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Museums and Community Engagement: The Politics of Practice within Museum Organisations

Nuala Morse

Abstract

Community engagement (CE) is a key focus of UK museum policy and practice, increasingly used as a strategy to democratise museums and position them as social agents. However, the practices of CE have not evolved far beyond what I call the 'contributory museum', which focuses on how communities can benefit the museum. In this thesis I propose the *distributed museum* as an alternative contribution to museological theory and practice, and call for a conceptual and practical reconfiguration that focuses on how museums can benefit communities.

This concept arises from a deep investigation of the politics of CE practice at Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums. The research takes a unique organisational perspective, focusing on museum professionals' perspectives to examine how CE is constructed and managed across the museum's different departments, and highlighting varying practices, competing meanings and discourses, and the operational and cultural barriers to this work. Using a novel collaborative-ethnographic methodology, the research examines how the museum's Outreach Team negotiates institutional barriers, and how their practices have evolved towards more collaborative ways of working with community organisations and localities.

Arising from this close examination of practice, the thesis finds evidence for the distributed museum in some elements of current Outreach practice, but it is yet to be realised across the whole museum institution. It suggests that two distinctive practices make the distributed museum: care and craft. These practices are analysed drawing on the geographies of care literatures, and actor-network and assemblages theories. Critically, this thesis presents a politics of practice that works from within the logics of the museum and therefore attends to the competing demands that are currently placed on museums. I argue that if CE is reconfigured in these ways – as a practice of care and as craft – then community engagement will enable a new basis for collaborative practice with communities. The thesis ends with implications for museum policy and practice, and further research.

Museums and Community Engagement: The Politics of Practice within Museum Organisations

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September 2014

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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List of abbreviations

ACE – Arts Council England

BME – Black Minority Ethnic groups

CASE - Co-operative Awards in Science and Engineering

CE – Community Engagement

DCMS – Department for Culture, Media and Sports

HLF – Heritage Lottery Fund

ESRC – Economic and Social Research Council

MLA – Museums, Libraries and Archives

MPM – Major Partner Museum

NEET – Not in Education, Employment or Training

PG – People’s Gallery

PHF – Paul Hamlyn Foundation

SMT – Senior Management Team

TWAM – Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums

Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

Portions of this thesis have previously appeared in the following publication:

Morse, N., 2013b. Researching with(in) organisations: creating safe spaces for collaborative research. In: R. Craggs, H. Geoghegan and I. Kieghren, eds., *Collaborative geographies: the politics, practicalities, and promise of working together*, Historical Geography Research Series. Royal Geographical Society, pp.41–49.

Acknowledgements

I would like to give my warmest thanks to all the museum staff at TWAM who participated in this research and made me feel welcome in the museum. In particular, I would like to thank every member of the Outreach Team and extend my gratitude for their generosity, hospitality and kindness. Their intellectual engagement with the research has both challenged and inspired me, and I remain in deep admiration of the work they do.

I would like to offer my sincerest thanks to my supervisors, Prof. Rachel Pain and Prof. Mike Crang for their support, guidance and reflections. Their unwavering confidence in this project and my own abilities has enabled my personal development as an academic, for which I will always be deeply grateful. Hazel Edwards and Morag Macpherson from Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums acted as CASE supervisors, and I am thankful for their time and insightful thoughts as the research developed.

The research was made possible through funding from the Economic and Social Research Council and the museum service, and I am grateful for this support.

In the Durham University Department of Geography, staff (both academic and support staff) and fellow postgraduate researchers provided me with a friendly, creative and stimulating environment in which to develop this work. Special thanks must go to: Jayne Jeffries, Lizzie Richardson, Cat Button, Nick Rush-Cooper, Tim Lane, Matt Finn, Ruth Machen, Rob Shaw and Jenny Laws.

Other colleagues have also provided invaluable inspiration for this work, and I am particularly grateful to Helen Graham, Adam Gutteridge, Rhiannon Mason, Bernadette Lynch, Piotr Bienkowski and Ealasaid Munro.

Thank you also to family and friends who shared with me this experience and all its highs and low points. Thank you for all your help, support and love over this long process. We got there.

Any errors or omissions are of course my own.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Across the UK museum sector, there is a current excitement and optimism about participation and community engagement. It is the theme of numerous professional conferences, articles and case studies. It is at the centre of policy, contained in the one-time flagship idea of the 'Big Society' of the current coalition government, and building upon the social inclusion policies of New Labour. It is the focus of a renewed academic engagement with museums. Across these three areas, community engagement is positioned as the key to securing the museum's continued relevance and purpose in contemporary society.

This thesis argues that the practices of community engagement have not evolved far beyond what I call the 'contributory museum' – a model which focuses on how communities can *benefit the museum*. The contributory museum is a mostly unidirectional model where the museum is the centre and communities contribute to the institution through donations, loans, by sharing their stories, through visitor-generated content, or simply by visiting, and participation is predominantly contained within the boundaries of the institution. By focusing on contribution, this museum model misrecognises entire sites and ways of working through which museums can *benefit communities*. I will argue that this model also defines the current critical museum literature.

The thesis proposes the *distributed museum* as an alternative contribution to museological theory and practice, and calls for a conceptual and practical reconfiguration that moves beyond the contributory model to focus on how museums can benefit communities – a critical reversal of the terms of community engagement. The concept of the distributed museum arises from a deep investigation of the politics of community engagement practice in museums. This research was undertaken as part of an ESRC CASE studentship¹ with Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums (TWAM), a major regional local authority museum, art gallery and archives service in the North East of England (although in this thesis it is most generally referred to as 'the museum'). TWAM has a long term commitment to, and a

¹ I explain the CASE (Co-operative Awards in Science and Engineering) model in Chapter 3

national and international reputation for, its community engagement work which is mainly (though not exclusively) driven by its Outreach team. As such it provides an important case study from which to analyse community engagement (for key facts about TWAM, see Appendix I).

The broad aim of this thesis is to investigate the role, meanings and practices of community engagement from organisational and staff perspectives, and through this investigation to reframe the concept of community engagement. By community engagement (hereafter CE) I am referring specifically to work with external groups and localities, typically including people who do not visit museums. I do not mean audience engagement, visitor studies or the more generic public engagement. While collections are central to museum engagement, they do not feature in detail in this thesis which is instead concerned with the wider dimensions of practice – relational, emotional and its atmospheres – which are transferable to engagement with any type of collection.

The research takes a unique organisational perspective, focusing on museum professionals' perspectives to examine how CE is constructed and managed across the museum's different departments, and highlighting varying practices, competing meanings and discourses, and operational and cultural barriers to this work. Using a novel collaborative-ethnographic methodology, the research examines how the Outreach team navigate institutional barriers, and how their practices have evolved towards more collaborative ways of working with community organisations and localities. This is what I discuss as the 'politics of practice' which focuses on the practices of Outreach as creating alternative possibilities for CE. This focus on the *doing* of community engagement is the unique contribution of this thesis to the multidisciplinary literatures on museums, including critical museum studies and cultural geography.

From this focus, the research presents two reconceptualised concepts for CE practice: CE as a practice of care, and CE as a craft. Arising from the close examination of the politics of these practices, the thesis finds evidence for the distributed museum in elements of current Outreach practice, but it is yet to be realised across the whole museum institution. It suggests that these two distinctive CE practices make the distributed museum by re-centring relationships as the key dimension of museum work.

Critically, this thesis presents a politics of practice that works from within the logics of the museum to open up the practical possibilities for CE while attending to institutional

contingencies and the multiple demands placed on museums. I argue that if CE is reconfigured in these ways, as care and as craft, then community engagement will enable a new basis for collaborative practice with communities and re-position the museum as a community-based resource.

While the study is limited to TWAM, I suggest that its findings are transferable to other UK museums, as well as having significant wider implications for museum theory, practice and policy, and further research.

