

[216] Ibid., 161

forward"[217] Here Google is painted as a figure bringing together the world's cultural gatekeepers under a banner of new progressive technology and ideas. Hillis et al. argue that a crucial part of the Google brand image is its role as missionary, bringing light to outdated dark museum corridors. Speaking of Google Books they write with a dose of tongue and cheek wit: "Only Google, it would seem, has the moxie and expertise and, therefore, by the neoliberal logic of the Californian ideology, the moral valence, to successfully operate such a benign quasi monopoly that promises to liberate our cultural heritage from the obsolete and melancholy dustbins of bricks-and-mortar libraries."[218] Many of the Project's press releases stress that the project, and in particular the technology behind it, is made possible only by Google. The Google name appears countlessly throughout the releases and the brand is praised endlessly for its ability to realize dreams like the one cited in the Tretyakov Gallery's release: "155 years ago the Gallery's founder, philanthropist and collector of Russian art Pavel Tretyakov was dreaming of the day when his collection would become open to the general public. We are extremely glad that this Google project is opening the best works of art for people who live far away from Moscow."[219] In GAP we see some of the more complex mess around copyright issues, business contracts, and ownership obscured by the same technological idealism characteristic of the Google brand as a whole:

> Capitalism is not a unitary or singular foundation; that Google is a business success should not obscure a central truth about the firm: its corporate messianism—a combination of technological idealism and missionary zeal suffused with corporate pride and capitalized undertones to be sure, but messianism nonetheless.[220]

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[217] Tate Britain, "Google and Museums around the World Unveil Art Project."

[218] Hillis, Petit, and Jarrett, *Google and the Culture of Search*, 151.

[219] The State Tretyakov Gallery, "The State Tretyakov Gallery in the Art Project by Google."

[220] Hillis, Petit, and Jarrett, *Google and the Culture of Search*, 7.

The themes appearing frequently in the GAP discourse that I have already explored including democratization, universal accessibility, user empowerment, interactivity, and community fit well into this "missionary" role Google has formed for itself.

Beginning in 2011 with only seventeen gallery partners, GAP was still fairly unknown. Upon expanding the project to include 250 gallery partners in 2013, GAP also widened its audience. Today, its following on Google + sits at over 8 million, a respectable though certainly not monumental number especially considering GAP's intensive integration with the social networking platform. More than user numbers or even profitability, what GAP contributes to the Google brand is symbolic capital. Through Google+, Google Books, Google Maps and Google search, Google is already heavily integrated into the culture of everyday life. But GAP lays claim very clearly in the world of high art, designating the museum and the gallery as new Google territory. Symbolic capital, achieved through recognized prestige and "arts for art's sake" is a crucial component of maintaining social power.[221] For a corporation as vast as Google, one that Hillis et al., comically describe as working to balance the "tensions between 'nerds' and 'suits,'"[222] simply accruing economic capital is not enough. Searching, Google's mainstay, is more than the simple typing of words into a white box; "search as an activity extends far beyond googling, Google Maps, Google Earth, Street View, and Google Books. It is operationalized across the Web as a way of life, and most of us have become in some way searchers."[223] The gallery has long been associated with the temple or the church, a place greater than ordinary everyday life where "time is suspended'; where the visitor desires one of 'those momentary cultural epiphanies'"[224] Google occupies a role much different from many technology companies and it has done so

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[221] Ibid., 42.

[222] Ibid., 32.

[223] Ibid., 4.

[224] Denney, *At the Temple of Art: The Grosvenor Gallery, 1877-1890*, 9.

through achieving a form of consecration.[225] Although their many platforms like Google maps and Google Search may be inherently cultural, what better way to claim the cultural sphere than with a project notably titled "the Cultural Institute." It is under this banner that GAP falls, along with other exhibitions titled "Historic Moments," "World Wonders," "Women in Culture," and "Stories of the Holocaust." These exhibitions span across time and geography, constructing what is represented as a decidedly Global "Cultural Institute." Under the Cultural Institute's "Frequently Asked Questions" one question reads: "Why has Google created the Cultural Institute?" The answer states: "Google's mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful. The Cultural Institute is an effort to make important cultural material available and accessible to everyone and to digitally preserve it to educate and inspire future generations."[226] For Hillis et al., this lofty mission to "organize the world's information" is intimately tied to "free market, libertarian, autocratic, democratic, utopian and globalizing ideologies" and represents a "hybrid steward-owner relationship to a global universal index or archive."[227] The Google search homepage features links to Google News, Google Maps, Google Images, and Google Videos (or YouTube). In a matter of just over two years GAP expanded from seventeen museum and gallery partners to 250. If the project continues to grow at such a pace it is not unreasonable to think that Google "Culture" or Google "Art" might soon be an option on that search page. If Google Art were to fade into disuse rather than grow, likely Google would find another venture linked to high culture and the kind of consecration Google craves: "Google's legitimacy depends upon constant maintenance of the (perceived) equilibrium between economic and symbolic profits."[228]

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[225] Hillis, Petit, and Jarrett, *Google and the Culture of Search*, 7.

[226] Google Art Project, "Frequently Asked Questions."

[227] Hillis, Petit, and Jarrett, *Google and the Culture of Search*, 5.

[228] Ibid., 51.

