Analogue Audience/Digital Interfaces
Symposium Overview

On November 24th 2015 **Shwetal Patel** invited faculty members of the **Winchester School of Art** (**Dr. Ryan Bishop, Dr. Robert E. D'Souza and Dr. Sunil Manghani**) to dissect the implications of an increasingly digitalised world on how we encounter and experience works of art. Joining them in the conference were artist and poet **Robert Montgomery,** curators **Chris Dercon** (former Director of the **Tate Modern**), **Hannah Redler** (of the **Open Data Institute**) and **August Davis** (**WSA**), as well as **Ashley Wong** of **Sedition art**, and **James Davis** of the **Google Art Project**. The open-ended nature of the conference raised a number of questions, drawn together here in the hope that the conversation can continue amongst a digital audience.

Taking the concept of the 'interface' as a starting point, the debates aimed to extend beyond charting the proliferation of screens, towards a deeper understanding of the relationship between digital and analogue experience. Recent book-length studies (for example, Branden Hookway's *Interface* and Alexander R. Galloway's *The Interface Effect*) focus on machine-machine interaction rather than the human-machine interface, thus tending towards technological determinism. As such, in the context of cultural institutions and the environment in which art is produced and received, how can we visibilise the spatial and conceptual aspects of this relationship? As **Ryan Bishop's** introductory talk notes, the 'interface' has a paradoxical tendency to fade from awareness in an increasingly digitalised, mediated world. He asks, "are there ways of critically engaging it, so we can have it do more of what we want it to do? Or are we stuck with a system of machine-machine interaction, proprietary platforms talking to each other, where we can't really edit what we want them to do?"

Artistic engagements with digital media increasingly aim to break down the analogue/digital binary. **Hannah Redler** presented an overview of the **Lowry'**s recent show ***Right Here, Right Now,*** which she curated with Lucy Dusgate. Redler explains that "all the work engages formally with digital technology, whether deliberately or tangentially, critically or more accidentally…what comes through is how the interface is about relationships rather than about technology." These works take an often playful, yet critical, response to changing material realities. Many explore the role of chance and aggregation in interface-driven encounters through working to translate the interface(s) into visual, auditory and mobile forms, augmenting it and thus visualising otherwise hidden relationships. Daniel Rozin's *Darwinian Straw Mirror* and Thompson & Craig's *Corruption* work as 'reactive environments' whose elements reconfigure in response to the viewer's bodily form. "The technology builds that relationship with you." In Julie Freeman's *We Need Us*, the meta-data contributed by members of a citizen science website 'Zooniverse' is used to drive the behaviour of a series of animated forms, producing a kinetic digital sculpture, which Redler notes "challenges the idea that data is always about something tangible. What this really responds to is the labour of all the people altruistically contributing to the site." Others work to visualise the data we may forget we are contributing to a networked interface, such as Banger Briz collective's *Charge for Privacy*, a unit on a plinth where users can charge their mobile phones in exchange for the rights to all photographic data on their phone, an unsettling reference to Facebook's terms and conditions "raising questions about what we

are or aren't prepared to do as we navigate the digital and the real world." Mishke Henner's photographic series knitting together images from satellite views of American oil fields, freely available online via Google's satellite view. Speaking of "the discomfort [Henner] felt over creating things from online sources, which then suddenly appear in a gallery," Redler notes, "this brings a question underlying a lot of work in this exhibition, and indeed a lot of digital work. That of navigation. What is the toggling that goes on between the gallery, the physical environment, and works created in an online space?"

Some of the works presented were more additive in nature, more an elaboration than a translation. Stephanie Rothenberg's *Planthropy* connected a series of hanging plants to a networked cause seeking funding, like breast cancer, which receive nourishment as the cause receives funding. "These plants live or die according to the generosity of the giving economy." Yet, by augmenting networked relationships through this creative elaboration, questions are raised with regards the non-binary nature of the digital/analogue relationship. Joe Hamilton's online film *Regular Division* superimposes photographic, moving and painted images, conceptually disrupting the visually seamless 3D reality presented on the digital screen. Felicity Hammond's *Restore to Factory Settings* addresses allegorical photographs of transition, of liminality, in relation to the shift from architectural blueprint to architectural reality. As a visual quip, the artist "deliberately chose the colour blue to refer to the blueprint, the promised plans, the moment of hope, but also the error screen, the point at which computer says 'no'."

