

'A space of negotiation': Visitor Generated Content and Ethics at Tate

Jenny Kidd*, Rosie Cardiff**

Abstract

This article uses Tate as a case study through which to explore the ethical dimensions of museums' and galleries' efforts to create participatory digital encounters for visitors. To what extent, it asks, is a framework for a digital museum ethics beginning to emerge at Tate?

Using data from a suite of interviews with the digital team at Tate, this article reveals an organization ready for considered engagement with the knottier extensions of the debate about museums' digital practice in 2015, but a concern about how to ensure staff members have the skills and confidence to lead and take part in those discussions on the ground.

Keywords: Tate, digital, ethics, participation, collaboration.

Introduction

Discourses about participation, collaboration, co-curation and co-production have been enthusiastically adopted within the global museums sector (for example as recorded in Simon 2010, Black 2012, Drotner and Schröder 2013, Kidd 2014,). In 2016 there is an emergent critical reflection on that discourse which moves across and between both practice and scholarship, indeed often collapsing them (Lynch 2011, 2014; Adair et al 2011; Giaccardi, 2012).

What has yet to emerge, however, is a common language with which to interrogate the ethical dimensions of that practice. This article uses Tate as a case study through which to explore these dimensions. To what extent, it asks, is a framework for a digital museum ethics beginning to emerge at Tate? The article reveals an organization ready for considered engagement with the knottier extensions of the debate about museums' digital practice in 2015, but a concern about how to ensure staff members have the skills and confidence to lead and take part in those discussions on the ground.

In this research, nine interviews were carried out with staff to discuss various aspects of Tate's commitment to, and experience of, what we were at that time terming 'visitor generated content' (VGC).¹ Questions included an exploration of how those individuals understood this term and how it fitted with Tate's vision and digital media strategy; what kind of voice they, and Tate, try to use in such projects; how the legacies and 'products' of Tate's work with VGC might be understood and articulated; who 'owns' those products; and how 'success' might be constructed in relation to such projects. In all of these discussions, the weighty issue of ethics loomed large.

This research collaboration – between a University researcher and a (now former) cross platform Senior Digital Producer at Tate – was seeded in the AHRC funded research network 'iSay: Visitor Generated Content in Heritage Institutions' (2012-2014)². The network convened four events during which heritage professionals and academics shared practices and discourses on the politics of moderation, control, legitimization, adoption and use of VGC; and sought to explore the radically new models of visitor participation that were emerging within heritage practice in the digital mediascape. The above interview questions had emerged as pertinent in the network itself, but as under-explored within ethical frameworks currently in operation in the sector (as will be demonstrated in the following section).

Those nine semi-structured interviews provide insight into the institutional and technological architectures within which VGC is sought, framed and institutionalized as new knowledge at Tate, as well as into the ethical debates that inevitably accompany such practice – and its reflection – on the ground.

In this article we use the term 'visitor generated content,' but not uncritically. It proved a useful – and provocative – terminological catalyst for the various meetings of the research network which sparked these discussions, but we are alive to its limitations. There is of course a (useful but not neutral) blurring of the distinctions between visitors, users and audiences inherent in such work, as well as a tension around the term 'generated' and the dynamics of power and politics it reveals. The term 'content' might seem contentious also, foregrounding the products of such participatory endeavour over and above their processes; the moments wherein genuine change and even empowerment might be situated, but where 'success' might be most difficult to articulate. These reservations notwithstanding, we commit to the term here not least because, in methodological terms, it offers a more honest appraisal of the discussions that form the basis of the analysis presented; VGC was the term used, and usefully complicated, during the interviews upon which much of what follows is based. The article will begin with a discussion about museum ethics, and digital ethics in particular, before going on to explore Tate as a specific case study of practice.

The ethical dimensions of museums' digital practice

According to Tomislav Sola, ethical considerations are so implicit as to be fundamental to all museums' work. 'The entire museological concept' he says 'begins with two questions: "What?" and "For Whom?"... Both questions are ethical issues.' (Sola: 1997: 170). Indeed, Sola goes as far as to assert that 'everything said about museums or put into written form is an ethical statement' (Sola 1997: 172), and reminds us that some of these statements are also backed with the weight of law.

Beyond those instances where legal frameworks are implemented however, ethical issues can be intensely problematic for they often defy consensus and are altogether more subtle (Besterman 1992: 29). Codes of professional ethics are designed to provide a set of moral ideals to help professionals deal with entanglements where they occur, but need to be 'constantly' updated so as to be worthy of consultation (Schmidt 1992: 259). Recent research, according to Alexandra Bounia (2014) has begun to recognize both the 'multiplicity and complexity' of museum ethics in particular, and there is a sense that this debate needs re-appraising in quite fundamental ways, as Janet Marstine notes: 'The traditional museum ethics discourse, created to instill professional practice through a system of consensus and its correlative, coercion, is unable to meet the needs of museums and society in the twenty-first century' (Marstine 2011 xxiii). Robert Janes has used similarly stark terms noting that 'It is time for museums to examine their core assumptions' (Janes 2009: 13, see also Papaioannou 2013).