## 3.4     Closed Interfaces, Authoritative Voices

Art galleries and museums are powerful institutions and their authoritative voices can significantly shape how the public understands past, present and future culture:

> The orthodoxy has been for museums to value stability, to act as cultural freezers into which societies drop and trap elements of their world and experience, preserving them as best they can—a 'controlled environment' both intellectually and physically. It is then from this 'control' that museums assume their position of authority, and it is the verifiability and credibility that this authority then brings with it that has traditionally given museums their unique edifying position in society.[229]

Galleries and museums control a great deal of cultural and symbolic capital and this capital is often distributed strategically to benefit some groups, supporting their domination of other peripheral groups. For example, Stuart Hall in "Whose Heritage? Un-Settling 'the heritage', re-imagining the post-nation" critiques the representation of British heritage in museums, particularly in the ways it validates and sustains British colonialism.[230] There is a great body of academic work in both museum studies and critical art studies about the authority of cultural institutions. This is a vast and complex field of study that in a thesis of this length cannot be explored fully. Writers including Fiona Kameron, Ingrid Mason, Ross Parry, Lorna Abungu and Gordon Wilson among many others have produced important works analyzing the politicized nature of digitization techniques in art galleries and museums. Raymond Williams, Tim Barringer, Catherine Pagani, John MacKenzie, Annie Coombes, Stuart Hall, Sally Price, and Kathleen Wilson are a small fraction of academics who have explored how cultural institutions powerfully shape cultural narratives.

The World Wide Web provides a potential method for diluting the art institution's authority, aiding in the incorporation of both large and small voices into artistic conversation. In its "Memory of the World" conference series in 2003 the United Nations

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[229] Parry, *Recoding the Museum: Digital Heritage and the Technologies of Change*, 102.

[230] Hall, ""Whose Heritage?: Un-Settling 'the Heritage',."

Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization touted digitalization as a primary means of defending the right to local memory, arguing that vibrant heritages are the foundation of a lively public sphere:

> The digital heritage is inherently unlimited by time, geography, culture or format. It is culture- specific, but potentially accessible to every person in the world. Minorities may speak to majorities, the individual to a global audience. The digital heritage of all regions, countries and communities should be preserved and made accessible, so as to assure over time representation of all peoples, nations, cultures and languages.[231]

This conceptualization of the Internet as a beacon of tolerance, community relationships, democratized culture, and universal education reflects the Internet's mythological status. As I have already argued, overstating the Internet's ability to eclipse geographic and social limitations risks depoliticizing the online sphere. Before I move to a critique of GAP's closed nature, it is important to recognize where real potential has been shown elsewhere to mobilize Internet functionalities to amplify the voices of the public and of artists who are not typically given voice in the traditional art system.

An interesting example where the World Wide Web helped to construct a sphere of vibrant creative and intellectual exchanges is the website *Rhizome*. *Rhizome* was created specifically to add to the discourse surrounding the relationship between technology and art. The website incorporates various forms of communication including forums, archives of digital artworks, portfolios, articles with lively comment sections, as well as a more controlled and vetted art journal. *Rhizome*'s openness has its limits, as it is still run by a board of trustees whose voices lend an air of authority and power. However, *Rhizome's* purpose is to highlight those works that often disappear into the background of the larger art institution. It largely features new media art and therefore artworks not necessarily displayed in the halls of the Louvre or the MoMa. Susan Hazan writes, "locating new media in this hierarchy of artistic practice becomes a daunting

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[231] UNESCO, "Draft Charter on the Preservation of the Digital Heritage."

challenge"[232] It is because new media art resisted the categories traditionally used to classify art that it took some time and a great deal of energy from dedicated artists to establish a new media art presence in galleries. Graham and Cook argue that "new media art starts from the problematic taxonomic starting point of being labeled as 'not art' because it is identified as popular culture or activism or science or design or technology."[233] Having faced difficulty in breaking through the limits of what "art" is in the traditional art discourse, for new media art communities like *Rhizome*, it is important to open up that discourse through integrating forums, tagging, comment sections, and portfolio hosting. These online functionalities serve to create both a symbolic and literal openness in the community dynamic, distributing authority through a variety of voices. Through allowing users to add tags and keywords, these users become crucial actors in creating the database structure. Rather than curators, art historians and museum officials holding full taxonomical power, some of this is distributed to the user. Graham and Cook list *Rhizome Artbase*, *runme.org* and *Kurator* as significant net art projects that focus on distributing curatorial power throughout their online audiences: "the audience provides the content and helps form the 'folksonomy' for cataloguing these emerging forms of art."[234] Prior to the mid-twentieth century the gallery's categorizing system, or taxonomy, was traditionally highly controlled and standardized.[235] As Parry argues, the introduction of the computer into the museum initially led to more widespread standardization, as the personalized practices of individual curators were exchanged for the keywords used to catalogue collections around the world.[236] The functionalities available online allowed for classificatory systems or "bottom-up folksonomies more familiar to the communities of users outside of the museum. As they 'tagged' on-line

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[232] Graham and Cook, *Rethinking Curating: Art After New Media*, 4.

[233] Ibid., 289.

[234] Ibid., 270.

[235] Parry, *Recoding the Museum: Digital Heritage and the Technologies of Change*, 51.