1.2. Research Context

The UK museum sector is currently undergoing what might be described as a sector-wide shift towards more collaborative paradigms. In museum practice and its associated literature, there have been three broad trends for museums working with communities:

- 1) For audience development, to diversify the visitor base (e.g. Black, 2005; Simon, 2010).
- 2) For knowledge development, in terms of collections and exhibition narratives, and in particular working with originating communities (e.g. Peers and Brown, 2003; Golding and Modest, 2013)
- 3) To increase access to culture for under-served groups (Mason, 2004); and its more radical orientation, to redress inequalities and address social justice issues (e.g. Dodd et al., 2002; Sandell, 2007; Sandell et al., 2010; Sandell and Nightingale, 2012);

In social policy more widely, museums are increasingly positioned as having a social role, in terms of community cohesion and resilience (Newman and McLean, 1998a), urban regeneration (Plaza and Haarich, 2009), social inclusion (Sandell, 1998; Newman and McLean, 2004) and most recently, in term of community and individual health and wellbeing (Health and Culture, 2011; Chatterjee and Noble, 2013). In fact, a whole range of policy, sectoral and other contexts have come together to place CE at the centre of UK museum agendas, with increasing urgency and optimism for change.

It is also another time of significant change for UK museums. The funding and cultural policy has shifted dramatically as museums came under the remit of the Arts Council England (ACE) in 2012. At the same time the context of austerity is deepening, with significant reductions to cultural funding bodies and local authorities from 2010 onwards. For TWAM, and other museums across the country, the consequences of these national changes have been profound, including staffing restructures, a reduction of workforce, the

closure of some venues for part of the year, a large scale review of museum strategies to respond to the Arts Council priorities, and an increasing focus on income generation to supplement reduced funding.

There is a third context of change. The key document that frames the current debates in the museum sector is the *Whose Cake is it Anyway?* report. Written by Bernadette Lynch on behalf of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF), the research was a collaborative investigation with 12 museums and their community partners into the effectiveness of participation in museums in the UK. The report concluded that “[d]espite presenting numerous examples of ground-breaking, innovative practice, the funding invested in public engagement and participation in the UK’s museums and galleries has not significantly succeeded in shifting the work from the margins to the core of many of these organisations”(Lynch, 2011c, p.5). As a direct outcome of the research, the PHF has invested into a special museum initiative, ‘Our Museum: Museums and Communities as Active Partners’, to support museums through a process of organisational change that will place communities at the core of their work. Since 2012 TWAM has been part of this three year programme for organisational change. As a CASE project, my study is linked to this process and aims to inform organisational learning, both at TWAM and as part of the national PHF initiative.

These three overlapping contexts of change are a starting point to reveal the dynamics and challenges that currently animate museum practice. This research, which took place between 2010 and 2013, is situated exactly within this unsettled context and is therefore a timely contribution which reflects on how ‘community engagement’ is constructed, mediated and managed in museum theory and practice.

1.3. Research framework

1.3.1. Account-Abilities

To guide the investigation into the role, meanings and practices of CE, I propose a framework of *account-abilities* to outline my research process and to highlight the current gaps in the literature that I will engage with throughout this thesis. The framework reflects an intervention in the epistemologies and methodologies of museum participation studies.

Following Hetherington² (2003, pp.107–8), I deconstruct the term in three ways – accountability, accounts and abilities – to support my research design:

1) Accountability

Accountability presents a starting point to examine the competing demands that are currently placed on museums. There are multiple forms of accountability within museums (Gray, 2011). Some are common to the public sector: the financial accountability and audit owed to government funding bodies; direct political accountability to local councillors; legal accountability and compliance. There is a more general public accountability directed at those people for whom the museum exists – ‘the public’, communities, and visitors. Alongside these are other forms of ‘temporal’ or custodial forms of accountability that are particular to the museum sector (Gray, 2011, p.54): the responsibility of museums to the past (preserving collections), the present (displaying collections for contemporary audiences), and the future (holding objects in trust for future generations). Finally, there is the accountability to professional values. Each form of accountability presents different sets of expectations which the museum must negotiate into a balance. Relations of accountability are, it follows, configured through various politics that direct which take priority and *cui bono*, who the museum is functioning for.

The dynamics of accountability have been investigated by a small number of studies (Carnegie and Wolnizer, 1996; Gray, 2011), however, CE is rarely explicitly discussed in these, while studies of participatory practice have limited their focus to the relationships between the museum and the community without reference to the wider patterns of accountabilities in which museums are situated. As I will argue in Chapter 5, the different patterns of accountability produce different logics of participation in museums with particular consequences. By re-centring ideas of accountability, I present the possibilities for a modified balance that puts communities’ needs and interests at the core of museum work while taking into account the complexities of museum organisations. This is a significant step forward towards a form of the museum that is more inclusive and responsive to communities – or, to use the terms of this thesis, its distributed form.

² Hetherington’s (2000) paper considers accountability in the context of museums and access for visually impaired visitors. It should be noted that his three senses of accountability follow different lines of enquiry to those suggested here.

2) Accounts

Currently, there is a paucity of direct studies of museum processes from an organisational perspective. Instead, museum processes are usually examined through the study of a single gallery or a specific museum project, isolated from the wider workings of the museum organisation³. Such studies tend to ‘flatten’ the museum by presenting it as a homogenous, rational, functioning machine. This research is different in taking an organisational perspective which views the museum as a loosely-coupled system (Rounds, 2012) where different elements contend for influence and authority, and as an institution that is ‘peopled and practiced’ (Askew, 2009). While there is a significant amount of research that examines communities’ experiences of participation, this study is unique in focusing on museum professionals’ accounts of CE.

The starting point of this collaborative project was an initial conversation with the Outreach workers at TWAM. I was struck by how often staff spoke about the challenges of doing CE as coming from *within* the organisation. There appeared a disjuncture between, on the one hand, the prevalence of participation in the official rhetoric of the museum, and on the other, how Outreach workers experienced their institutions as resistant to their work⁴. This apparent paradox is the starting premise for this research.

The second sense of account(-ability), then, reflects the methodology of the thesis (Chapter 3). The research proceeds through a collaborative-ethnographic approach that pays close attention to the detailed accounts of organisational life by museum workers in their own words. ‘Accounts’ refers to the on-the-ground understandings and use of terms such as CE and participation. ‘Accounts’ also refers to the ability of staff to develop their own practices of CE within institutions, that is, it implies their agency to resist, revise and sustain institutional interpretations and structures.

³ Sharon Macdonald’s ethnography of the Science Museum (2002) is an exception and has provided much of the inspiration for this research.

⁴ Sara Ahmed’s work on diversity practitioners provides a key inspiration to address this paradox in Chapter 5, which she also described in a Higher Education context.

3) Abilities

The prominence of participation work across the museum and heritage sectors has been accompanied by a proliferation of guidelines, toolkits and training packs⁵. While these publications offer many important principles for developing work with communities, these guidelines often operate at an abstract level. For example, the idea that collaboration should be underpinned by ‘mutual benefit’ is often cited as an essential criterion. However, the process of identifying benefits is not often discussed, or it is assumed to proceed in linear, step by step stages – when in fact this is often something that happens over time and through many interactions and conversations. Equally, list of principles such as ‘reciprocity’ and ‘respect’ are important, but the work – emotional and administrative – through which ‘respect’ is something felt by those involved needs illuminating. The academic literature also tends towards these too-quick abstractions without really engaging with ‘what happens’ in practice. This thesis aims to generate a deep and nuanced understanding of the quality of engagement – to ‘get under the skin’ of CE practice.

(Account-) Abilities refers to the skills for CE in a broad sense, including knowledge, competencies, training, values, approaches and dispositions. The research develops a participatory research methodology with the Outreach Team at TWAM to collectively explore and articulate the abilities of CE practice.