Interest in museum ethics within the cultural sector itself has also increased in the last five years. This trend can be examined through a number of lenses: the economic downturn (especially in Europe) which has led to the funding of museum practice being (more) intensely debated³; the emphasis on 'social justice' and 'radical transparency' in the twenty-first century museum (Marstine 2011); continued debates about repatriation, and about the destruction and looting of cultural property⁴; and questions about what constitutes acceptable and/or appropriate risk in the museum context. As Edson asserts, in the museum 'almost every decision involves risk' (1997: 10). The ethics of museum work have thus been scrutinized along a number of trajectories, and their digital practice has not been immune to that investigation.

Those working most closely with our cultural 'assets' are often now more confident in their use of digital media, and are increasingly in a position to stand back and ask questions about what it is those media DO to us, whether what we do with them is always appropriate and defensible, and what our strategies should be for responding if it becomes apparent that they are not. It is our own experience that museum professionals do now appreciate the importance of a digital museum ethics even if they aren't sure where to begin their appraisal.

Digital media raise ethical questions that need to be considered, and reviewed, by institutions on a rolling basis, because making decisions pertaining to ethics is an unavoidable

and ongoing part of our daily practice. What is an ethical response in one moment might not be in another. What is an ethical response in one project might not be in another. Situations change, digital platforms – and the terms on which they operate – mutate. Whether museums are working with formal learning groups, ‘casual’ visitors, or those separated in time and space on the Web, ethics are unavoidable. Social media especially might be considered a test-bed for museums’ practice when it comes to such issues as: surveillance and privacy; moderation; the archival and ethical use of audience content; transparency in collaboration and co-production; the ethical utilization of data for marketing or as analytics; and the disposal of user data also.

With regard to the broader range of digital media being utilized by museums, there are other ethical questions which may need addressing: Should museums encourage visitors/audiences to use proprietary platforms wherein their data is collated and sold to advertisers (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)? Are museums clear about how they will use the data they themselves harvest? Is crowdfunding always ethically defensible? Do museum professionals have strategies for what to do if a user becomes distressed in their interactions with them online? Do staff check that users own the images they profess to own or is self-assertion enough? Who is excluded through the use of particular hardware, software, and operating systems? Do museums conform to international norms for web accessibility and usability? Do online collections recognize the subjective and political nature of interpretation in their presentation? Are certain uses of online collections defensible and others not? And are ethics a consideration of museums’ digital policy/strategy and larger mission statements?

In the digital heritage literature a more nuanced discussion about institutions’ incorporation of visitor/user content in particular is beginning to emerge (see for example Ridge 2014, Simon 2010, Drotner and Schroder 2013, Giaccardi 2012, and Adair et al 2011). However, that discussion continues to be framed within a set of persistent ongoing binaries that often serve to legitimize and support certain kinds of practice over others. According to Kidd (2014) these binaries are set up according to assumptions about what constitutes amateur/professional, grass-roots/top down, authenticity/quality and open/closed. As has been noted, ethical considerations are complex and such binaries can be unhelpful and fail to account for the ‘contingent’ nature of museum ethics (Marstine 2011: 8); that ethics is situated, adaptive and often improvised.

When we talk here about digital manifestations of VGC in museums, we are referring to a range of different possibilities for intervention including but not limited to: public curation, photo sharing, digital storytelling, blog contributions or comments, open art projects, and much social media activity. The potentials of such practices include a radical overhaul of the ways in which we collect, value, filter and appropriate cultural content, although clearly the extent to which these are achieved will vary wildly, and depend on individual assessments of ‘success’ that are in themselves multiply skewed. The praxis at the heart of the debate about VGC matters for many reasons, not least because it threatens to re-define visitor perceptions of historical authority and authenticity (or so it is posited in Adair et al 2011, Giaccardi 2012, Cameron & Kelly 2010).

Tate’s online ventures have received not insignificant scrutiny within the professional and academic literature (perhaps most extensively through the Museums and the Web conference forum). Such attention has focussed on web usability⁵, language barriers⁶, Tate Kids⁷, the Young Tate Web site⁸, multimedia tours⁹, online courses¹⁰, use of analytics¹¹ and tours using mobile technologies¹². In those earlier papers ethical issues are not foregrounded beyond important questions about who is excluded from the digital manifestations of Tate’s work (Charitonos 2010), but a later paper from Cardiff et al in 2013 about a crowdsourcing project begins to demonstrate a more nuanced consideration of the ethical dilemmas outlined above. They ask:

What value and status does crowdsourced content have in relation to curatorial scholarship? Where and for how long will you store content submitted, and under what license? What expectations do you raise for users in how you will use or credit their contributions? (Cardiff et al. 2013)

The remainder of this article will explore the extent to which such searching questioning of ethical responsibility has become normalized within Tate with specific reference to VGC practice. It covers a lot of ground, suggesting four macro-level areas of focus for any institutional consideration of digital ethics. These are; voice and discourse in VGC, moderation and

ownership, data use and retention and, crucially, articulating 'value' in VGC. Collectively, these areas of focus speak to broader issues about power, control and professional priorities that will re-surface in the conclusion.