[236] Bourcier and Rogers, *Nomenclature 3.0 For Museum Cataloguing*, xvii.

content, users became collectors of information, and the act of curatorship became open and shared."[237]

If we see glimpses of folksonomies in *Rhizome* and even in larger websites like Flickr,[238] on GAP we see a comparatively closed interface. Although GAP ventures to bring art galleries onto the web—an atmosphere that is often aligned with the loosening of control—GAP continues to maintain a great deal of control over its artworks and its users' interactions with these works. Earlier, I quoted Parry's statement that museums "work as cultural freezers" through creating "a 'controlled environment' both intellectually and physically."[239] In Chapter Two I describe the layout of the search pages, arguing that while search is often considered to be utilitarian in nature, with an emphasis on efficiency, search is fundamentally political. The filter on the "Artworks" page, for example, mediates the distribution of symbolic and cultural capital, consecrating only some art practices. The search page is also a crucial clue in determining whether GAP is more flexible and open than the traditional art gallery. Tagging functionalities often provide keywords that become a crucial part of the metadata used to filter content. Users on *Rhizome Artbase*, for example, can search by tag. These tags are not only determined by the website's designers and writers, but also by the user community. In this way, the users help to inform an important part of the search structure and create active folksonomies. Users, along with Google and its partners, would determine the visibility of artworks, and this visibility would always shift as users continue to contribute to the metadata. Without making their database accessible to users through any form of open source software, or even enabling tagging as a means for users to shape the search interface used to access so much of the world's art, GAP symbolically closes itself off from its public.

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[237] Parry, *Recoding the Museum: Digital Heritage and the Technologies of Change*, 55.

[238] Although Flickr seems to be outside of the art world, in fact there are vibrant photography communities that live on Flickr and therefore it deserves some mention here.

[239] Parry, *Recoding the Museum: Digital Heritage and the Technologies of Change*, 107.

By maintaining such a closed database structure, Google validates its own voice, and the voice of its partner institutions, while devaluing public voices. Bayne et al., argue that this is characteristic of cultural institutions:

> Authority is reconfigured (and 'extended') to include participation and voice— voice is 'given' (on the terms of the institution) to interested audiences. Left unquestioned are the assumptions that the museum must always be half of any 'cultural dialogue,' and that the authentic is that which is provided or sanctioned by the museum.[240]

On GAP, users can create a collection, but it is kept very separate from the rest of the website, in its own section clearly labeled "User Galleries," which immediately identifies it as something that is decidedly apart from the carefully curated and vetted museum collections. One is only allowed to add user contributions to the "*user* gallery" area of the website; users are limited technically, through the design of the interface, but the significance of this limitation is inherently symbolic. While user contributions are given some form of value, since they do appear on the website, this value is always kept separate from the value of cultural authorities. Even further, within the "User Galleries" section there are two levels of galleries, the first section labeled "Featured Galleries" consisting of collections created by museum directors and celebrity curators, and the second section labeled "All the Galleries" where the rest of the public's creations are held. There is no decisive organization in this area of the website, with all the user galleries simply contained in an overwhelmingly long list. The user can only sort through the unwieldy list according to date, with the newest galleries first or alphabetically. Similar to the "Artworks" page, power here is realized through visibility. The culturally rich director galleries are made the most visible, while "average" user galleries are much less visible.

Nowhere is the prominence of museum authority more visible on the GAP website, than on the "Education" page. The "Education" page lists an activity called "YouGallery," a name likely inspired by the Google-owned YouTube, where users can

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[240] Bayne et al., "Objects, Subjects, Bits and Bytes: Learning from the Digital Collections of the National Museums," 118.

"try on the role of curator by creating an exhibition in the Google Art Project."[241] The words "try on" suggest that this role as curator is only temporary, and not only is it temporary but it is a form of masquerade or costume, something that cloaks an individual's true identity. A user can aspire to be a curator, and the "User Gallery" functionality can impart them a sense of curatorial power for an instant, but they clearly remain a "user." The "Education" page also features a section labeled "Look Like an Expert." Once more, it is made clear that the user *is not* an expert, but by following the steps laid out for them in the page's text, they can *look* like one. "User Galleries," "YouGallery," and "Look Like an Expert" give the user a *sense* of power, but this power is always given on Google's terms. GAP, in actuality, serves to reproduce the symbolic and cultural capital already accumulated by Google and its institutional partners.

## 3.5    The Myth of Accessibility

Underlying my discussion of the potential for user empowerment and reinterpreted hierarchies on GAP, is the issue of access. Access has almost always been a central concern for curators and museologists, whether it be physical access to a museum, access to special collections in a gallery, access to works online, or intellectual access to artistic content. Accessibility, while a positive and commendable concern, has important consequences. In the late eighteenth century the Louvre was conceived as a space for the French public to enjoy and learn about France's art and history. It was a space to celebrate artistic skill, and to bask in the grandiosity of the King's art collection within the elaborate palace walls. Yet the history of the Louvre demonstrates that the art pieces were more than apolitical objects. They were organized chronologically, painting a sequence of French history reflected in images. The Louvre's curator, Jean Marie Roland selected from the Monarchy's vast collection of both French and foreign art, specific pieces that worked to visualize a narrative of French power, wealth, and community.[242] By inviting the public into the gallery space that had once been the King's palace, the

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[241] Google Art Project. 2014

[242] McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, 8.

monarchy suggested a sort of camaraderie or conversation between those in power and the general public. The Louvre was a final attempt to restore faith in the Old Regime. Andrew McClellan cites a piece written by Jacques-Henri Meister for *Correspondence Litteraire* in 1795: "Who knows if this museum, completed to perfection, might not have saved the monarchy, by providing a more imposing idea of its power and vision, by calming anxious spirits, and by dramatizing the benefits of the old regime."[243] In the Louvre's case, accessibility was a decisive political strategy meant to demonstrate the monarchy's superiority and the public's comparative inferiority; rather than inspire active patrons, the gallery worked to create docile subjects. This short piece of history indicates that "accessibility" is a fraught, complex idea that is bound up in issues of class, politics, economics, history, and most importantly, power.