These works, exploring and attempting to visualise digital interaction, augmentation, aggregation, relationships, 'sharing', question what it means to refer to the interface today in a gallery setting. Some made this setting more explicit in their content: Ed Carter's *Birographic* composes and performs a soundtrack in response to the gallery's data during the exhibition; Nikki Pugh's *Colony* adapts GPS technology for the gallery's audience. Perhaps some of the most powerful works presented by Redler indicate the invisibilis-ing of one interface by another via a simple gesture. Eva and Franco Mattes' *Emily's video* exhibits people's reactions as they watch a film (invisible to us) from the 'dark net' which is delivered to their homes. Redler surmises, "We are made aware of what we can't see. The invisible, and perhaps the unpalatable."

The performative, relational approaches of many of these works place them into a broader artistic lineage, whilst specifically addressing "the notion of the digital as a materialist challenge… [through] developing interactions with audiences around the interactive and inter-additive." A shift can be seen in these contemporary works, all made within the last five years, "from appropriation to sharing, aggregation and interconnectedness. The singular, or 'decisive moment' is becoming circulation, exchange, live changes of state. These works are in a gallery but don't have to be. The art we encounter can smash through the walls of the gallery and into our pockets."

This bridging of the distanced object with the intimacy of digital media is explored by artist **Robert Montgomery**, who speaks of his subversion of advertising in public spaces, through an "interruption" of its language, in Barthian terms a 'dominant' type of speech. The works contain messages which are both emotive and political, possessing a poetic ambiguity or non-specificity that facilitates a re-contextualisation, away from its original placement on a billboard, through its re-appearance everywhere from t-shirts to hip hop music videos to the banners of the Occupy London movement.

Montgomery is interested in following how audiences receive, reiterate, and redisplay his work, in which an oscillation between digital and analogue public spaces becomes a creative force of its own. The prolific online 'sharing' of photographs of his works is most frequently re-purposed towards the processing or expression of private grief or emotion, most commonly in memorial or 'tribute' pages. In one instance, Montgomery took a picture of his work, '*The people you love become ghosts inside of you and like this you keep them alive*,' which was installed for one day only in 2010, at the De La Warr Pavilion in Sussex. "Now, if you google the image, or google 'the people you love,' you get 4.3 million results in 0.7 seconds. Which is really interesting, as I only published it *once* on my website, and everything else is sharing. The kind of sharing is diverse, both institutional but also more commonly the kind of sharing which is a tribute page to someone's dead friend. These personal kind of quiet personal-public moments. When people die, or the anniversary of a loved friend or family member. So it becomes this oddly *personal* thing to share in public." In a literalisation of this Montgomery notes a case of the work travelling "from the screen to the skin, in the form of tattoos." This movement to an epidermal interface is fascinating to Montgomery, who notes that "the person getting the tattoo has rarely seen it in real life. I don't know a single case where a kid has been to the gallery and seen the piece. They've all seen it on facebook, pinterest, Instagram. To deny that alienation of distance, from the digital world to them, they've got the piece tattooed on their tummy, their side, and their arm. Sometimes there are blogs about why they've done it."

These works take on a haunting quality as they travel through and between these analogue/digital audiences. Are these reproductions of the work of art, or transformations of it? As argued by Benjamin's famous essay on the 'aura' of the work of art, do these reproductions subtract something from the original?

Montgomery speaks of the influence this essay had on him, of the inevitably political nature of the production and reception of works of art, but fundamentally disagrees with the crux of Benjamin's argument that "that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the artwork." Citing the quote by Paul Valery [1931] which introduces Benjamin's seminal essay, "our fine arts were developed, their types and uses established, by men in a time very different from the present, by men whose power of action upon things was insignificant in comparison with our own," Montgomery points to the similarity, nearly a century later, in contemporary discussions regarding the phenomenology of the internet. Are we blinded by the apparent newness of our innovations?

Suggesting that Benjamin missed evidence within his own time, Montgomery argues that it was only when the Mona Lisa was stolen from the Louvre in 1911, when reproductions of this image began to proliferate in posters and an entire industry of 'postcard pirates,' that a real 'aura' was created around the work: "it creates a sort of actual ghostliness, a subconscious archetypical imprint of an object, of an artwork, in our minds." In one case, a Catholic postcard produced in dedication to St. Anthony (the patron saint of lost things) contained an embedded image of Mona Lisa which hauntingly appears upon holding the postcard up to a candle. Montgomery develops this line of thought to suggest that the internet itself possesses an aura in relation to human lives: "The internet is the ghost world of our lives. It's easy to call it a reflection of our collective unconscious, but I'm interested in a more literal supernaturality: the supernatural speed by which an image, or a poem can travel from London to New York, the supernatural intimacy of the immediate message in

your pocket from a lover 2000 miles away. For that reason I'm saying the internet is a new medium of simultaneous and unparalleled distance and intimacy."