Voice and discourse in VGC

VGC projects are now widespread at Tate in the form of short- and longer-term initiatives often intersecting between online and in-gallery environments (we will overview some examples in this discussion). As such, the parameters of VGC at Tate are incredibly broad. In some instances it has become an integral part of the definition of a programme, for example, the now infamous comments cards in the Turner Prize exhibition; 'if they were taken away from the show, it would seem that it almost wouldn't be the Turner Prize anymore, it would be something else' (I.5), and in other projects it has been at the crux of the offering from the outset (as with the Hello Cube Tweetable Object in 2011, Hellicar and Lewis, see Image 1). There is demonstrably a 'great appetite' for VGC at Tate from both staff and user-creators themselves; interviewees recount participation figures into the tens of thousands for some initiatives. Indeed, as I.9 noted, talk of VGC has become very much normalized at Tate, often conflated with social media activity especially (not unproblematically); 'you cant do anything these days without having an element of user generated or social media content.'

What became evident in the interviews was how fully enmeshed each and every one of Tate's initiatives in this area inevitably is with debate about ethics, despite the projects' varying audiences and ambitions. Digital ethics were a fundamental concern to all of the interviewees we spoke to, manifesting in varied discourses for different areas of the institution even as individuals



Fig 1: *The Hello Cube*

grappled to make sense of the same conundrums. For example, the lexicon differed considerably depending on whether interviewees were in the Marketing or Learning team; a member of the public could be one of Tate's 'advocates' or part of its 'community', but either way, their acknowledgement as a source of content was seen as paramount for ethical reasons. Similarly, whether referencing a 'project' or a 'campaign', transparency on the part of the organization was considered a key overarching principle. Such subtleties in language are not in themselves surprising; members of staff are operationalizing the discursive frameworks common to their roles, and to their immediate teams as would be expected (Foucault 1980).

One of our questions explicitly encouraged interviewees to reflect on 'voice' within Tate's work with VGC, and the responses were intriguing. There was a general agreement that Tate staff sought

to utilize a different tone of voice depending on the context of the project. Thus, the tone used on social media will be less formal than the tone on the blog, which will in turn be less formal than exhibition wall text. In VGC projects the emphasis is on inviting responses, so most interviewees attested to the 'conversational' nature of communications, for example 'I think if you can't be conversational about what you're working on when we're in a public gallery [then] we should be held accountable for why we're doing certain things' (I.5). This tallies with perceptions that VGC work is at its heart about opening up the institution in a non-threatening way, building community, being responsive, and even creating 'new knowledge' (I.4). I.8 speaks enthusiastically about this desire to open up and provide a 'welcome'; 'it's not a shared voice but there is a kind of shared welcome. I suppose it makes sense – the people who are working on these projects are the people who are really excited to hear from visitors'. Putting workforce – and skills – implications aside for now, there was recognition that conversation is only one of a number of possible outcomes of work in this area, and that it is never inevitable; 'once you open the door to discussion, you can't just shut it and ignore. You have to respond as well, and sometimes you forget that it's a two-way conversation' (I.2). As I.1 noted on this theme;

I would say that there are a number of voices that are broadcast and to a lesser extent some voices coming back in from the outside. They're much quieter and less visible and I think that's the area we're interested in amplifying.

Moderation and ownership

Reflections on voice inevitably spilled into discussion about moderation, evidencing considerable – and continued – anxiety about the reality of inviting users' contributions and (by extension) opinions. This was seen most clearly in consideration of the challenge in moderating blog comments that are critical of Tate as an institution. I.5 summarized the issue thus; 'We want a debate but never about any of our own activity... then it seems that you can't really have a debate then or a discussion because you're not willing to talk about certain things.' Such rationalizing is unsurprising, and it would be unhelpful to gloss over the realities of operating within a cultural sector where an ethos of public service rubs up against market pressures. As the Science Museum recently discovered to its detriment¹³, a high profile debate about the ethics of your corporate relationships and responsibilities can be undesirable, and interviewees are wise to the fact that such criticisms inevitably circulate around Tate also; they do not wish to be in the business of censoring or indeed self-censoring within the digital domain but it is a fine line to tread. Having a 'two-way conversation' might be one of the promises of digital media but it's realities in practical and ethical terms played on the mind of all of the interviewees. That social networks might host discussions about Tate's ethical practice more broadly, at the same time as being in themselves sites that raise ethical questions with regard to voice, led to profound questioning for I.2 about what kind of an institution Tate wishes to be:

I think if you're going to initiate anything that's got VGC, you have to really, really, really, really think about who is going to manage it, like what kind of institution are you? Are you a 24 hour museum or are you a 9 – 5 museum? Do you care about international audiences? What do you need to moderate, should you pre-moderate, should you post-moderate? Should the community do the moderating for you and what if you don't have a big enough community? Who's going to manage all the spam? Yes, it's a lot to think about.