Bourdieu's *The Love of Art* is a sociological study of European museum publics, detailing patron demographics, anecdotes from patrons about their museum experience, and the history of museum attempts to increase access to their collections. Bourdieu complicates the notion of "accessibility" by suggesting that simply lowering entrance fees or making a building more physically accessible does not necessarily mean that a diverse audience will feel comfortable or accepted within the building, nor will the audience necessarily be able to access all the levels of meaning within an artwork: "A small group of traditional themes, ritually invoked at national and international conferences, such as free admission, extension of opening hours, or publicity, provide the surest alibi for any concern about 'democracy.'"[244] In comparison to the cost of a ticket to a major theatre or to the ballet, the price of admission for a gallery is lower. A general admission ticket to the Art Gallery of Ontario, for example, is $19.50. For the National Ballet of Canada's production of Romeo and Juliet, a small section of inexpensive seats are priced at $25, with all the other seats ranging in price from $55 to $244. However, Bourdieu argues that while the art gallery may appear to be the most accessible of all the fine art institutions for the general public, there is a discrepancy between the "pure

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[243] Ibid., 8.

[244] Bourdieu, Alain, and Schnapper, *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public*. 98.

possibility" of accessibility and "real accessibility": "if it is indisputable that our society offers to all the *pure possibility* of taking advantage of the works on display in museums, it remains the case that only some have the *real possibility* of doing so."[245] While the "pure possibility" means to overcome the logistical barriers to access, for Bourdieu the "real possibility" refers to the more complex barriers including inequality in education, and overall social inequalities as the result of class differences. In the press release commemorating GAP's launch, the VP engineering at Google is quoted as saying "the last 20 years have transformed and democratized the world of art—with better access to museums in many countries and a proliferation of public artworks."[246] He continues on to say that the Project will extend this access and inspire people "wherever they live, to access and explore art."[247] This is a bold claim and is one that is repeated throughout many of the press releases. 53% of the museums from the initial launch who released press statements explicitly included either the term "accessibility", the phrase "anyone can learn from anywhere", the phrase "reach more users" or mentioned "disseminating culture online." The TED website even introduces Amit Sood's TED Talk with this description: "Amit Sood explores his new development with google in which he made all of the worlds best museums accessible to anyone with internet access."[248] In most cases, GAP is characterized as a venture that makes art more accessible than has previously been possible within the constraints of the traditional gallery system.

The problem with assuming that simply making information available online will enable "accessibility for all" is that this logic ignores how some groups are systematically privileged over others in the cultural sphere. All individuals do not approach a work of art in the same manner. Democratizing culture is then, not as simple as bringing art collections online. Taste and the manner in which it divides culture is habitualized and set

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[245] Ibid., 37.

[246] Google, "Google and Museums around the World Unveil Art Project."

[247] Ibid.

[248] TED, "Amit Sood: Building a Museum of Museums."

in art's history. The GAP "Artworks" search page, despite its utilitarian appearance, reinforces what Bourdieu calls "sense limits." The search structure demonstrates one of the fundamental problems with search design: it often assumes that you know something about what you are looking for.[249]  In the case of GAP, this means assuming that most users have knowledge of the rules of art. These "rules" are varied and include everything from the etiquette one must use while within an art gallery to the way artworks and artists are divided according to categories such as "medium" or "period." Bourdieu argues that these categories classify not only artworks but patrons as well, based on their familiarity with this classification system.[250] Most of GAP's organization is determined by classifications and labels that are entrenched in the art institution. The search interface on the "Works of Art" page is especially problematic for what it assumes about the GAP audience. The Search page borrows many elements from art history including the terms it uses to narrow user query results, to the "compare" functionality that appears at the bottom of the page. This functionality allows the user to compare two artworks side by side, a pedagogical technique often employed in art history classrooms.[251] In the "Education" area of GAP, especially in the "Look Like an Expert" exercises, there is an emphasis on the art periods and the techniques typical to each period. Yet, outside of this small "Education" area, there is no opportunity for the user to develop the skills to distinguish the unique techniques, icons, and styles of an artist, a time period, or an artistic movement. The "Artists" page presents a problem for users unfamiliar with artist names. The page is fairly inflexible, only giving the user the option to search by typing in the artist's name, or by scrolling through the alphabetized list. The artist's name is listed over an image of one of their artworks; this artwork is often one of their most recognized works. Their other works are represented beside their name with a series of thumbnails. The simple alphabetized list avoids hierarchizing or categorizing artists based on their primary medium, level of popular recognition, or other factors. But the long list is also

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[249] Manovich, "Media Visualization: Visual Techniques For Exploring Large Media Collections," 4.

[250] Bourdieu, Alain, and Schnapper, *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public*, 40.