Does an image, or a poem, become iconic in its collective iterations, or because of its intimacy with a personal experience? Montgomery's interests lie in this connection between public and private, rather than in any simplistic notion of fame or celebrity. "We have here, by far the majority of times, a chance to look at the piece without the interruption of the artist's name. I think this is a genuine innovation from this type of digital sharing in communities. It's a new thing."

Whilst Montgomery's work, as public artwork, is in a sense made to be shared, not contained within a gallery or privately owned, it raises questions of control over public space and information on both analogue and digital displays. It is perhaps this which relates his interest in the digital to his interest in the city as phenomenon; both are a form of "domesticated space [which are] also a wild space at the same time." It is a dichotomy which the artist celebrates. Could it be the case that, given artists' intense awareness of their physical and social environment, the changes brought with the digital revolution will inevitably affect the mindset with which an artist creates their work? If so, is this problematic?

Pertinent to this concern is the next presentation and debate led by **Ashley Wong** who works for **Sedition Art**. She describes this as "an online platform selling digital limited editions of art by world-renowned contemporary artists. Works are all videos and image stills that can be viewed on TVs, tablets, mobile phones. They are limited editions of up to 1000 editions at the most [complete with a 'certificate of authenticity' signed by the artist]. Members of the platform collect artworks, held in the Sedition account and accessible on your mobile, tablet or TV to display in your home." Both Robert Montgomery and Sedition, in somewhat contrasting ways, explore questions surrounding the ownership of art, what 'possession' of an art object means, how this relates to the boundaries between public and private, and in turn how this relates to issues of the artwork's 'audience.'

Despite its branding as an 'online' platform for the collection of art, Wong expressed the organisation's desire to combine this with a presence in the 'offline' spaces of exhibitions, museums and public spaces. These range from selling 'gift cards' (with codes to acquire online works) in museum shops, to the installation of video pieces in hotel rooms, notably works by Matt Collishaw, Tim Noble & Sue Webster, Jacco Olivier and others at the London Edition (which double up as a point-of-sale display). Sedition recently commissioned a neon sculptural installation by Tracey Emin (a 'message of love' animating public space), and have held a number of interactive exhibitions, such as FIELD, produced in collaboration with the Hospital Club (a members club for the creative industries). Here, an oculus rift-type technology allowed users to individually engage with and control the experience they have, producing a parallel "unique experience" which characterises the Sedition digital brand, one attendee noting "it really changed the whole vibe of the evening, people were a lot more engaged and involved themselves, it kind of affected how people looked at [the] photographs…I really enjoyed that."

Beyond capturing a larger audience, does this movement into the 'analogue' realm express a desire for a more concrete physicality, one which seems to go against the digitalising impetus on which Sedition was founded? It is perhaps worth keeping in mind that many of the installations and events-based works Wong describes are at private, exclusive venues,

'members only' environments. Despite this, it is perhaps the personalised interface through which the works are experienced and shared which is truly unique about the platform. This acts as one of many ways to increase audience engagement with artworks. Does this deliver a positive counter to accusations of working against the digital ethos of sharing, open-access and the 'democratic postcard company' model of appropriating, editing and sharing artworks which Montgomery spoke about so positively?

Whilst the platform primarily plays host to those already working in 'digital media' – e.g. Universal Everything, Quayola – it also collaborates with artists used to producing work for the 'analogue' gallery space. Wong describes Sedition as a partner for the artists, working to expand the art world institution through a model profitable to the artist: "to have the digital editions alongside other kinds of installation pieces and interactive art pieces it kind of builds a whole body and context for the artist's work. We see Sedition as one of just many ways for artists to distribute the work. They can have editions on Sedition, installations, commissions, large scale exhibitions. Sedition is one way people can take home and own a piece of their work… [it] at least tries to create an economy for artists to monetise their digital works. Especially artists working in video, or other digital media. It is creating an economic model for that." Is this, however, at the price of restricting the transformative potential of artists' use of the digital, or on the contrary does it provide a mode through which this can be explored? Wong responds "we understand that Sedition may go against the nature of things digital, where things can be reproduced infinitely, but at the same time, everyone expects digital content to be free. Which it isn't really. They are feeding you advertising, or tracking your data."