This appraisal of the challenges inherent in an increased commitment to VGC is one that echoes discussions that are currently taking place across the museums and galleries sector, but more broadly too. In the media for example the issue of moderation continues to be a lively one, and we have seen in recent years a retraction of some opportunities offered by news outlets for comment in response to those challenges (BBC 2015)¹⁴.

The allied issue of ownership was one that interviewees were dealing with on a regular basis although the variety of answers to our question about this revealed its complexity; 'I think contractually it can get quite complicated in the detail of VGC projects' (I.6). Indeed, a

question that emerged within the discussions was what *is* ownership within these projects and landscapes? Is having a license to use visitors' content the same as owning it? I.5 laughingly asserts with reference to the blog that 'Tate owns those [comments] because I think once you register and sign up, you sign away your right to own your own thoughts'. The sinister overtones of such assessments, even jokingly, are not lost on the interviewees; I.2 is quick to point out that 'we own it but not in a dark way'. Interviewees are clearly aware of wider debates about privacy and surveillance, and are beginning to assess what the implications might be of utilizing third party sites such as Facebook, Twitter or Google about which public opinion can be rather vexed. As I.6 notes 'when people contribute to something, we're asking their permission to re-use it in various ways but that can also be shared with third parties'. She then reflects on the approach and concludes: 'We need to find a way of being almost like a gatekeeper so that people's contributions are used wisely and in a trusting manner.' This gatekeeping function is at present ambiguous at best, and 'needs finessing' according to I.7.

The legal positions on many of these issues might be evident, but there was much uncertainty in the discussions that informed this research; 'There are a lot of responsibilities and perhaps legalities which we need to iron out' (I.2). All respondents were doubtless that if someone made a request to have their own content removed then they would do just that, but whether this is clear to contributors is of course a different question (as is whether they would feel able and confident enough to make such a request in the first instance):

With Tate Kids it's been around now for six years, so a kid who was ten is now 16, do they still want their artwork on there? What's the process to take it down? Should there be some kind of thing at sign-up that says, it will be up for five years, do you agree to that? How do you make it all official and legal without putting the kids off when they first sign-up to share their work? There's a lot of considerations I think that we need to make around VGC and I think, well, I know that I maybe jumped into making all my content open and conversational without really considering what the outcomes might be (I.2)

There was agreement that some of Tate's projects were perhaps uniquely complex with regard to VGC and ownership, such as when people contribute to a collaborative artwork, especially when that process is overseen by a professional artist as is often the case. It may of course be very difficult if not impossible to disaggregate an artwork and give each contributor back their piece of content should such a request be made. The Exquisite Forest (2012-2014) was earmarked as an example of the complexity around ownership.¹⁵ An animation project in

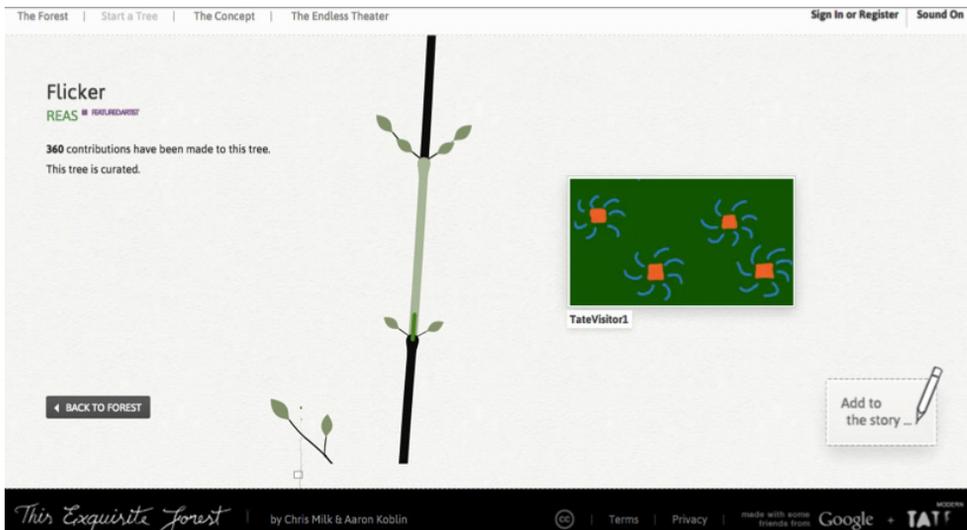


Fig 2: Screen capture from *The Exquisite Forest*

partnership with Google, made by Chris Milk and Aaron Koblin but featuring the contributions of a host of user-creators, this was a project that featured both on-site and online extensions, creating a 'branching, ever-evolving narrative' (Tate 2014, Image 2).

In this instance, Tate made use of a Creative Commons license to allow for sharing and adaptation and tried to emphasize the role of 'curators' in managing the project and its contributions. In such instances, ownership inevitably becomes very blurred, although I.4 saw this as potentially quite a creative tension:

I think that's something that's quite valuable as well though – that blurring of who owns it and actually having that conversation about 'who has the rights to that?' I think that's what makes user-generated or visitor-generated content an interesting space because it's still a space of negotiation and thought, and it's actually still quite free.

As such, discussions happening in the arena of Tate's digital VGC projects could perhaps inform the approach to ownership and re-use adopted elsewhere in the institution going forward, and serve a useful research and development function.