1.4. The Politics of Practice

A second dimension of my research process, as announced in the title of this thesis, is to examine the politics of practice in museum organisations. I draw on the work of Outreach to situate a politics of practice as resistant and as creating alternative forms of CE. A first consideration of the politics of practice is to highlight the mostly hidden daily work of Outreach staff: the bureaucratic struggles, creative negotiations and practical actions of staff as they negotiate their institutional contexts. A second consideration is a focus on a relational approach (Allen, 2012). Indeed, the practices of Outreach are not developed in isolation but exactly through partnerships and collaboration, through sharing knowledge and expertise. A final consideration of the politics of practice is a focus on infrastructures. I

⁵ The ‘Participation Portal’ (<http://www.collectionstrust.org.uk/participation-resources>) is one place where these have been recently brought together.

use the word infrastructures to denote both the relationships that are formed to sustain CE work, as well as the more 'formal' structures that are put in place to support it.

1.5. Museum Geographies

To date, the cross-overs between geography and museum studies have been limited in either direction (for a summary from a geography perspective, see Geoghegan, 2010; see also Crang, 2003; Craggs et al., 2013). Notably, geographers' engagement with museums has focused on materialities; this research sets itself apart by its focus on museums as organisations and its focus on practice. Coming to this study as a cultural geographer, I bring certain theories and associated methodologies which are intended to helpfully add to the repertoire of museum studies. The methodology is guided by Participatory Action Research which is more common in human geography (Chapter 3). A number of geographical concepts have also been important in the analysis, in particular the focus on scale which offers an analytical lens which is especially transferable to museum settings (Chapter 5). Additionally, a number of literatures have been significant in framing the empirics, including the geographies of care literature (Chapter 7), and actor-network and assemblage theories (Chapter 8). Finally, Chapter 9 is influenced by questions of the state, community and locality that animate current political and urban geography. As such, the research provides an original contribution as an interdisciplinary project that can inform both disciplines.

1.6. Research Questions

The thesis is guided by a set of research questions:

- 1) How is community engagement constructed, mediated and managed across different museum departments?
- 2) What are the organisational and cultural barriers to community engagement, and what are the effects of these on staff?
- 3) How do Outreach workers navigate and influence their institution? What infrastructures do they create to support their work?
- 4) What are the skills and knowledge of community engagement work? How can community engagement be reconfigured in light of these?
- 5) What are the implications for future museum policy and practice?

1.7. Thesis Outline

To begin to build my argument for a new conceptualisation of CE in museums, the opening chapter situates this research in relation to the current literature. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the museum studies and participation literature to examine the different purposes for participation and their differing logics in museums. I argue that the prevalent literature reproduces a contributory model of museum participation, whereby communities input into the institution and participate on the museum's terms. There are two central concepts in this model that I examine in the review: the ladder of participation (Arnstein, 1969) and James Clifford's idea of the 'contact zone' (1997). I argue that these typologies of participation tend to focus exclusively on the end goals of community decision-making and control at the expenses of the other elements – relational, practical and material – that enable and sustain participation. These are a key concern of this thesis.

The chapter outlines a growing critical museums literature which draws upon a longer critique of power relations in museums (e.g. Karp and Lavine, 1991; Karp et al., 1992). This literature argues that despite its claims, CE often becomes a tokenistic gesture when translated into practice (Fouseki, 2010; Lynch and Alberti, 2010; Lynch, 2011c). Yet this literature is optimistic for a modified form of participatory practice that can lead to democratising museums. I suggest, following Graham (2012), that currently critical work on museum participation is stuck in an intellectual impasse, between critique and optimistic ideal. The starting intellectual point of this thesis is that community engagement in museums is *necessarily* limited by its conceptualisation and occurrence within a contributory model which frames its 'conditions of possibility'; *however*, it also views museum staff as influential and resistant in their institutional settings. This thesis moves beyond the critical impasse to situate the politics of community engagement practice as working *within* the logics of the museum as the site for institutional, political and social change.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology for researching CE practice in this study. Reflecting on the CASE structure and the context of austerity in which the research is situated, it provides methodological insights into the challenges and promise of collaborative research with(in) museums. The TWAM study proceeds through what I term a *collaborative organisational ethnography*, combining ethnography with participatory commitments based in Participatory Action Research in order to 'hear' the accounts of organisational

actors and at the same time, to reveal the often overlooked, tacitly known and taken-for-granted aspects of organisations. By attending to museum professionals' accounts *and* to organisational complexities, therefore, the explicit aim is to produce research that bridges theory and practice.

Chapter 4 further introduces the TWAM case study and describes the development of CE at TWAM in relation to the evolution of UK cultural policy over the last three decades. Based on the analysis of organisational documents and interviews with past directors, I argue that the development of CE and its role, meanings and purpose are closely related to shifts in policy and funding requirements.

Chapter 5 moves on to examine the effects of these varying discourses on current museum practices. Based on the accounts of a cross-section of TWAM staff, the research examines the ways in which the concept of CE is configured in practice. In particular, I address the question of institutional commitment to CE. The research finds there is no clear definition of CE in the museum and that its varying meanings are located within the different patterns of accountability at play in museums, which have particular consequences for CE. My aim in this thesis is not to provide a clear or final definition or model of CE; rather, it is concerned with the tensions that arise as museums attempt to balance CE with other demands.

Chapter 6 investigates these tensions further and considers how CE is managed within the organisation. In particular, it describes the different operational and cultural barriers to CE at TWAM. In this chapter I aim to explain the apparent paradox between, on the one hand, the prevalence of CE in the official rhetoric of the museum, and on the other, how Outreach workers experience their institutions as resistant to their work. Focusing on the accounts of Outreach workers, the chapter considers the tactics used by staff to navigate and influence their organisational arrangements. I argue that this work, within the logics of the museum and working through 'adjustments', opens up a space of possibilities for CE.

The next two chapters go on to discuss in detail the practices of Outreach and the *doing* of CE. Chapter 7 describes the work of the team with health and social care service users, and chapter 8 describes the processes that took place around a community exhibition. Through these chapters I present the reconfiguration of CE as a practice of care (Chapter 7) and as a craft (Chapter 8). As I have suggested, a key purpose of this study is to articulate the abilities – the skills and knowledge – of CE. By framing CE as care, I highlight the affective and relational dimensions of CE work, drawing on the geographies of care literatures. In

positioning CE as craft, I draw attention to the work of assembling and creating connections between people, places and objects. This second re-framing of CE is developed in reference to actor-network and assemblage theories. These two chapters are concerned with a politics of practice aimed at articulating and valuing the subtlety and nuance of community engagement work. Across these chapters I also consider the infrastructures that staff create to support and sustain CE in the museum.

In Chapter 8 I outline the 'distributed museum' as emerging from these practices of care and craft. The distributed museum is a conceptual and practical reconfiguration that moves beyond the contributory model to focus on how museums can benefit communities. I suggest that this form of the museum can play a truly significant social role as a community-based resource and support system.

The final chapter summarises the research findings and reflects on the implications for organisational learning at TWAM and for the wider museum sector. I argue that a reconfiguration of the museum as distributed, and a view of CE as proceeding from the practices of care and craft, has significant implications for museum theory, practice and policy.

Chapter 2. Museums and Community Engagement: a review of the literature

2.1. Introduction

Community engagement and participation are arguably the two central ideas in current museum theory and practice. Museums are increasingly understood as places of participation on a number of different levels: there is a moral responsibility to work in collaboration with those whose material history is held in the collections; there is a desire to develop broader and more diverse audiences; there is a policy argument around access to culture; there is an interest in the digital realm and exploring user-generated content; there is an interest in exploring alternative narratives about our past; and more and more volunteers are becoming involved in all aspects of museums work. Discussion about community involvement in museums has evolved via terms such as *inclusion*, *access*, *consultation*, *outreach*, *engagement*, *co-curation*, *co-production* and *co-creation*, each term having different emphases in terms of how much authority and control is shared between the museum and communities (Mason et al., 2013, p.163). The aim of this chapter is to review the main themes in the current literature on CE in museums. There are a number of typologies and theories of engagement which form the basis of much of the discussion and practice, which I will discuss in the first section.