More broadly, whole exhibitions which exist in the digital realm, such as the Wrong Biennale (which played host to many artists collected by Sedition's users) are often partnered with 'physical' substantiations or institutions. As audiences become adept at a seamless toggling between both experiences, will artists find new ways to meld them together? Wong gives the example of C*rystallised Skins* by artist Quayola: "You can observe the cast, as you would with traditional sculptures, and then you can watch the video of the piece animating. The idea of this as an online exhibition breaks down the production process, of creating 3D animations, but you can also download these as 3D models that can be 3D printed. So this can be manifested as a physical exhibition with 3D sculptures. It's this relationship between the online and physical experiences of these works that is important for Sedition. We're an online business but we really need these live experiences as well….people 'get' how they are meant to experience or view the works on Sedition, [but] we create a broader experience through other kinds of interactive works that the artist may do." Through their initial focus on what is traditionally conceived of as the machine-human 'interface,' Sedition's work then perhaps points towards its less obvious, invisible layers and instantiations.

Certainly, Sedition doesn't aim to monopolise the art market, but to diversify it. Wong refers to a recent conversation with Matt Pike about his contrasting modes of distribution: "he can put it on vimeo and have 300,000 people watch that video, but it's not the same as releasing a tiny bit of that, and having that piece of work that you own and can view in your private space. He talks about this intimate ownership, but these different forms can co-exist in an artists practice." This echoes the blurring of the analogue/digital dichotomy discussed above: in both cases "people share the experience of the art, as art is always a shared experience." This is a view shared by Montgomery. Asked if he would produce work for

Sedition, Montgomery explains “I’m not interested in machine-machine dialogue, as we discussed earlier, but I am interested in person-to-person dialogue, via whatever medium that has to travel. I probably would do a Sedition work, because I think it probably has an audience… [but] we have to stop thinking of the artist and viewer as two individual parts.’ Indeed, in Montgomery’s case, the artist themselves are increasingly an audience for new iterations of their own work.

Another digital platform which engages with cultural institutions and actors as partners is the **Google Art Project**. James Davis, who as program manager of the Google Cultural Institute has played a crucial role in the design and running of this platform, spoke at the conference about the aims and thinking underlying this ostensibly non-profit Institute. The project works with around 890 (and counting) ‘partner’ cultural organisations and institutions to “tell their stories and share their artworks.” In turn, Google is able to develop a platform separate to the less filtered Google Search, which – he says – “does a reasonable job of helping you find stuff, but you might lose cultural context in that. You have to be an expert in what you’re doing to get the most efficient use out of it.” The Cultural Institute platform supplies an ‘authoritative’ image of an artwork, which is “protected…it doesn’t get distributed by others. It doesn’t go into Google Images.” The search result is accompanied by a “knowledge panel, a selection of essentially authoritative information whose accuracy we can be confident about as it comes from the source [where the work is held].” Whilst Davis applauds the new forms of audience engagement facilitated by Montgomery’s approach, he notes “this isn’t typical behaviour for an institution… we had to begin by moving as close as possible towards the metrics adopted by the cultural sector. Everything is supplied by the museum. We can’t do anything without them. This means I suppose that we adopt more traditional practices, which may not be attuned to the contemporariness of Robert’s experiences in distributing his artwork.”

The resulting aggregation of high-quality images of works of art is not simply a database, but is also organised and ‘curated’ into categories and online exhibitions, again to an extent mirroring the pre-existing institutional structures of art and culture: The overall platform consists of three ‘channels’: ‘Art Project’ being one, alongside ‘Historic Moments’ and ‘World Wonders,’ which Davis translates into Art, History, and Culture. “The reason they are in different ‘channels’ is because these different sectors operate in very different ways. How you experience content differs greatly between them.” Davis contrasts the greater element of storytelling required of ‘history’ and ‘culture’ as calling for online curatorial and exhibition platforms, put together by historians or curators at cultural organisations, telling stories of particular historical moments, or as part of a ‘tour’ of a particular global region. An example from the ‘Historic Moments’ channel is the Anne Frank page, which is ‘curated by Anne Frank House, but scrolling to the end, you see a selection of logos of partners, and the curators have digitally ‘borrowed’ artefacts from those institutions in order to tell a more complete story, offer a different perspective, to fill holes in their collection.’ This digital loan system is something of an innovation, ‘a way of bringing together the collections of multiple organisations in order to tell a more complete story.’

In the telling of these stories we want to use our technologies in an innovatory way to distribute this material to new audiences. I don’t think that is ‘wiki-isation’ as I understand it. Really, we want audiences to have engaging experiences. Whilst there are comprehensive databases behind all this that may be able to resolve the date of birth of a painter or not, that isn’t our goal, or our target. It’s really something more experiential. Something slightly

more subjective, in allowing those databases to be used to create new innovative experiences for audiences.