Data use and data retention

There were some key ethical questions raised in all of this related to the collection and retention of user data. There was no clear strategy for how Tate keeps and archives VGC, for how long, how and whether it might be augmented, and under what circumstances it should be deleted:

if we own it, how long are we supposed to own it for and why? If we have a bit of UGC that's ten years old, what value is it to us apart from taking up server space really? How do we archive those things and do we want to archive those things and how useful is it? I don't know. (I.2)

Some projects are archived online but some have been closed down completely and effectively deleted. I.6 details one example, and it is worth reproducing here at some length:

When we closed the community down on the Tate Movie Project, it really was disappointing for the children and they expressed that disappointment, which was both gratifying because it meant that we'd made a difference to them and they'd had, certainly the community we were left with at the end, had built very strong relationships and meaningful journeys of discovery through the project and felt very connected and engaged with Tate and the art and each other, and then just to close it down was a disappointment to them and it's one that was hard to mediate.

There are important questions raised by such an example that bleed into the section that follows on ascribing 'value' to VGC. In this instance, it might have been more fruitful to consider the collective endeavour of the community as a useful contribution to institutional memory rather than as pieces of content that only had value for those individuals.

I.3 noted that ongoing commitment to archival of such contributions could have implications for the content management system (CMS) and the workflow of the organization, and that 'I don't think it is something we've got to grips with'. I.7 concurs in their analysis of the depth of the challenge around archiving and managing such data over time:

I think it would be a little odd if people were giving of their time and presenting all this material only to find five years later, it had disappeared. So I think, looking forward, we do have think of how we're going to manage all the metadata, all this material coming in as we move forward in terms of migration and preservation of all this material. So, in a sense, we're creating a whole new archive round that from other people's thoughts and ideas, yes. It's a bit scary, isn't it?

I.3 reflected 'Do we have the rights to keep it, and to transfer it and transform it in order to sustain it? We will have to deal with this', and I.5 concluded that 'maybe I need to think about that more'.

According to I.1 Tate was 'just beginning to have those conversations' and one project in particular was named as necessitating reflection on these issues; the complex and multifaceted Archives and Access digitization project¹⁶. It is worth taking a closer look at this initiative as it has raised issues about copyright, data protection, safeguarding, and data storage that are relevant to this discussion, particularly as they relate to the question of 'value'.

Articulating 'value' in VGC

Archives and Access has involved the digitization of 52,000 pieces from Tate's artists' archives, and their integration with the existing 'Art and Artists' collection. This ongoing project is the recipient of a £1.9 million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund in the UK. Two aspects of that project in particular are interesting to note with regard to the question of VGC and ethics. Firstly, the online crowdsourcing transcription tool AnnoTate which has been made in conjunction with Zooniverse and contains a Talk function (Image 3). Secondly, various parts of the associated learning programme which operates in five regions of Britain and features participatory initiatives with various online and offline extensions.

At the reflective conference 'Unboxing the Archive' in November 2015 it was clear that the ethical dimensions of these projects had been closely considered with regard to copyright, but less so with regard to some of the knottier issues referenced above about how you archive

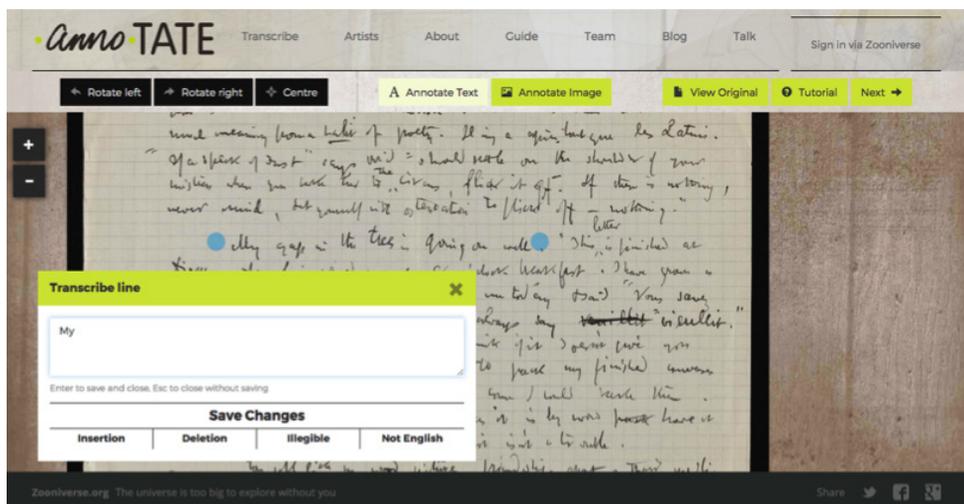


Fig 3: Screen capture from Transcribe pages of <https://anno.tate.org.uk>

and secure a legacy for such content over time, and moreover, presenters struggled to articulate how VGC is being valued by the institution in this initiative. When pressed, three of the presenters in the closing panel confessed that making sense of these issues constituted an 'unresolved issue' (2015).