[251] Manovich, "Media Visualization: Visual Techniques For Exploring Large Media Collections," 4.

clumsy, forcing the user to scroll through hundreds of artists, waiting for each thumbnail to load. The user must therefore either type in a name they already know, or scroll through the impossibly long list. It is likely that most users visiting the "Artist" page would arrive there with a particular artist or set of artists to search for. The lack of filtering options also limits a user's ability to discover relationships between artists. Which artists may have worked together? Which artists used similar techniques or worked in the same art period? Which artists primarily work in the same medium? Which artists' works were shown together in a temporary exhibition and what story did it tell? Search functionalities, as a text, can be read to uncover assumptions about the GAP audience and who the website may be truly useful for. Bourdieu remarks that from the moment an individual enters a gallery, they become aware of their place within that gallery. Is the art designed for their eyes? Are they the gallery's target audience? In his discussion of "taste" Bourdieu writes, "Objective limits become sense limits, a practical anticipation of objective limits acquired by experience of objective limits, a 'sense of one's place' which leads one to exclude oneself from the goods, persons, places and so forth from which one is excluded."[252] A subject internalizes the categorizing systems that indicate popular culture for the middle and lower classes and high art for the elite classes. In order for these limits to have their power they must be naturalized and fade into the background. When this happens, subjects willingly accept these limits as common-sense and traverse daily life accordingly: "dominated agents…tend to attribute to themselves what the distribution attributes to them, refusing what they are refused ('That's not for the likes of us'), adjusting their expectations to their chances, defining themselves as the established order defines them." [253] The "Artists" page is more than simply frustrating for users who do not have a deeper knowledge of art history. It works to reinforce "sense limits" because it reminds the user of their lack of cultural capital. It tells them "this is not for you" ('That's not for the likes of us'). While Google often states that GAP is for

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[252] Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, 471.

[253] Ibid.

"everyone," it remains clear that while the artworks may be physically accessible via the GAP website, their "codes" can only be read by those with a knowledge of art discourse.

Even more troubling is that they must have a knowledge of the history of art as it has been constructed in the West. Gary Marsden et al. argue in "Using Digital Technology to Access and Store African Art" that in Western art history we classify art according to periods like "impressionism" or "romanticism." However, similar categorizations do not exist in all of the world's art history. "Impressionism" does not exist in African art history, nor is African art traditionally included in studies of impressionist art.[254] Yet despite this, Western institutions often either try to clumsily fit African art into their categorizations, or fetishize its "otherness" by isolating it in its own exhibition. Andre Gunder Frank writes, "more important, our ignorance of the underdeveloped country's history leads us to assume that their past and indeed their present resembles earlier stages of the history of the now developed countries."[255] For example, art history is largely represented as being linear. The refine by "date" option on the "artworks" page is an example of this linearity; Users are given a chronological timeline from which to select a more specific period of time. This progression from era to era informs how cultural knowledge is collected, organized, and understood. This process should change drastically for communities that embrace a more cyclical understanding of history. However, not only are more complex understandings of art history not built into the interface, but they are entirely absent from the Project's "Education." Under the subtitle "What Is the Language of Art?" the text reads: "The Google Art Project is an initiative to provide thousands of high quality, high resolution images from museums across the globe in one place, making art's history, meaning and beauty available in ways never possible before."[256] As in the press releases and content located elsewhere on the Project website, GAP's global nature is stressed. But this "language of art," the codes and

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[254] Marsden et al., "Using Digital Technology to Access and Store African Art,"," 528.

[255] Gunder Frank, "The Development of Underdevelopment," 76.

[256] Google Art Project, "Education."

classification system Bourdieu speaks of, are produced by Western artists, academics, and art patrons. The "Do You Speak The Language of Art" section that follows directs the reader to the "Look Like an Expert" exercise where users are quickly taught about medieval subjects and Baroque artists. Users are educated about "The Shape of Time" which divides the fall of the Roman Empire to the beginning of the Modern Era into three periods: "Medieval," "Renaissance," and "Baroque." There is no discussion at all of non-Western art. The content of the "Education" section was produced during the Project's first launch with museums and galleries from only nine countries. This content was never updated when the Project expanded to include a wider range of galleries from around the world. As discussed earlier, there is no openness in the GAP database that allows for user input into how the artworks are divided. The classification remains largely in the hands of museum executives. DiMaggio and Useem, echoing Veblen, write that art will continue to be the domain of the elite because it is the elite who often have the "power to define what, in fact, would be considered 'art.'"[257] That power falls into the hands of the partner institutions and an American corporation.

Through consistently praising the Project's ability to create universal accessibility and unite the global art world, Google is able to obscure how systematic inequalities in power between classes and between countries are further proliferated online. In doing so, Google is able to amass cultural capital and certify its privileged position as a "missionary"[258] Western Corporation with global reach. This chapter is titled "Revolutionizing It All?" because the idea of GAP as a revolution for the art world, as a "gallery of the future" is so well integrated into GAP texts. Nicholas Serota summarizes it well when he states, "This pioneering collaboration between Google and some of the world's leading arts organizations gives us a taste of the digital future for museums."[259]

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[257] DiMaggio and Michael Useem, "Cultural Democracy in a Period of Cultural Expansion: The Social Composition of Arts Audiences in the United States," 179.

[258] This notion of Google as a missionary will be discussed in section 3.5 and is largely informed by Hillis et al.'s insightful text *Google and the Culture of Search*.