The many types of participation reveal as many purposes for working with communities, a few of which have been highlighted above. In this chapter I orient my review of the literature specifically to examine the differing logics of participation in museums. Indeed, the multiple uses of participation describe different ways in which the relationships between the museum institution and communities are being negotiated. It is these relationships and their politics that form the first of two major foci of this review chapter.

Whatever its form, within much of the literature 'community engagement' emerges as something inherently valuable; it is linked to participant empowerment; it promises the democratising and pluralising of museum spaces; it is a 'good' thing. And yet, at the same time, it is a contested domain that has incited much debate, leading to a renewed focus on theorizing power in museums (Clifford, 1997; Tapsell, 2003; Phillips, 2003; Sandell, 2007; Smith and Waterton, 2009; Waterton and Watson, 2011; Lynch and Alberti, 2010; Sandell

and Nightingale, 2012). Through these contributions, a critical literature has emerged around the notion that participation, despite its claims, is little more than tokenism (c.f. Cooke and Kothari, 2001). I explore some of these tensions in this review and in my empirical discussion thereafter; however my purpose is *not* to revivify these debates. Indeed, as I made clear from the outset, my research is focused on museum professionals and their institutions, rather than focusing on participants and their experiences of participation, and as such it provides a novel angle for analysis. The second focus of this review, then, is on the politics of practice as suggested by the title of this study.

While the review speaks of ‘participation’, I focus my discussion, and indeed this thesis, on the notion of ‘community engagement’ as I find it better reflects the idea of relations between museums and communities, and the practice through which these are created and maintained. Following Dahlgren (2009), I see engagement as a prerequisite to participation; engagement covers a broader set of practices, moods and atmospheres, and includes participation as more practical action.

My review of the literature presents two key arguments. First, it is suggested that the literature reflects a contributory model of participation which focuses certain dominant conceptual pathways of analysis, in particular, a focus on community choice and control. Furthermore, this contributory model frames the current logics of participation in museums. I argue that such a view limits the possibilities for CE. Second, the review finds that currently critical work on museum participation is stuck in an intellectual impasse. This is best explained by Graham (2012, p.566) who claims that “work on community participation in museums currently remains caught in a counter-hegemonic cycle of constantly noting the need for a greater critique of the institution, followed by a critique of the institution, followed by the optimism for an always-yet-to-be-realized community practice which might finally secure the museum as (for example) a ‘third space’ or a ‘participatory sphere institution’ (Lynch and Alberti, 2010, p.16)”.

My own view, which I will present through reference to the literature here, is that participation and CE in museums is necessarily limited by its conceptualisation and occurrence within institutional boundaries. However, far from suggesting that there is no politics to be done in museums, through this thesis I wish to focus on the pragmatic work of CE practitioners as they attempt to make their institutions more engaging and more participatory. I suggest that the focus on the ‘always-yet-to-be-realized’ grand

transformative promise of participation has restricted the terms of the debate to certain narratives that misread the potential of museums for communities, and furthermore, overlooks the potential role of museums for wider social and political change. Furthermore, as I discussed in Chapter 1, the current literature has so far failed to take into account the organisational complexity of museums and its effects on understandings and practices of CE.

Over its five sections, this chapter will provide a specific review of the participation literature in which I will situate my own research, identify what has not yet been addressed, and how my own work contributes to new knowledge in this field. The review focuses primarily on the museum studies literature; however, my own analysis in the following chapters is more widely influenced by current research in cultural geography (see Chapters 7, 8 and 9).

2.2. Museums and communities: origins and development

It is important first in such a review to briefly acknowledge two main influences that have focused discussion of communities in the museum: the 'new museology' of the 1970s and the collaborations with Indigenous communities through the 1990s (see Macdonald, 2006). These movements focused on the politics of museum practice to challenge the cultural authority of the museum and address issues of knowledge and power in the museum. The new museology refers to the intended shift from exclusive and socially divisive institutions (Bennett, 1995) and the privileging of collections-based functions which had dominated traditional thinking within the museum field (Vergo, 1989). The aim of the new museology was to reconsider the purpose of museums in relation to the communities they serve: as Weil (1999) famously put it, to move 'from being about something to being for somebody'.

This shift in perspective was set within broader academic developments, as the social and cultural disciplines began to engage with questions of representation. Rather than viewing knowledge as incontestable facts, this signified a move towards regarding knowledge as inherently political, partial and situated. In the museum context, this led to a wider critique of the politics of representation in museum exhibitions and practice (e.g. Karp and Lavine, 1991; Karp et al., 1992; Macdonald, 1998). This critique also drew upon the radical identity politics of the 1960s which called on museums to question their own claims about identity and overcome their monologism in an effort to re-examine their role in society. The

critique of cultural representation came especially from the many minorities forces – indigenous, popular, feminist, postcolonial – whose voices had previously been ignored or silenced by museums (e.g. Hall, 1992; Haraway, 1994; Samuel, 1994; Coombes, 1994; Porter, 1996; Lidchi, 1997; Barringer and Flynn, 1998; Sandell, 2002). This critique demanded that museums become reflexive of, and responsive to, their exclusionary practices; and even beyond this, it called for the complete reform of museums into democratic forums and dialogic spaces of exchange with communities (c.f. Clifford, 1997 and the idea of the ‘contact zone’ below).

Since the 1990s, there have been unprecedented efforts by many museums to include communities in the management, use and presentation of their heritage in museums, especially those communities whose material culture is held in the collections. Here, consultation and community engagement are seen as the solutions to some of the challenges of cultural representation. This practice has developed particularly in the US, Canada and Australia and in countries where there are local Indigenous communities, with museum programmes being developed to empower these communities and collaboratively review Indigenous representation (Ames, 1992; Berry, 2006; Sleeper-Smith, 2009; Lonetree, 2012). In the UK, there have been recent publications addressing these challenges in response to the collaborative exhibitions developed for the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade (Lynch and Alberti, 2010; Fouseki, 2010; Lynch, 2011a; Smith et al., 2010, 2011). Most recently, a special issue addressed these themes in relation to the exhibitions developed for the 2012 Cultural Olympiad (Morse et al., 2013⁶; Lynch, 2013; Strachan and Mackay, 2013). These discussions have occurred within a renewed focus on the ethics of museums and museum practice (Marstine, 2011). Although this thesis does not directly address issues of representation, it is influenced by many of these themes and political concerns – namely, a concern with creating new relations between museums and communities.

Some of the key academic works on community engagement include Andrea Witcomb’s (2003) *Re-imagining the Museum*, Karp et al. (1992) *Museums and Communities*, the edited volume by Laura Peers and Alison Brown (2003) *Museums and Sources Communities*, Sheila Watson’s (2007) *Museums and Their Communities*, Elizabeth Crooke’s (2008) *Museum and Community*. More recently there have been two notable additions, the edited volume by

⁶ This collaborative paper written with TWAM staff is another direct outcome of the research.

Emma Waterton and Steven Watson (2011) *Heritage and Community Engagement: Collaboration or Contestation?* and the edited book by Vivien Golding and Wayne Modest (2013) *Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections and Collaboration*. These, and many other academic papers, have provided the museum sector with new critical perspectives for collaborating with communities on collection development, conservation, exhibition display and interpretation, and actively involving communities in these different aspects of museum practice, through consultations, community outreach projects and more recently, through the process of co-production or co-curation. As I described in Chapter 1, in the last few years call for participation have increased in urgency and in their demands to shift communities from ‘users and choosers to makers and shapers’ (Cornwall and Gaventa, 2001; see also Lynch, 2011c). Reflecting a desire across the sector to promote active participation, co-production in particular has become a central theme in both the literature and professional articles.