This echoes findings from the interviews that there is no consensus about how VGC should be valued whether within Tate or by current audiences:

I don't think we know exactly what we should be doing with it [VGC] or indeed what people want us to do with it. I think in the small surveys or conversations I've had with some of our audiences about what is the value of this kind of work, whether it's people's photographs or comments or whatever, there's a general agreement that it is interesting to hear multiple voices or opinions or contributions to the broader understanding of the collection but there's a whole range of opinions from, 'it needs to be right up there next to what the curator's think' to 'No, it needs

to be entirely separate, we don't come to Tate for opinions, we come for expertise'. I think it's not clear where it should sit or how it's valued and there are multiple answers to that really. (I.1)

And as I.8 notes there are similar tensions around showcasing digital VGC in the gallery space.

Certainly there are lots of questions around the aesthetics of these systems, how they would work in various galleries. I know that would be a big conversation to have is how you would create a system that was inviting visitors to participate in a gallery in a way that would be acceptable from an aesthetic point of view for the curator of that particular display.

To I.6 this is a consequence of working in a 'white cube environment which traditionally isn't about multiple screens and UGC.' Given this assessment, and a perception that work with VGC occupies an emergent space, it is perhaps easiest for Tate staff to envisage the Tate Modern as the natural home for such experimentation:

There is curatorial concern that people might mistake it for an artwork... It would be very interesting in the new Tate Modern to see whether we can find spaces that are hybrid – that allow for art and for public interaction in a way that people feel comfortable with. (I.6)

The above quote echoes quite explicitly that binary between professional and amateur which many might like to think is being eroded within the digital environment. It is never-the-less still very much in evidence in this discourse.

Questions about how to value VGC are of course fraught with complexity (Kidd 2014) and bleed into questions about how to measure its 'success' (or, indeed, failure). Most interviewees agreed that a successful VGC project should show depth of engagement with the content but acknowledged that Tate usually only measures the number of contributions or the number of hits to a website, understanding VGC solely as a driver for web traffic. The interviewees we spoke to don't generally measure the depth of engagement, in part because of perceived methodological difficulties. There is an understanding that there might be more value (and indeed impact) in reaching fewer people and having more in-depth interaction or where 'barriers to entry' (I.3) might be more significant, but no robust institutional mechanism for articulating and measuring that kind of value. I.3 hypothesises about two imaginary projects; 'if numbers alone were the metric, then the second one [with lower reach but more depth] is a failure compared to the first one but actually it wasn't at all', and as I.6 summarizes:

I think UGC needs to be thought of quite carefully because on the one hand it might simply be 'oh wow, thousands of people participated' but how meaningful is that participation? It might be that a smaller group of people having a deeper journey and more thoughtful engagement have... that might be considered more successful than simply '30,000 people left a comment this month'. So I think, we don't have analytics in place that really weigh and measure those things yet.

This is of course not only a museum or gallery problem, but one faced by cultural and educational establishments more broadly, not least universities in their own understandings of impact. It is revealing that in the final quote above, analytics seems to have become the catch-all term for evaluating and interpreting participation of all types, even though largely it is understood that numbers alone can misrepresent projects.

There was an emergent consensus, however, that VGC was changing, even if only in small ways, the way that Tate thinks about audiences, as I.4 notes: 'I think the legacy is that the content is changing Tate and it's bringing it closer to our audiences in terms of what they might want in relation to what we might want'. This has an important marketing and branding function also, as recognized by I.9 'its putting the audience more and more at the centre of what we do and trying to instigate the public to be as vocal as possible – especially if they are enjoying what they are getting from Tate'. This is an honest response to how marketing activity is changed within the digital domain; push marketing is of course out of favour and the

onus now is on pull or inbound marketing strategies (Scott 2007). Keeping the wider public 'warm to the brand' is crucial (I.9). But I.8 takes the discussion in another direction, noting how such content actually has the capacity to contribute to and confirm institutional, individual and shared cultural memories over time. This is a more considered appraisal of the use-value of such archives over time than we saw in the previous section; 'it's interesting how these sorts of things become part of the collective memory of an institution or a series of exhibitions. They're important to how people remember an institution or an event'. I.7 extends this idea further; 'I would hope that it might bring in many different voices and different viewpoints that perhaps the physical galleries cannot reach and, in that sense, become more of the fabric of the nation's cultural history'. He goes on: 'In a sense it's almost like oral history. It's capturing people's memories of places and people and artworks and their own impressions'. If that assessment is true, then VGC assumes a profound importance to some visitors and to non-visitors also. Its ethical dimensions become all the more important to understand in light of these comments. They also raise questions about the appropriate skillset necessary for facilitating such interactions and understanding their legacies, and the policy framework within which decisions pertaining to VGC are made.

For our interviewees, there were questions about how the digital strategy supported VGC projects specifically, and a broad review of policy documentation revealed some tension, not least in the extent to which the resource intensity of this kind of practice was understood. There was a call for a more robust set of guidelines for VGC in order that (often junior) staff would not be overwhelmed by the weight of responsibility in this area, especially with regard to safeguarding issues. I.3 noted:

If you have UGC then that is essentially a community that needs looking after. There needs to be people replying to comments, moderating things, questions arise around what is and isn't appropriate material. Questions like what do we do if somebody hijacks us and uses it to campaign against something. So those kinds of questions are very different from resource issues.