The ‘World Wonders’ channel “focuses on street-view technology which we take to these locations, where you can walk around…with curated information or exhibitions that relate to that. An example is the ‘Wonders of Pakistan,’ a selection of cultural organisations in Pakistan brought together really for the first time.” Davis notes that art and cultural information about such conflict-ridden areas is often swamped by news of war and violence. It is through StreetView technology that Davis first interacted with Google, during his previous role at the Tate, which followed his studies in interaction design at the RCA, where he explored with what it meant to speak of an interface in relation to art and culture, which he does not see as something that can be conceived of as stand-alone. “Interfaces are a small part of the space between people and things and services and environments. There are lots of other features of that space between things which are maybe ceremonial, graphic, cultural.” Davis strongly believes in the importance of Google Art Project’s aim to increase (screen-mediated) access to artworks; he is particularly enthusiastic about the potential for technology to help engage and interest viewers in the first place. In more ways than one, the interface between art and a viewer cannot operate in isolation of cultural and social context.

He explains, in the context of the Google Art Project, that “[this] interface is also about trying to close this gap between simple, scholarly information about this artwork…and creating something more experiential, that takes over your screen and has a more cinematographic quality. We are able to create something more engaging, that can bring viewers in.” This is something he grappled with in his work at the Tate where, specialising in audience interpretation, he examined “the space between what curators and sometimes artists are thinking and what the public wants. There is an interesting navigation of how you talk about art to the public, in a way that doesn’t dumb it down, makes it accessible, is true to the art, curator or scholarship, but allows wide audiences to come in, doesn’t narrow them.” The technology used by the Google Art Project offers more veracity to the art than is often possible by standing in front of it. The use of super-high resolution *giga-pixel* technology allows users to zoom into the artwork, which prompts the stripping back of all extraneous screen content. “People want to see art, not a website, not a Google logo.” The photographic technology used for this level of detail is laborious, taking a minimum of 6 hours though often 12 hours or longer per picture. Davis notes the compelling example of Chagall’s grandson visiting the Google Laboratory in Paris, where – viewing his grandfather’s painting on the ceiling of the Paris Opera – he was able to make out new details, including an image of himself as a baby.

Davis argues that this dialogue with the cultural sector enables them to assist in audience interpretation whilst evading interference, or the setting of a Google-driven agenda. He argues that they aspire “simply to mirror what we see as best and neutrally as we can.” Despite its ostensibly neutral outlook, this platform is part of an organisation whose use of innovatory technology in creating new ways and opportunities to view art is likely to change things in some direction, the question is what will this look like? Will google attempt to control it?

Given the sheer size of the audience available to Google, Davis speaks of a sense of “responsibility, given our access to tens of millions of audience members, to deliver art and

culture to them in some shape or form." He is evidently excited by the idea that unintended encounters driven by the platform might spark longer-term interests, or educational journeys for audience members. Certainly, his belief in the project is sincere. He points to the roots of Google as an organisation in the hippie-infused 1960s techno-culture of the West Coast, which later gave birth to Silicon Valley, but has not lost touch with its point of origin: "Within the company there are aspirations to organise a world of information and make it universally accessible to everybody, and this is one of the core missions of Google – it manifests in Google search – which is about organising information, and the cultural institute is a sort of cultural part of that mission – of organising the world's information… I can tell you with a straight face that I can sleep at night with what we're doing, because we're echoing some of the important principles that the public sector has in the realm of art and culture, but we're doing it quite delicately, and sensitively, in a commercial and technology-driven landscape."

The apparently conservative ethos of the current model in adhering to the 'metrics of the cultural sector,' Davis emphasises, is a starting point. "It's about refining our practices step by step, being iterative, which is something very 'Googly' – do something one step at a time, again and again, and before you know it you've completely changed the game. This is very different for example to Apple, who changed the game with big leaps forward in technology products." The Cultural Institute is an 'experimental institute' whose projects are open-ended in nature. The project of translating museum-held artworks onto the Google Art platform is likely to undergo a variety of mutations and permutations in the future. He speaks of the Google Laboratory in Paris as "a space where we could answer questions about what happens when culture and technology meet. Yet, as time went on we realised that this was actually the place where we would be inventing the questions in the first place. We don't really know what all the questions are. This space is so open and unfinished. It is fascinating for us."