What sets my own research apart from many of the current studies of CE is that it aims to move beyond the concerns of the politics of representation which have so far dominated critical museum studies, to consider a broader view of the qualities of engagement work alongside its role in facilitating representation. The research also aims to move from purely theoretical museological accounts and to return to more empirically informed forms of research that connects insights from academic research with the practical work of museums. The research therefore makes a useful and timely addition to the current literature by providing an in-depth analysis of practice from an organisational perspective, which has so far not been done.

2.2.1. On community

The aforementioned key texts have also been significant in contributing to debates around the very idea of ‘community’. Community is a term that is completely fundamental to and yet entirely elusive in museums, and museum professionals and academics writing in the field have understood and applied the term in different ways.

Watson (2007, p.3), alongside other authors, argues that identities are strongly tied to communities: “the essential defining factor of a community is the sense of belonging that comes to those who are part of it (Kavanagh, 1990, p.68) and that, through association with communities, individuals conceptualise identity”. A core element of a ‘community’ is the sharing of certain criteria such as historical and cultural experience, ethnicity, socio-

economic status, gender, age and geographical location; it is also defined by exclusions from other communities (Mason, 2005, pp.206–207). Communities are fluid and relational, and individuals belong to more than one at any time: “some communities are ours by choice, some are ours because of the way others see us” (Watson 2007: 4). Communities are also imagined (Anderson, 1991): for example communities based on a geographical location, like that nation, will include people who may never interact or know each other, yet they share in common a nationality. Similarly, communities can be ‘thick’ or ‘thin’, based on a wider range or only a few shared characteristics (Delanty, 2003).

In different ways, such commentators have presented a view of community as emergent; however certain conceptual tensions remain: “the links between museums, heritage and community are so complex that it is hard to distinguish which one leads the other – does heritage construct the community or does a community construct heritage?” (Crooke, 2008, p.1). For authors such as Tony Bennett the museum is as much about producing and inventing a notion of community as it is about representing it: community and museums are necessarily constitutive of each other (1998, p.205). I broadly agree with this position in my own study of the museum (see Chapters 5 and 9).

Representing the complexity and diversity of community is one of the main challenges for museums and participation is seen as the solution. In either view, ‘community’ is overwhelmingly a positive word, and, more problematically, museums tend to formulate a romantic discourse of community (Bennett, 1998, p.205). In the field of heritage, Smith and Waterton (2010) argue that community is predominantly expressed through nostalgia, consensus and homogeneity (what Smith (2006) has elsewhere termed the Authorized Heritage Discourse), which prevents exploration of alternative understandings and presentations of the past. In her study *Against the Romance of Community* (2002), (which stretches much further than museums to a societal view), Miranda Joseph argues that such an idealized version of community is complicit with capital and hierarchies of power in terms of gender, race and nation. ‘Community’, and indeed ‘participation’, have been mobilized to support different philosophies both on the right and the left (Pateman, 1970). Currently their joint use in policy either side of the political spectrum has brought the term at the centre of contemporary debate across many public areas (see Chapter 4).

In Chapter 5 I present the general terms in which ‘community’ and ‘engagement’ are understood at TWAM; in Chapters 7, 8 and 9 I consider the notion of community as emergent through the research and the different museum activities I observed.

2.3. Engagement theory: ladders and contact zones

As the review above has begun to highlight, engagement has been used in practice and in academia to describe a wide range of activities. Current engagement theory has aimed to analyse engagement by categorizing ‘types’ of engagement along a spectrum, based on the level of power that is shared (Arnstein, 1969; Galla, 1997; Simon, 2010). A common typology of participation is Sherry Arnstein’s (1969) *Ladder of Citizen Participation* (see Figure 1), which although dated, remains a key document for policy makers and practitioners. It has also been persistent in museum research and the different terms, *inclusion, access, consultation, outreach, engagement, co-curation, co-production* and *co-creation* have been mapped onto these steps. Arnstein describes a gradation model across three main categories. The lowest part of the ladder represents ‘non-participation’, moving through ‘tokenism’ to ‘citizen power’. It is not the aim of this thesis to categorise the engagement work of TWAM. Rather, the purpose of this study is to ‘get under the skin’ of engagement practice which is unlikely to fit a ladder metaphor.

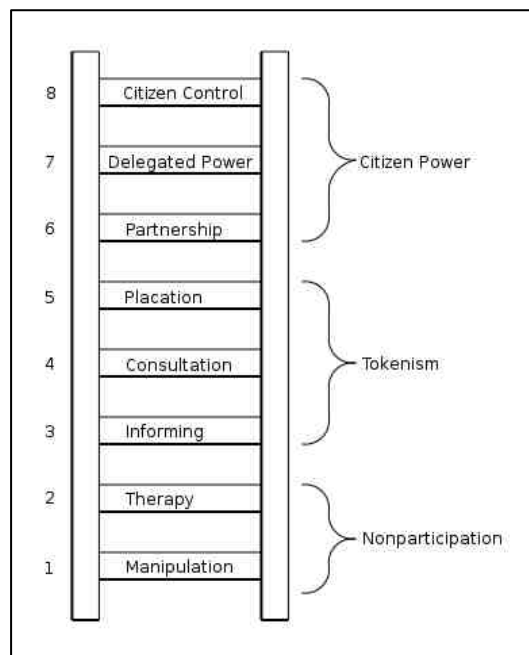


Figure 1: Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969)

Many have critiqued the limitations to the ladder framework as it presents a linear model; in reality, participation is more likely to happen across a shifting continuum with different 'types' of participation happening at different times, rather than through a series of chronological steps forward (Cornwall, 2008, p.273). Implicit in the model is a hierarchy of participation which equates the greatest level of relinquishing of power with the most valuable forms of participation. However, this idealises some forms of participation over others by implying that some relationships are inherently more democratic than others. In fact, taken to its concluding logic, the ladder is a self-perpetuating model, as full citizen control will create a new set of 'powerholders'(in Arstein's terms) that will require challenge.

For Arnstein, the key aim of participation is the redistribution of power and so the measure of participation is the power to make decisions and gain control, and this is the desirable end point. As such, the model focuses on the outcome, at the expense of the process, for example, the methods of engagement (Tritter and McCallum, 2006). As Tritter and McCallum (2006, p.157) have commented, "despite the interpretations, refinements, and revisions of Arnstein's model, they retain a hierarchical approach and uncritically embrace citizen control as the pinnacle of involvement". The ideal of full community control is echoed in the museum literature: the aim is to involve participants in all aspects of museum work. This is persistent in accounts of co-produced exhibitions (Lynch and Alberti, 2010) and of community-led heritage projects (Smith and Waterton, 2009). These discussions are based on the values of 'choice' and 'control', which tend to focus on the capacity of individuals or groups to make final decisions about sets of actions – for example, choice of objects and decisions over interpretation and narrative; as well as focusing on the tangible outputs of co-production and the role of participants in controlling the processes of production – of a display, an exhibition, a gallery, etc. In reality however, these are often only limited choices as projects are always framed by professional standards and the museum's own agenda (Lynch, 2011c).

Through my own research with TWAM, I will present a critical analysis of the spectrum of engagement by challenging the idea that control over decision-making is the only or ultimate aim (see also Onciul, 2013). I argue instead for a much closer attention to relations and specificity which will highlight other challenges and dynamics. As I will go on to describe in Chapter 6, the focus on choice and control as a goal and an end in itself has

certain effects which actually limit the possibilities for participation in museums, as well as misrecognising the potential sites for change.

Another limitation of the ladder model is the tendency to reduce its actors to homogenous groups; equally, it does not account for the ways in which an individual's (or groups' or museums') power can shift throughout a collaborative process. Instead, my study seeks to develop a complexity view of organisations which takes into account a diversity of organisational actors (see Chapter 3). In particular, I am interested in the agency of CE museum staff and how they resist their often uncooperative institutions.