[259] Tate Britain, "Google and Museums around the World Unveil Art Project." This quotation appears in its longer form in section 2.3.

GAP, with its purported universal accessibility and focus on helping users actively explore the art world, presents an all too perfect solution for the "problems" of the offline museum and gallery. The WWW and digitization initiatives do *not* magically erase the problems of the offline world. They do not mean that everyone will explore art in the same way. They do not mean that "all the world's information" can, or even *should* be organized and brought online, especially by a corporation. They do not mean that all users suddenly have a say in how categories like "art" and "high culture" and "low culture" are defined. Lee writes, "the ultimate goal of technology is to solve all unsolved problems, including social ills…technology is viewed as universal—that every society needs the same technology to solve the same problems."[260] GAP may have its merits, but it should not be considered a revolutionary art project. There are many visions of what art looks like, and GAP presents too narrow a vision while simultaneously claiming its universality.

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[260] Lee, "A Political Economic Critique of Google Maps and Google Earth," 911.

**SUBJECT MATTERS**

top

The subject of a work of art can offer an important clue to understanding its place in history. Check out these clues:

- Ancient Greeks and Romans used art to represent a wide variety of subjects. These included portraits of gods, rituals, heroes, rulers, and thinkers.

- Medieval subjects focused largely on the spiritual (representations of Christ, Mary, the saints, miracles, etc.).

- Renaissance subjects expanded beyond the religious to include classical and literary subjects, portraits, and the representation of the figure in a physical setting (landscape, interior, etc.).

- Baroque artists added pure landscape (in other words, a landscape that wasn't a setting for another story), genre (scenes of everyday life), and still life.

- Modern art from the 19th century added new subjects including urban and suburban life.

Can you identify the subject matter and locate these images in their historical period?

**Figure 12 From the "Look Like An Expert" page on GAP**

## THE SHAPE OF TIME

top

The roughly 1500 year span, between the fall of the Roman Empire (c. 300 C.E.) and the beginning of our Modern era (c. 1750), is broadly divided into the Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque periods. Each era found a unique way to shape human figures and the spaces they inhabit—an expression of the values of that particular period. Here are some simple ways to recognize these strategies.

### Medieval (c. 300-1420)

Medieval artists were interested in the invisible realm of the soul, and often used a flat gold background to represent the heavenly. They were influenced by the East, specifically Byzantine culture, which had its capital in Constantinople (modern Istanbul). As a result, figures were rendered in a highly stylized manner, unnaturally tall and flat, with elongated, elegant features.

### Renaissance (c. 1400-1600)

Renaissance artists were more interested in the world we can see than their medieval predecessors. Artists in the Renaissance placed their more weighty, more three dimensional figures in a physical space. These artists also used strong horizontal and vertical lines or pyramids that convey balance and stability.

### Baroque (c. 1600-1750)

The Baroque favored more energized compositions that use diagonals and strong contrasts of light and dark. Baroque paintings can feel off balance as the compositions set the picture in motion.

Match the images to the styles below.

A. Medieval

B. Renaissance

C. Baroque



**Figure 13 From the "Look Like An Expert" page on GAP**

## Conclusion

As I described in the introduction, I came upon this thesis project quite accidentally; although it was not the project I originally set out to write, it grew out of a curiosity with GAP. I excitedly tested the "museum view" function, zoomed into several artworks, and looking to learn more about the Project, watched its first promotional videos. I had just visited the Musée d'Orsay in Paris several months prior and I was delighted to revisit that experience in some way by virtually traversing the halls of the wings I remembered most. I mention several times that I do not mean to completely discount GAP or its qualities that genuinely excite others in the same way it first intrigued me. GAP integrates unique functionalities and its incredibly large scale (with a mission that proposes an even larger scale—the world) gives the user so much to explore. I believe that in order to engage in a successful criticism, one has to recognize potential positives in the object of concern. I understand the excitement, as it was my own initial reaction. However, I felt a nagging concern with not necessarily the Project itself but with the fact that it was run by Google. This simple fact alone sets GAP apart from many of the other digitization projects online run by museums or non-profit foundations. My frustration and concern grew when I, perhaps ironically, "Googled," to see if any other bloggers or journalists were talking about what it meant for this to be *Google's* Art Project and found almost nothing. This thesis project is my personal mission to contribute to the GAP discussion.

In Chapter One, I provide context for the analysis in Chapter Two and Chapter Three by outlining the academic literature I draw from. My theoretical perspective is an important component of this project; I take an interdisciplinary approach to my analysis, incorporating work from such academic spheres as digital heritage studies, library studies, cultural studies, and media studies. It is impossible to incorporate all the academic work from each sphere in a thesis of this length. Instead, to maintain a focused theoretical perspective I have highlighted critical theorists whose work I find most relevant from each area. Although this thesis is not about the production of new media art per say, I found that a great deal of academic writing on new media art was relevant for this project. In particular, work by Stallabrass, Manovich, Wilson, Graham and Cook identifies the difficulties new media art has experienced in its attempt to find a place for