The next speaker, **Chris Dercon**, sways less towards the iterative approach, proposing that cultural institutions – and audiences – must be prepared for radical structural change. He speculates on what museums can learn from the increasing digitisation of artworks, and the melding of digital and analogue interfaces, in the context of the current social, political and economic environments in which they find themselves. For example, cultural institution are recognising that their online presence is no longer primarily about the mammoth task of digitalising their entire collections, but about organising and co-ordinating this visual and verbal information to create a 'digital architecture,' a new way of experiencing the museum which co-interacts with it.

Dercon theorising of the museum itself as a 'mass medium' places it on a continuum with this digital architecture. He explores this dynamic through the recent Calder show at the Tate Modern, which highlights the sometimes unpredictable ways in which audiences react to their coming together. Whilst a shift has occurred whereby museums now recognise that "the more, as a museum, you are online, the more people are actually coming to the museum," the digital architecture of museums evidently has the potential to alter the in-gallery experience in profound ways which must be responded to. The Calder show received "the best reviews you can get, from left and right [news media]…it was called the 'happiest' exhibition, in London, internationally … everyone is applauding this exhibition. Everyone is speaking about it online, on social media. We never got such an online reaction before. Yet, the attendance is the lowest ever." With 23,000 visitors to the Tate website on one day, but only 1700 choosing to attend the show, a record high digital

audience seemed to coincide with a record low analogue audience. Despite this, Dercon argues that “the digital architecture of the museum is not impeding the public to stay away from the museum. In the case of Calder, it’s about something else.” He acknowledges that, of course, “some topics issues, objects, themes can come alive much more online, and via social media, and we need these kinds of platforms. [in the show] nobody gets to see…these objects as a kind of archival object, and you have to imagine the movement, and this kind of imagination *is* online.” The precise interaction of analogue and digital platforms behind the roaring success of this exhibition, is something “we can only speculate” on at the moment, “it is too recent, too fresh.”

In breaking down this dynamic, Dercon points to a recent survey by the Tate Modern, which asked 6 million people ‘What makes you want to come to the Tate Modern?’ He notes, “only 12% said they come to be a witness to the geniality of the artist and the artwork. 17% said we come to gain knowledge. Another 12% came to say we would like to enjoy art. But 47% said we like to be at Tate Modern because of encounters, the whole idea of the encounter, to be with someone else, to engage with other people. The gestures of other people, the way they look at art, and also the objects there, how they are working *with* the people. We want to be in the museum as a place of encounters.” The collective nature of this encounter shares properties with theatre, and indeed Dercon, who recently took up the position of Director of the Volksbuhne in Berlin notes, “the museum is the opera and theatre of the 21st Century. It’s the only place where you can watch people watching art, it’s the only place where you can be a voyeur. In a museum, you can sit and watch people watching photographs. It’s part of the museum experience.” Dercon highlights that a crucial part of this experience is tied to the curatorial design of a show, and that this cannot be satisfied solely through visiting a website. “When we try to sell exhibitions online we cannot give that same form of theatre, we cannot put these strange objects together in this [authored] way. It is a form of theatre where you are in the presence of a few objects, and you find yourself present within this strange constellation of objects.”

The questions these visits trigger are tied by Dercon not to democratic ideals of audience participation (though he acknowledges the importance of the relational aesthetics debate), but to a rather Brechtian emphasis on the distanced object – whether in a museum setting, or through experiencing the objects behind a screen, “it’s not because you’re being able to participate that something is coming to life. It’s always putting the viewer in a distanced [position], it’s a distanced object.” Ryan Bishop notes how this highlights the displays as “already pre-programmed. It’s like a lot of interfaces that pretend and claim to be dialogical are only dialogical insofar as they have been programmed to be so.” At the same time, the apparent rules set out by technology, by history, by institutions can be leapfrogged and changed. Dercon calls for a self-awareness, beyond the ‘short-circuits of identity’ reinforced by aspects of social media culture such as the ‘selfie, [which] leads back to the history of the grotesque, back to the 15th Century. The ‘grotesque’ as part of humanism was ultimately a recognition that we all want to achieve harmony, or an ideal life, but we recognise that we can’t achieve it. So the mischief that we see in the grotesque, the burlesque, the grimace, is a recognition of the face that we want to achieve an ideal life, but can’t … celebrities all present themselves constantly online and in selfies as clowns…a black clown, a white clown, the whole circus is coming back! The selfie culture, and the clown-esque. These things are very important to understand right now.”