What is more interesting to take away from Arnstein's work and those who have developed it (e.g. Pretty et al., 1995; Mikkelsen, 2005; Bovaird, 2007) is an acute awareness of how participation is used to legitimate power. Participation can be distorted, filled with pretence and placation, and even used for manipulation. For example, some forms of participation use committees or advisory groups that give members the illusion that they can influence the process, yet these groups often have no power. These token types of involvement enable the 'powerholders' to maintain control while at the same time maintaining the appearance of legitimacy by referring to these groups. This attention to power has influenced the critical museum literature, which I further discuss below.

More complex theories of participation have built on Arnstein's ladder, adding a focus on individual and community empowerment. Some key developments are Wilcox (1994) whose model shifts in emphasis to a recognition that power is not always transferred but that the participative process can still have value; and Burns et al.'s (1994) ladder that attempts to incorporate the quality of engagement experiences. Such research shows that the *nature* of the participatory relationships is also important and this is the starting point and focus of my own study of CE at TWAM. I am interested in the *how* of participation, rather than the *how much*. In the following chapters (7 and 8) I will propose a more nuanced interpretation of engagement through a specific attention to its processes and methods, as well as the skills required to support CE.

Within the museum sector, Nina Simon has been a catalyst for participation. Her blog, followed by her book, also freely available online (<http://www.participatorymuseum.org/>), has provided inspiration across the UK sector. Simon defines four forms of participation in museums: *Contributory*, where communities have a specific and often limited input in an institutionally controlled process; *Collaborative*, where visitors become active participants

in shaping a museum project that is ultimately controlled by the museum; *Co-creative*, where communities work with museum staff from the beginning to define the project's goals; and *Hosting*, where the museum opens its facilities and resources for communities to develop projects themselves (Simon, 2010). In her view, these different participatory categories are not progressively more valuable, or better than each other: some contributory projects can fail to attract participants, and some co-created projects can produce outcomes that are not desired or valued by either the community or the institution. Simon's main argument is that museums must consider the implications of community work and develop models that best fit their institutional goals. Therefore, in whichever forms of participation it decides to enable, the institution remains very much in control.

A more sophisticated theory of engagement for museums can be found in James Clifford's (1997) 'contact zone' which pays closer attention to power dynamics within engagement sessions. Borrowing the phrase from Mary Louise Pratt (1992), Clifford uses the contact perspective to examine the nature of post-colonial encounters in the museum. For Clifford, the relationships between museums and their communities have historically been characterized by radically asymmetric relations of power, rendered visible through exhibitions and displays which have privileged the views of certain classes, races and genders. Clifford makes clear that contemporary relationships are still characterized by uneven power relations which must be recognised. His political project of the contact zone is articulated through the *principle of reciprocity* and through the potential for agency in asymmetrical power relations. The possibility of the contact zone, as a space of collaboration, discussion, negotiation and exchange has provided much optimism for collaborative work (for a thoughtful critique, see Bennett, 1998; Boast, 2011; Dibley, 2005; Witcomb, 2003). Although not always explicitly referred to, it has been argued that the contact zone is largely synonymous with the new collaborative programmes in museums from the 1990s to this day (Boast, 2011, p.59). A recent contribution to the literature is Bryony Onciul's 'engagement zone' which takes a broader view to include contact zone as well as the unpredictable "intercommunity work that happens in cross-cultural engagement" (2013, p.83). Within my own research at TWAM, I introduce the notion of *networks of engagement* (Chapter 8 and 9). I find this conceptual shift necessary as my focus is on the wider processes of community engagement which do not necessarily result in an outcome (such as an exhibition). While it is presented as a critique and move away

from the ladder model, however, it is not incompatible with contact zones and engagement zones.

Robin Boast's critique of the contact zone as a neo-colonial project is interesting for this review. Boast states that "the contact zone is a *clinical collaboration* [...] designed to appropriate the resources necessary for the academy and to be silent about those that are not *necessary*" (Boast, 2011, p.66 emphasis in original). For Boast, like Bennett (1998), the contact zone "is a site in and for the centre" (2011, p.67). These two points are important to my study: I address the 'clinical' nature of collaboration in Chapter 7, where I introduce the concept of care as a powerful (and still powerfully political) alternative. Most critically however, is the issue of core/periphery. I want to suggest that the different theories of engagement presented above are in fact framed within a contributory model where the museum is at the centre of engagement and communities are in the margins. This model has also framed the different logics of participation which are discussed at the end of the following section 2.5.

2.4. 'Good for us', 'good for them', 'good for us all': the logics of participation

A starting premise for this study is that participation can only be understood by examining the logics of participation – the aims and purpose of engagement – and their relative primacy as drivers for CE work. As Cornwall (2006, p.50) remarks, as an "infinitely malleable term, participation can be used to evoke and to signify almost anything that involves people. As such, it can be framed to meet almost any demand made of it". As I commented above, calls for greater participation are made across the political spectrum towards different ends: "it is conducted in a world of ethical greys" (Graham, 2011, p.6). This section draws on Helen Graham's (2011) review of the participation literature in the context of intellectual property rights and informed consent. Graham describes three arguments that are put forward by cultural institutions for participation: good for us, good for them, and good for us all. There is also a counter-argument, not good for anyone, which I describe in the following section on 'the critique of participation'.

2.4.1. Good for us

The first two trends for participation are linked to two concerns: a concern about making museums relevant and a desire for better knowledge (Graham, 2011, pp.6–9). Both concerns aim to involve people as this will lead to benefits for the institution, including, as Graham shows, providing legitimacy, a concern I return to in Chapter 5. The relevance of the museum has been a key concern in the museum literature for many years now – a concern with ‘reinventing’ the museum with a clear role in society (Anderson, 2004), and away from its 19th century origins as a pedagogic and civilising institution (Bennett, 1995). Most recently, the Museum Association’s vision for the future of museums, *Museums Change Lives*, talks about museums becoming ‘more relevant to their audiences and communities’ (2013, p.3). Participation is seen as the solution to the issues of relevance (see Simon, 2010, p.ii). Increasingly, in policy directed documents such as the MA statement, relevance (and legitimacy) is directly linked to public funding. In this sense, the ‘good for us’ mode of participation is first about improving museum institutions (Graham, 2011, p.9).

The second tenet in the ‘good for us’ mode is the way in which participation is framed as a way to access better knowledge for research and exhibitions. As I described above, this mode of participation is of particular relevance to contact zone work with originating communities. As Graham (2011) remarks, this is also an explicit means of securing legitimacy for the museum, especially in terms of object interpretation; it is further suggested that collaborative and co-produced exhibitions and displays will provide better knowledge and better exhibitions (Ames, 2003; Tapsell, 2003; Lynch and Alberti, 2010; Lynch, 2011a; Wood, 2011).

2.4.2. Good for them

The ‘good for them’ logic is understood as improving the public through their participation in museums (Graham, 2011, p.9). The idea of museums ‘acting on the social’ can be traced back to the 19th century museum as ‘educating and civilising agencies’ for the reform of public manners (Bennett, 1995, p.66; Duncan, 1995; McClellan, 2003), an idea that has found a new articulation in a UK context under the New Labour cultural policy of social inclusion. As Crooke comments, “the concern to make museums relevant to the ‘community’ has swiftly moved to combining museums with some of the key social policy issues, such as tackling social exclusions, building cohesive communities, and contributing

to museum regeneration” (Crooke, 2006, p.170). The focus on participation is to have a positive impact on those involved, in terms of social capital, self-confidence, citizenship, skills, wellbeing and happiness (Dodd and Sandell, 1998). Here the museum’s relevance and legitimacy is linked to demonstrating its ‘public value’ in terms of its social impact (Gray, 2008). As Graham points out, legitimacy here “is secured through appeals to a political order [which] controls museums’ public funding via a promise to ‘act on’ its ‘citizens’ on their behalf. In other words, participation carries value – including monetary value – which does not come directly from the individual (as in the Good for ‘Us’ mode) but via an imagined aggregate governmental value of lots of individuals’ engagement (healthy population; more skilled workforce)” (Graham, 2011, p.10). While social inclusion policy was conceived to increase cultural participation, implicit in the policy writings around social exclusion was a *deficit perspective*, part of a wider socio-political ideology that approaches the socially excluded based upon perception of their shortcomings (Levinas, 2005). The deficit perspective focuses on individuals’ skills and attributes, but in terms of their ‘incompleteness’, rather than addressing the condition which underlie and perpetuate the deficit perspective. Additionally, it has been argued that embedded within these policies is a soft-disciplinary discourse of creating better citizens (Bennett, 1998, 2003). I address this mode of participation and its links to the policy environment in more detail in Chapter 4 in relation to the development of CE at TWAM.