Tate is widely regarded as a leader in the cultural sector for its digital policy framework, but its lack of attention to the detail of VGC does not make it conspicuous. Far from it, this has been a sector-wide blind spot. As I.1 eloquently recognizes 'we are still dancing in the dark around that.' I.2 goes further in asserting that Tate has a 'responsibility' to other smaller institutions in the sector 'to lead the way in things like this'. Other challenges include a lack of time for reflection on practice – and thus for institutional learning – and a consequent difficulty in creating sustainable programmes in this area; 'We need to not rush into it because it's a lot of work. I keep saying it's a lot of work but it really is, it's a lot of work,' reiterated I.2.

Conclusion

'user generated content should be about exchange and showing that people have an opportunity to engage with Tate and manipulate it [the institution], change it, add to it, contribute to it.' (I.4)

The above discussion reveals three key findings from the research. Firstly, that interviewees are now dealing with VGC on a daily basis throughout the organization. Secondly, that reflection on ethics is a key part of that practice even if the language for that reflection differs around the institution. Thirdly, and most critically, interviewees felt the lack of an institutional or professional framework to help them value, manage and evaluate their participatory digital work, and thus to match their ambitions in this area. As a consequence, the approach to VGC is one characterized by a need for 'control' and 'management' even though this is out of step with the core rationale for doing this work in the first instance.

A number of questions arise for further research, and for debate within and beyond the sector: Are museums and galleries interested in the quality of process or the quality of product when it comes to VGC? Are projects audience led, technology led or content led? Do the user-creators' interests align with institutional intentions? How does such content fit within an institution's workflow model, their CMS and their key performance measurements? And, to

re-iterate an earlier point, what should be the consequences if it transpires that they do not?

It would seem inconsistency and improvisation are set to continue characterizing Tate's work with VGC and their approach to digital ethics in the short to medium term. This is in many senses reassuring, not least because it accords with recent approaches to ethical issues more broadly; the need for Janet Marstine's 'contingent' everyday ethics is perfectly captured in the above discussions (Marstine 2011: 8). Indeed, inconsistency and improvisation might also typify museums' approaches more broadly within a cultural heritage landscape that has become increasingly challenging to negotiate.

Given the extent of Tate's programs using VGC, its reputation for digital, its reach and its recent capital investment in agile and integrated systems, the institution is well-positioned to test Marstine's view that ethics is an 'opportunity for growth' and should not simply be understood as a 'burden of compliance' (Marstine 2011: 6). Robert Janes in 2009 asserted that most museums 'struggle to overcome the tyranny of tradition' (Janes 2009: 14). Rather than let tradition shape what is practicable and desirable within the landscape for VGC, Tate should embrace the language of contemporary ethics discourse to carve out space for considered experimentation and reflexivity with, and alongside, its varied constituencies of users.

Received: 8 February 2016

Finally accepted: 20 February 2017

Notes

- 1 These were Tate's Head of the Digital Department, the Editor/Producer for Tate Kids, the Convenor for Young People's Programmes and Circuit Lead, the Head of the Tate Archive, the Head of Content and Creative Director for Tate Media, the Digital Marketing Manager, the Curator of Interpretation, the Curator, Digital Learning, and the Assistant Blog Editor for Tate Media. They have all been anonymized within this article and assigned a number where quoted in the following sections (I.1 – I.9).
- 2 Part of the AHRC Digital Transformations in the Arts and Humanities theme.
- 3 Not least financially motivated disposal.
- 4 For example as in Iraq, Syria and Turkey.
- 5 See Tasich, Tijana, and Villaespesa, Elena, 2013, 'Meeting the Real User: Evaluating the Usability of Tate's Website' presented at Museums and the Web 2013. Available at <http://mw2013.museumsandtheweb.com/paper/meeting-the-real-user-evaluating-the-usability-of-tates-website/> [Accessed 22nd June 2016].
- 6 See Marlow, Jennifer, Clough, Paul, and Dance, Katie, 2007, 'Multilingual Needs of Cultural Heritage Web Site Visitors: A Case Study of Tate Online' available at http://www.museumsandtheweb.com/biblio/multilingual_needs_of_cultural_heritage_website_visit.html [Accessed 22nd June 2016].
- 7 See Charitonos, Koula, 2010, 'Promoting Positive Attitudes in Children Towards Museums and Art: A Case Study of the Use of Tate Kids in Primary Arts Education' presentation at Museums and the Web 2010. Available at <http://www.archimuse.com/mw2010/papers/charitonos/charitonos.html> [Accessed 22nd June 2016].
- 8 See Cardiff, Rosie 2007, 'Designing a Web site for Young People: The Challenges of Appealing to a Diverse and Fickle Audience' presentation at Museums and the Web 2007. Available at http://www.museumsandtheweb.com/biblio/designing_a_web_site_for_young_people_the_challenges_.html [Accessed 22nd June 2016].
- 9 See Wilson, Gillian, 2004, 'Multimedia Tour Programme at Tate Modern' presentation at Museums and the Web 2004. Available at <http://www.archimuse.com/mw2004/papers/wilson/wilson.html> [Accessed 22nd June 2016].