New platforms tried out by the Tate attempting to articulate analogue curation online are discussed by Dercon, including the BMW Tate Live programme, where live performances within the museum building are streamed via the Tate's YouTube Channel, then archived and made available to view after the event. Dercon praises this program as 'highly successful,' highlighting the responsibility of institutions to adapt their digital architecture in light of the increasingly international audiences and networks of collaboration that now constitute the art world. He points to the use of the museum itself as a theatre stage by dancers, choreographers, who increasingly want to work for the museum. Dercon asks - why do they want to do this? Why do they want to explore different temporal and spatial structures and infrastructures in the museum context?

He laments the literal expansion of museums in terms of size. "I think the extension of Tate Modern opening in June 2016 is an example of the last generation of museums. The museum of the future will never be anymore a vast, monolithical, vertical space, because there is not enough space or money, and too much competition on the market….Tate modern is the last museum of its generation. If you want to think about expanding the museum you need to talk about another form of expansion – not brick and mortar – but a new form of organising the museum. Digital architecture is part of that." He points to Max Hollhein's investment, as director of the Städel Museum in Frankfurt, of €25m to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the museum by 'expanding' the museum, yet focusing solely on expanding its digital architecture. He contrasts this with the planned construction of a vast M+ 'art tower' in Hong Kong: "the building is delayed, the director is unhappy, [as is] the main collector who sold and gave his collection to M+. You could have solved their unhappiness by coming up with a complete new form of the museum. Which is thinking of the [role of the] digital museum in the first place… [in a country where] you cannot show all these works which are in the collection without getting into trouble with the local government." He suggests it is unlikely to draw international visitors, HK is not an attractive place for a mega-museum environmentally or politically, and institutions should be looking to the digital to help work through such problems and innovate past them. "We cannot solve the problem of the museum by building these big vast spaces. Even if there is an ingenious master plan by Norman Foster, we cannot solve the 'problem' of the museum. We have to be very radical and new. I think the future of the museum as discussed amongst young architects and thinkers is that it will be a much more flexible space, much more horizontal, it will be about pavilions where people can go from one space to the other. Where there is a lot of space for interaction, social space, where you can change a building into something completely different, where there is open storage, a library, that kind of thing. The past 250 years saw some very interesting footnotes – the Guggenheim and Frank Lloyd Wright; Renzo Piano, Richard Rogers doing this whole idea of the experimental museum, the Centre Pompidou; Rem Koolhaas and Kunsthal in Rotterdam – [yet these are] all footnotes only, underneath a text. Finally, we will now see architects and clients with the courage to think and come up with something new."

Dercon points to the emergent art scene in Sharjah as a case in point, and Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi's innovative use of infrastructure there. He clearly believes that a large part of such forward-thinking approaches will occur in regions relatively new to the international art world: Africa, Asia, the Middle East, not least in response to the return of objects from Western museums over the coming decade and a half. The latter may find themselves responding to a physically shrinking collection, and in any case are already painfully aware

of the loss of objects in conflict-torn regions such as Aleppo, Palmyra. Perhaps a deeper element of historical research and awareness will be required in order to comprehend what the museum of the future will look like. Dercon describes his current, rather unusual, research project which he is conducting for Belgium's Heimatmuseum along with Rem Koolhaas. This involves rethinking that museum space by looking to Belgium's rural history of agricultural labour, from the 18th and 19th Centuries, in relation to the current movement of young Berlinese artists to the countryside, to Brandenburg, as well as the role of digital architecture. "That's far removed from building towards in Hong Kong right? I'm not saying it's any better, but we have to be provocative, we have to create alternative models, to break loose, and to ask the right questions."

He suggests one such question revolves around whether the West has reached a sense of stasis, a disappearance of the future, as a paradoxical response to the acceleration of mediation of information. "If you think about what's in the world right now – print, journalism, TV, things are going so fast! You have to be on social media every 3-4 hours to know what is going on in the world! The future is being replaced by something that has to do with a 'fast forward,' but also an entropy, things are turning like in a washing machine. The funny thing is it leads to immobility, to stasis – which etymologically means civil war….Paul Virilio talking about dromoscopy said already in 1983 that we have to learn to accept that at some point we will program, if we are not careful, our own absence. Wow! And that's what we have now! We have programmed our own absence. And by the way, he hated contemporary art."

Ryan Bishop suggests that, given so many of the technologies we use now were developed for the military during the Cold War, "everything is in real time, but that has then shifted and become our temporality – this eternal now which we cannot push forward. So it's a concept which literally has no future." Is this something we can work through? Is this simply a case of technology moving faster than institutions, impacting individuals in uncontrolled ways who respond without institutional guidance or example? Is this democratic, or dangerous?