2.4.3. Good for us all

In this orientation, both modes above are connected and the focus is on the impact of the museum on society at large⁷. A particular intonation of this mode has been the long held aspiration of the museum as a ‘forum’(Cameron, 1971) and as a centre for civic dialogue. The most interesting work in this vein has discussed the role of the museum for social justice and as a space for activism (Sandell, 2007; Sandell and Nightingale, 2012; Hollows, 2013) and citizenship (Lynch, 2011a); as well as the role of museums in addressing those pressing issues in our ‘troubled’ world (Janes, 2009; Gurian, 2010). The museum is re-imagined as a dialogic space, with different rhetorical inflexions which on a basic level reflect the differences between a liberal position and a more radical one. The wider debates here are framed in terms of the role of the museum institution as either neutral

⁷ It should be noted that my interpretation of this mode differs slightly in focus from the mode proposed by Graham.

facilitator, as a political and activist agent, or as enabling open spaces of pluralism (Graham, 2011, p.15). For example, authors such as Richard Sandell have emphasised the museum's authority and 'moral leadership role' in combating prejudice (2007, p.186), while Lynch and Alberti (2010, p.13) focus on the museums as a 'participatory sphere', where "diverse interpretations and agendas are not homogenized into a seamless product, but remain distinct", which is essentially a form of liberal pluralism. In this mode, the commitment to participation is linked to empowerment and social change. The policy version of this rhetoric relies on a perceived 'ripple out' effect, whereby individual cultural engagement is understood to have positive effect on communities (an assumption that has been challenged elsewhere, see Sennett, 2012).

Another dimension that comes through the 'good for us all' societal view is the idea of balance as central to museum ethics – for example, balancing the needs of a community involved in co-producing a display with the requirements for access guidelines that will ensure it is accessible to the wider public (Museums Association, 2008; Graham et al., 2013). I discuss the notion of balance in relation to the institutional complexities of TWAM in Chapter 5. Briefly, as Simon states, "[e]very participatory project has three core stakeholders: the institution, participants, and the audience" (2010, p.13). I will argue that there are even more stakeholder interests to consider in this balance, including local councils, funders and government (via policy).

In this thesis, I will add to the discussions on the logics of participation by introducing the notion of accountability as an alternative mode of theorising these relations and their politics (Chapter 5). Thinking through accountability is the first major contribution of this thesis and it aims to create new balances in community engagement initiatives, whilst recognising asymmetrical power relations.

2.5. Participation as contribution

In relation to these literatures, I want to argue that the different modes, including the 'good for us all' narrative, are in fact constructed within a 'contributory model' of the museum. The established contributory model⁸ defines the museum as a place that individuals and groups can input into through donations, bequests, telling their stories, or

⁸ The model can be traced back to the 19th century European expansionist perspective, and the museum as a central 'point of gathering' (Clifford, 1997, p.193; Bennett, 1998, p.203)

by simply visiting: the museum is “a place to which tribute must be paid” (Dewdney et al., 2012b, p.156). Within each of the modes, participation is also featured in terms of tribute: participation improves and benefits the museum. Even in the ‘good for them’ model, as Graham has highlighted, participation is caught up in a ‘good for us by being good to them’ logic which secures the museum’s relevance and legitimacy. Fundamentally across these modes, and including ‘good for us all’, CE and participation are instigated and contained *inside* the museum, and as such, are necessarily limited. Participation is imagined through certain codes, languages and knowledges that are expected as valid and valuable forms of contribution – for example the form of an interpretation for an artefact (see Chapter 6) – which is framed on the museum’s terms. The key iteration of the ‘good for us all’ mode relates to serious consideration of wider societal issues (such as social justice) and as such it is more open to challenging the contributory model, which it hopes to transform as, say, a ‘participatory sphere’ (Lynch and Alberti, 2010). However, by instigating participation on the museum’s terms – in terms of contribution – despite its rhetoric, participation is rarely oriented towards changing the institution; rather, it ends up maintaining the institution as it is. This argument is recurrent in the critique of participation which I examine in the following section. However, my contention is that this critique does not recognise the contributory model fully, and so it is unable to challenge it directly. In this thesis I will go on to argue for a *distributed model of the museum* (Chapter 9), which I base in empirical research, as a conceptual reversal of the contributory model, which I argue is necessary for beginning to reframe participation on different terms.

2.6. The critique of participation

The critique of participation in the museums literature draws upon a longer critique of power relations in participatory projects in Development Studies in particular. In this critique, participation is framed as inherently problematic, as it often reproduces the inequalities it seeks to challenge. Referring back to the ladder of participation, it can be used for coercion and manipulation and as a means of retaining control. The most significant influence in this literature is the contribution by Cooke and Kothari, *Participation: the New Tyranny?* (2001)

Bernadette Lynch is an important commentator – or ‘critical friend’ as she would put it – who has focused the debates in the UK museum sector. Based on her own experience working at the Manchester Museums and her research with the Paul Hamlyn Foundation,

she argues that museums have so far only practised 'empowerment-lite' because they continue to retain institutional control (Lynch, 2011a; c). Lynch argues that museums are still structured by inequality: participation happens in the 'invited spaces' (after Gaventa, 2004) of the institution which frame the rules of engagement:

"participation in invited spaces is generally on the terms set by those who create and maintain those spaces. (...) Thus, while an illusion of creative participation is what is on offer, decisions tend to be coerced or rushed through on the basis of the institution agenda or strategic plan, manipulating a group consensus into what is inevitable, usual or expected." (Lynch, 2011b, p.451)

In a paper with Alberti reflecting on an attempt at co-creating an exhibition, *Myths about Race*, at the Manchester Museum in which they were both involved, the authors describe how institutional priorities and practical considerations such as time and budgets took over. From their experience, the authors claim that despite well-meaning intentions, participation is not always the democratic process it sets out to be; rather, it more frequently reflects the agendas of the institutions and the processes, such as the final content edit, are tightly controlled by the museum (Fouseki, 2010).

In the review of the wider literature on museum participation, a key theme that emerged was a conflict model of CE. This tended to view participation as necessarily confrontational. This partly explains the prevalence of the discourse of community control as a solution for CE. However, I am cautious of such a framing as it tends to position community as essentially antagonistic. As I will go on to show through the empirics of this study, this has consequences for how museum professionals approach CE practice (Chapter 6).

For authors such as Lynch the critique of participation is also linked to optimism about changing practice. Lynch argues that museums must practice 'radical trust' and 'reciprocity' (inspired by Levinas and Bauman). An interesting aspect of Lynch's argument, which has stirred up the sector, is her discussion of conflict as central to dialogue and collaboration. Following political theorist Chantal Mouffe, Lynch argues that "conflict must be allowed to be central to democratic participation if museums are to view participants as *actors* rather than *beneficiaries*" (Lynch, 2011a, p.160) so that museum can become spaces "not only for collaboration but also for contestation" (Lynch and Alberti, 2010, p.16). For Lynch, conflict is the very site of interaction that *enables* reciprocity and trust. It is important to differentiate Lynch's view of conflict with the trend I just discussed above, about the prevalence of a conflict model of CE. Indeed, Lynch's argument is specifically about reframing conflict through Mouffe's political theory. As I will discuss, in practice however

there exists a conflict model of CE on a more prosaic level. The (Lynch) conflict view also tends to describe organisations in a particular way: the museum institution as all powerful and co-opting; and staff as either reluctant because they are afraid of conflict, or because they are clinging onto professional expertise. In this thesis I write against such overly critical and homogenising accounts by using the account-abilities framework of analysis presented in Chapter 1.