- ¹⁰ See Cardiff, Rosie 2012, 'Tate Online Courses' presented at Museums and the Web 2012. Available at http://www.museumsandtheweb.com/mw2012/papers/tate_online_courses.html [Accessed 22nd June 2016].
- ¹¹ See Villaespesa, Elena, and Tasich, Tijana, 2012, 'Making Sense of Numbers: A Journey of Spreading the Analytics Culture at Tate' presented at Museums and the Web 2012. Available at http://www.museumsandtheweb.com/mw2012/papers/making_sense_of_numbers_a_journey_of_spreading.html [Accessed 22nd June 2016].
- ¹² See Cardiff, Rosie, Sinker, Rebecca, and Beaven, Kirstie, 2013. 'Taking the Collection out of the Gallery' presentation at Museums and the Web 2013. Available at <http://mw2013.museumsandtheweb.com/paper/taking-the-collection-out-of-the-gallery/> [Accessed 15th 22nd June 2016].
- ¹³ See Macalister, Terry, 2015, 'Sell sought to influence direction of Science Museum climate programme' available at <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/may/31/shell-sought-influence-direction-science-museum-climate-programme> [Accessed 14th February 2017].
- ¹⁴ 'Is it the beginning of the end for online comments?', BBC Trending report 19 August 2015 at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-33963436> [Accessed 22nd June 2016].
- ¹⁵ <http://www.exquisiteforest.com/> [Accessed 22nd June 2016].
- ¹⁶ See <http://www.tate.org.uk/about/projects/transforming-tate-britain-archives-access> for more details [Accessed 22nd June 2016].

References

- Adair, Bill, Filene, Benjamin, and Koloski, Laura, (2011), *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-generated World*, Philadelphia: The Pew Center for Arts and Heritage.
- Besterman, Tristram, (1992), 'Disposals from museum collections: ethics and practicalities,' *Museum Management and Curatorship* 11(1) 29-44.
- Bounia, Alexandra, (2014), 'Codes of Ethics and Museum Research,' *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies* 12(1). p.Art. 5.
- Cameron, Fiona, and Kelly, Lynda, (2010), *Hot Topics, Public Culture, Museums*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars.
- Drotner, Kirsten, and Schröder, Kim Christian, (2013), *Museum Communication and Social Media: The Connected Museum*, New York and London: Routledge.
- Edson, Gary, (1997), *Museum Ethics: Theory and Practice*, London and NY: Routledge.
- Foucault 1980, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writing 1972-1977*, New York: Pantheon Books.
- Giaccardi, Elisa, (ed) (2012), *Heritage and Social Media*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Janes, Robert R., (2009), *Museums in a Troubled World: Renewal, irrelevance or collapse?* London and New York: Routledge.

Kidd, Jenny, (2014), *Museums in the New Mediascape: Transmedia, Participation, Ethics*, Surrey: Ashgate.

Lynch, Bernadette, (2011), *Whose Cake is it Anyway? Summary Report*, London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

Marstine, Janet (ed) (2011) *Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics: Redefining Ethics for the Twenty-First Century Museum*, London and New York: Routledge.

Papaioannou, Georgios, (2013), 'Guest Editorial on Museum Ethics' in *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies* 11(1), p.Art. 2.

Ridge, Mia, (ed) (2007), *Crowdsourcing Our Cultural Heritage*, Surrey: Ashgate.

Schmidt, Fenna, (1992), 'Codes of museum ethics and the financial pressures on museums' in *Museum Management and Curatorship*. 11(3) 257-268.

Simon, Nina, (2010), *The Participatory Museum*, Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0.

Sola, Tomislav, (1997), 'Museums, museology, and ethics: A changing paradigm' in Edson, Gary, 1997 (ed) *Museum Ethics*, 168-175 London: Routledge.

***Jenny Kidd** is Lecturer in Cardiff University's School of Journalism, Media and Culture. She has published widely on museums, digital media, and challenging histories including *Representation* (Routledge 2015), *Museums in the New Mediascape* (Ashgate 2014) and *Challenging History in the Museum* (Co-edited for Ashgate 2014).

Jenny Kidd
School of Journalism, Media & Cultural Studies
Cardiff University
Bute Building, King Edward VII Avenue
Cardiff
CF10 3NB

Kiddjc2@cardiff.ac.uk

****Rosie Cardiff** is Senior Digital Producer at the Serpentine Galleries (2014-). Previously, she spent nearly ten years at Tate, firstly as e-Learning Editor and then as Senior Digital Producer (cross platform). At Tate she managed the e-learning team and helped produce and deliver Tate's digital learning strategy.

Rosie Cardiff, Senior Digital Producer
Serpentine Gallery
Kensington Gardens
London
W2 3XA

rosiecardiff@gmail.com