itself in the institutional art world. Ross Parry's work in digital heritage studies highlights how shifts in the organization of data can influence a museum's entire philosophy. The introduction of automated cataloguing into the museum sector reconfigured the roles of employees in the museum and the way cultural objects were looked at and categorized. In Chapter Two I outline the results of the quantitative stage of my research process, using Fairclough's relational text analysis as my research framework. I examine the internal relations of the press release texts and detail the frequency of occurrence of specific themes and words. "Democratize culture" is a phrase frequently used throughout these press releases alongside words like "accessibility", emphasizing the Project's desire to reach an audience larger than that of the traditional art gallery.  Hand in hand with the lofty mission to "democratize culture," is the claim made in many press releases and Google-produced blog posts, that only Google and its vast resources could make such a project possible. In Part Two of Chapter Two, I deconstruct the internal relations of the GAP website, looking at its branding, textual content and search functions. Using some of the observations made in Chapter Two as a point of departure, Chapter Three is a more in-depth analysis of the overall GAP narrative, and the external relations of the GAP texts. I investigate how GAP negotiates its place between the traditional art world and the comparatively "open" web world. I look at claims of user empowerment made in the press releases, and examine how these claims are played out, arguing that GAP does not necessarily inspire "active" users. While GAP uses Web 2.0 rhetoric to conjure enthusiasm for functionalities like "User Galleries," the Project as a whole does not incorporate many of the qualities that define Web 2.0. Furthermore, and the biggest qualm I personally have with the project is that even if there were opportunities for significant user engagement on the website, users would still need to create an account with Google, transforming themselves into a commodity. Data, for a company like Google is an incredibly valuable entity, and a powerful form of online capital. The founder of the search engine Blekko writes, "Google is not the competitor, Google is the environment."[261] Google's power, in part, is derived from its diversity of "product"

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[261] Kulathuramaiyer and Wolf-Tilo, "Restricting the View and Connecting the Dots: Dangers of a Web Search Engine Monopoly," 1737.

offerings.[262] Google is not just a search engine, but a network of online platforms. Over the years Google has also expanded to hardware sectors, releasing their Android phone, Google Glass, and developing Google Fiber. Google has also taken steps into the medical industry with Google Health, and very recently into the biotech industry with Calico. Many writers (Finkle, 2011), (Lee, 2010), (Kulathuramaiyer, 2006), (Vaidhyanathan, 2011), (Hillis et al., 2013) have indicated that Google possesses a near-monopoly in the world of search. If galleries such as the AGO continue to abandon their own digitization projects in favor of GAP, Google could monopolize the digital records of a significant portion of the world's artwork.

There still remain alternative websites individuals can use to explore art of various time periods, practices and places of origin. I have listed several below in case a curious art-lover happens upon this thesis. These websites vary greatly, and I have included several that host the kinds of artwork that is difficult or impossible to find on GAP. These are only a small fraction of the websites one can turn to in order to discover art online; they provide alternative versions of what online art collections should look like. I opened this thesis asking whether we wanted Google to be the one to "tell the stories of our diverse cultural heritage?"[263] All the websites listed below tell very different stories of what "art" is. No, we do not want Google to tell all our stories. But at this moment in time, there are so many other voices that continue to contribute to how stories about art and culture, history and politics are told. The value of these voices, large or small, needs to be recognized and encouraged, especially as giants like Google and Amazon grow before our eyes.

- Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution
- Virtual Museum of Canada
- Museum of Modern Art Online
- Asia Art Archive
- Europeana

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[262] Finkle, ""Corporate Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Silicon Valley: The Case of Google, Inc," 871.

[263] Google Art Project, "About."

- National Gallery of Art
- Artchive
- WebMuseum
- ARTstor
- Rhizome ArtBase
- Colossal
- BOOOOOOOM
- Contemporary Art Daily
- Toronto Digital Projects
- CGSociety
- Concept Art world

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**Appendix A: The GAP Launch Press Release from Google**

**PRESS RELEASE**

Google and museums around the world unveil Art Project

LONDON, Tuesday 1st February. Today Google unveiled the Art Project, a unique collaboration with some of the world's most acclaimed art museums to enable people to discover and view more than a thousand artworks online in extraordinary detail.

Over the last 18 months Google has worked with 17 art museums including, Altes Nationalgalerie, The Freer Gallery of Art Smithsonian, National Gallery (London), The Frick Collection, Gemäldegalerie, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, MoMA, Museo Reina Sofia, Museo Thyseen - Bornemisza, Museum Kampa, Palace of Versailles, Rijksmuseum, The State Hermitage Museum, State Tretyakov Gallery, Tate, Uffizi and Van Gogh Museum. The results of this partnership, which can be explored at www.googleartproject.com involved taking a selection of super high resolution images of famous artworks, as well as collating more than a thousand other images into one place. It also included building 360 degree tours of individual galleries using Street View 'indoor' technology.

With this unique project, anyone anywhere in the world will be able to learn about the history and artists behind a huge number of works, at the click of a mouse.

Each of the museums has worked in extensive collaboration with Google, providing expertise and guidance on every step of the project, from choosing which collections to feature; to advising on the best angle to capture photos; to what kind of information should accompany the artwork.

Works of art included in the project range from Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus' to Chris Ofili's 'No Woman, No Cry', Cezanne's post impressionist works to Byzantine iconography. From the ceilings of Versailles to ancient Egyptian temples, a collection of Whistlers to Rembrandts all over the globe. In total, 486 artists from around the world have been included.

**Key features:**

Explore museums with Street View technology: using this feature, people can move around the gallery virtually on www.googleartproject.com, selecting works of art that interest them and clicking to discover more or diving into the high resolution images, where available. The info panel allows people to read more about an artwork, find more works by that artist and watch related YouTube videos.