Dercon praises technological and cultural hackers, those pushing for change, for "a big leap forward." The latter term is an idea Dercon discovered amongst South and East African artists and thinkers debating the new wave of 'Afro-futurism.' Responding in part to Joseph-Achille Mbembe's writings on Afropolitanism, they work to reconceptualise politically and economically precarious geographies through a future-oriented perspective, inventing new meta-narratives and stories which deal with what a 'big leap forward' would look like. Part of this is the aforementioned return of cultural objects to these locations. Dercon suggests the Google Cultural Institute might explore, as a thought experiment, what this would look like. "Why don't they think about the big leap forward and online use the Google Institute trying to connect with new clients and new users in new continents. Why don't they say 'let's imagine that these things are coming back.'" He dismisses questions raised over the potential for a 'digital arms race' between museums in the west and elsewhere, arguing that technology has not yet given western museums an advantage because they are not yet at a stage where they can engage it meaningfully. This provocation and evasion of technological determinism is a concern Dercon also speaks of in relation of the risks individuals might face through 'oversharing' – "please be very careful about all these things like participation and oversharing and giving things out for free. I mean come on, it's a trick!"

Dercon veers towards the suggestion that we are at a tipping point. Is Google's 'iterative' approach to the integration of technology and culture enough, or are we in need of more radical, structural shifts? Can we rely on the conflux of chance encounters via analogue and digital interfaces to drive innovation, or is a more political, institutional rethink involved? What would such a rethinking look like? The speakers within this conference point towards how we might be asking the right questions. These are now presented to a digital audience. We encourage you to continue this discussion online...

Conclusion/Summary

In their various efforts to address the increasingly digitalised interface between artwork and viewer, all speakers highlight the emergence of new hybrid forms of production and display which straddle the analogue/digital divide.

Hannah Redler presents a review of recent artworks which translate, augment, elaborate or even caricature elements of the 'interface' – embracing the definitional extension beyond the interface-as-screen. In utilising digital media as an artistic tool these works are acutely self-reflexive of their place within and beyond the gallery walls. This in turn encourages viewers to consider their ease in moving between the digital and analogue, and the extent to which their own potential to participate with the works is in a sense pre-programmed.

Robert Montgomery's talk further explores the increased audience agency made possible as artworks traverse the digital/analogue divide. His large-scale, ostensibly immobile public artworks aim to subvert the aesthetic of commercial billboards, through the spatial elision of poetic and political language. His analysis of sequential re-appropriations of his work draws our attention to the apparent intimacy facilitate by the digital, in a haunting re-reading of Benjamin's writings on the aura. Whilst Montgomery has great proclivity towards the digital 'sharing' of his work, and the greater democracy of experience this might offer, his work also gestures towards forms of control and regulation within public space. As the digital helps transport artworks beyond the gallery, Ashley Wong of *Sedition Art* points to new economic modes of distribution and display which work to retain the premium placed upon the rareness and originality of a work of art, whilst attempting to evade institutionally regulated settings.

James Davis by contrast highlights a freely accessible digital 'exhibition space' which presents images of artworks captured with the most advanced photographic technology made available by Google's 'Cultural Institute.' The *Google Art Project* relies on the existing 'analogue' world of cultural institutions where such artworks are located, and by extension their curatorial ethos, which is channelled into an ostensibly 'neutral' viewing interface. In digitalising the canon of art history for all to witness in rich detail, Davis is confident of Google's benevolent intentions which border on idealism. He speaks of the importance of not only accessibility, but also the chance encounter with works, which may lead to longer-term engagement. Whilst applauding the educational leapfrogging that such technology makes possible, Davis highlights the cautious, iterative nature of Google's development of its *Art Project*. In light of our habituation to such gradual change, questions are again raised regarding the need to continually interrogate and respond to the impact of the digital.

Chris Dercon turns our attention towards the museum as a theatrical space, a 'space of encounter,' rather than as a vast repository of objects. Drawing on both qualitative and

quantitative research, he argues that the digital architecture of museums is yet to be meaningfully integrated with its physical architecture. Furthermore, he hazards that an apparently unregulated 'digital' art world is by no means a democratic one, that we must actively engage with the potential for change offered by the digital, and the concurrent need for a radical institutional restructuring in response to it. The apparent intimacy of the digital does not by default offer increased social participation and interaction in artistic experience. In widening the geographical remit of the debate, Dercon points to schools of thought (most notably, Afropolitanism and Afro-futurism) which call for a forward thinking approach to cultural theory, if the art museum is to have a role in 21st Century culture.

Symposium Overview Notes by Henrietta Landells

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