A specially designed Street View 'trolley' took 360 degree images of the interior of selected galleries which were then stitched together, enabling smooth navigation of over 385 rooms within the museums. The gallery interiors can also be explored directly from within Street View in Google Maps.

Super high resolution feature artworks: each of the 17 museums selected one artwork to be photographed in extraordinary detail using super high resolution or 'gigapixel' photo capturing technology. Each such image contains around 7 billion pixels, enabling the viewer to study details of the brushwork and patina beyond that possible with the naked eye. Hard to see details suddenly become clear such as the tiny Latin couplet which appears in Hans Holbein the Younger's 'The Merchant Georg Gisze'. Or the people hidden behind the tree in Ivanov's 'The Apparition of Christ to the People'.

In addition, museums provided images for a selection totalling more than 1000 works of art. The resolution of these images, combined with a custom built zoom viewer, allows art-lovers to discover minute aspects of paintings they may never have seen up close before, such as the miniaturized people in the river of El Greco's 'View of Toledo', or individual dots in Seurat's 'Grandcamp, Evening'

**Create your own collection:**

The 'Create an Artwork Collection' feature allows users to save specific views of any of 1000+ artworks and build their own personalised collection. Comments can be added to each painting and the whole collection can then be shared with friends and family. It's an ideal tool for students or groups to work on collaborative projects or collections.

Nelson Mattos, VP Engineering, Google

'The last 20 years have transformed and democratised the world of art - with better access to museums in many countries and a proliferation of public artworks. We're delighted to have been able to collaborate with leading art museums around the world to create this state of the art technology. We hope it will inspire ever more people, wherever they live, to access and explore art - in new and amazing levels of detail."

Amit Sood, Head of Art Project, Google

'This initiative started as a '20% project' by a group of Googlers passionate about making art more accessible online. Together with our museum partners around the world we have created what we hope will be a fascinating resource for art-lovers, students and casual museum goers alike - inspiring them to one day visit the real thing.'

*Find out even more about Art Project on YouTube.*

- ENDS -

**Appendix B: List of Partner Institutions from the GAP Initial Launch**

| |
|---|
| Alte Nationalgalerie - Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin - Germany |
| Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian, Washington DC - USA |
| The Frick Collection, NYC - USA |
| Gemäldegalerie - Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin - Germany |
| The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC - USA |
| MoMA, The Museum of Modern Art, NYC - USA |
| Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid - Spain |
| Museo Thyssen - Bornemisza, Madrid - Spain |
| Museum Kampa, Prague - Czech Republic |
| National Gallery, London - UK |
| Palace of Versailles - France |
| Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam - The Netherlands |
| The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg - Russia |
| State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow - Russia |
| Tate Britain, London - UK |
| Uffizi Gallery, Florence - Italy |
| Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam - The Netherlands |

## Appendix C: Results from Quantitative Analysis of Partner Press Releases

|  | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| "Accessible" | 1 |  | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 3 |  | 2 |  | 3 |
| "High Resolution" | 1 |  | 7 |  |  | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 |  | 7 | 1 | 2 |  | 3 |
| "Detail" |  |  | 4 |  | 1 | 1 | 3 |  |  |  | 5 |  | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| "Share" |  |  | 6 |  | 3 | 2 |  |  |  |  | 4 |  |  |  | 1 |
| Refer to Social Networking in some way |  |  |  |  | 1 | 2 |  |  |  |  | 1 |  |  |  | 1 |
| "Over 30,000" |  |  | 3 |  |  |  | 1 |  | 1 |  |  | 1 |  |  |  |
| Refer to connections between museums/bringing museums together |  |  | 2 |  | 1 | 1 | 1 |  | 1 | 1 |  | 1 |  |  | 1 |
| "Global art collection" |  |  | 2 |  |  |  | 1 |  |  |  | 2 |  |  |  |  |
| Refer to partnership with Google | 1 |  | 2 |  |  |  | 1 |  | 1 |  | 3 |  |  | 1 | 1 |
| Google technology |  | 1 | 6 |  | 1 |  | 1 | 2 | 3 |  | 4 | 1 |  |  | 2 |
| Refer to technologies used (but not as Google specific) |  | 1 | 5 |  | 1 |  | 1 |  |  | 1 | 3 |  |  |  | 2 |
| "Never seen/experienced before" | 1 | 2 | 1 |  |  |  |  | 1 |  |  | 1 |  |  |  | 1 |
| Disseminate culture online |  |  |  |  |  |  | 1 |  |  |  | 1 |  | 1 |  | 1 |
| Discuss education/pedagogy and GAP | 1 |  | 3 |  |  |  | 1 | 1 |  |  | 2 |  |  | 1 | 1 |

**Legend**

**A:** Alte Nationalgalerie

**B:** Freer Gallery of Art,

**C:** The Frick Collection (3 Press Releases)

**D:** Gemäldegalerie

**E:** The Metropolitan Museum of Art

**F:** MoMA, The Museum of Modern Art

**G:** Museo Thyssen (2 Press Releases)

**H:** National Gallery

**I:** Palace of Versailles

**J:** Rijksmuseum (2 Press Releases)

**K:** Tate Britain (3 Press Releases)

**L:** Uffizi Gallery

**M:** Van Gogh

**N:** The State Hermitage Museum

**O:** State Tretyakov Gallery

# Curriculum Vitae

| | |
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