Another key contribution to the critique of participation, again by Lynch, is the *Whose cake is it anyway?* report (Lynch, 2011c). This research project asked museum staff and community partners across 12 museum organisations about their experiences of museum engagement. Overall, the report found that while there were diverse examples of good practice across the organisations, this work remained at the periphery of organisations⁹. The report highlights a number of reasons why engagement and participation have not become embedded across UK museums and galleries:

1. Project funding for engagement work is short term, with an unsustainable impact.
2. Museum practice of engagement is risk-averse and characterised by high levels of control. In some cases, public participation was simply a means to ‘rubber-stamp’ pre-existing plans.
3. Policies and practice are based on ‘helping out’ and ‘doing for’ rather than viewing communities as active agents.
4. This leads to community experiences of ‘empowerment-lite’ and false consensus.

A key aspect of this report in terms of this research is the ways in which Lynch highlights the ‘invisible power’ in the museum:

“It became evident in discussions with staff members that there is little understanding of how power influences the development and delivery of this complex work. The more overt use of institutional power includes decision-making and agenda-setting that clearly influence outcomes through inducement and persuasion based on the institution’s authority. But, as the study found, power also acts in invisible ways on those upon whom the practice is based, as well as on those charged with its delivery.” (Lynch, 2011c, p.15)

The research design in this thesis seeks to hone in on these important questions of ‘invisible power’ in organisations, and their effects on practice (see Chapter 3).

On another level, the critical literature has also brought into question whether participation as it is currently imagined can really lead to better knowledge. Referring to

⁹ See ‘From the Margins to the Core’ 2010 conference (<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/f/from-the-margins-to-the-core-2010-conference/>)

Cooke and Kothari (2001), Graham (2011, p.12) reminds that “participation is a model which already imagines knowledge in certain ways”. Lynch and Alberti (2010, p.14) also makes this point: participation “still resonate[s] with the museum’s role in essentialising difference. Western institutions continue to maintain borders and to privilege particular ways of knowing”. For these authors, a key challenge and possible way forward is for museums to *unlearn* their privilege “in order to openly and honestly negotiate knowledge and power with others” (Lynch and Alberti, 2010, p.30). I examine these questions of knowledge in relation to the TWAM case study and in Chapter 8 I suggest new approaches and sensibilities for CE that are more open to the plurality of knowledge and its co-production between a variety of institutions and communities.

Finally, another important critical stance on museums has focused on a Foucauldian reading of power. Foucault’s view of governmentality draws our attention to the less direct forms of power, such as self-regulation and the ‘conduct of conduct’ (which also form the ‘invisible powers’ of institutions). A key proponent of the governmentality logic of culture is Tony Bennett (1995, 1998). For Bennett, engagement theories (such as the contact zone) cannot dismantle the discursive dynamic of the museum because they are *already a part of* these same relations of governmentality: they are effectively “a programme of the same type” (1998, p.212). For Bennett, the contact zone is in fact an effect of governmental reform, this time presented as a programme for the value of cultural diversity. As such, participation (along with reciprocity and trust) is already factored into ‘the political rationality’ of the museum (see also Graham, 2012).

2.7. Critical impasses and beyond

As was noted in the introduction, the review of the literature finds that currently critical work on museum participation is caught in an intellectual impasse. Instead of abandoning it, each of these robust critiques returns to participation as ultimately redeemable *if* practised differently. Once again, Helen Graham most clearly summarises the different forms of this optimism:

“if museums’ ‘neocolonial legacy’ is fully recognized (Boast, 2011, p.67), if a museum recognizes its role in combating social inequality’ and ‘prejudice’ (Sandell, 2002, p.3), if community co-production is conducted with ‘honesty, dialogue, recognition of power, a holistic and integrated approach, and a critical regard for the social and political context of community engagement’ (Smith and Waterton, 2009, p.139) and in the spirit of ‘reciprocity’ and ‘radical trust’ and with an

acceptance of conflict (Lynch and Alberti 2010, p.16) – the promise of heritage and/or the museum as really democratic will be realized” (Graham, 2012, p.566)

This forms what Ben Dibley (2005) has termed the ‘redemptive narrative’ of the museum – ultimately, participation in/with the museum can be ‘good for us all’. The critique of museum participation is caught in a persistent cycle of critique-contest, followed by optimism for the ‘always-yet-to-be-realized’ practice that will guarantee the democratic museum. As Graham remarks, this critique echoes the ‘institutional critique’ in art and its co-option by art institutions (c.f. Fraser, 2005). For Graham, the danger of this critical impasse is that it ignores issues of scale:

“once the institutional critique phase has been completed then the hoped for co-production practice is imagined as a reworking the dynamics between museum and public so effectively at a micro level that it is as if it might simply be *scaled up* to then transform the museum and power in general” (Graham, 2012, p.568).

For me, the problem with this redemptive narrative is further compounded in the paradoxical statement that opened this thesis: if museum institutions are committed to participation (they are optimistic), why do CE practitioners consistently experience their institutions are resistant to their work?

Graham argues that what is needed to overcome the critique-contest discourse is a ‘contingent micropolitics of museum praxis’ (2012, p.568). My own study aims to contribute to such a politics by focusing on the work of Outreach staff at TWAM with a specific attention to their institutional contingencies.

For Graham and Dibley, the redemptive narrative of the museum is linked to the ‘political rationality’ of the museum described by Bennett: rather than being a radical turn, calls for more participation are already part of this logic. Rather than to abandon participation myself, or to suggest that there is therefore no politics to be done in museum, I want to engage with the possibilities in Bennett’s museology. Indeed, despite his critique, Bennett is ultimately sympathetic to the idea of the contact zone, but in his view, this work will happen within the logics of culture and “by tinkering with a range of practical arrangements” (1998, p.212). This idea of ‘tinkering’ and making ‘adjustments’ (Bennett, 1993, p.83) – what Graham (2012) refers to as ‘calibration’ – will become central to my discussion in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, as a theme that emerged from empirical analysis as a way of articulating the work of CE staff within their institutions. Following Graham’s (2012, pp.568–569) lead, through this thesis I aim to present a politics of CE practice that works

from within the logics of the museum and which creates possibilities “at the level of practicalities (how projects are conceived and organized) and practice (how projects are made up through interactions)”. Many cultural analysts remain uncomfortable with Bennett’s conclusion which renders the operations of culture’s governmentality impossible to resist. Dibley draws further on Foucault to turn Bennett’s argument around: in his view, we must recognise the subjectifying mechanisms of governmentality in order to refuse them (Dibley, 2005, p.23). In my own study, rather than fully accepting the governmental rationality, I examine the ways in which organisational actors navigate, influence and *refuse* their institutional arrangements. While I argue that community engagement that is instigated *inside* the museum is necessarily directed at maintaining the institution as it is, I am also looking for where a politics of practice can open up the potential for participation *from the inside*. To this end, I am interested in the *infrastructures* that CE staff create within their institutions in order to support their work. It is through a close attention to the practice of ‘doing’ community engagement that this study contributes to moving beyond the critical impasse of the participation literature.

Another impasse-like tendency in the literature is a typical problem of totalizing ‘all or nothing’ dichotomies – curated/co-produced, curator/community (see Golding and Modest, 2013). In Chapter 8 I propose a more nuanced reading of these categories by employing an assemblage perspective to propose an alternative understanding of co-production, drawing from actor-network theory and assemblage theories. Such a theoretical approach is still uncommon in museum studies (for exceptions, see Macdonald, 2009; Byrne et al., 2011; Harrison et al., 2013). As such, my discussion contributes to an important emerging field and it is the first contribution that explicitly discusses CE in these terms.

2.8. Conclusion

The review of the literature has traced a long tradition of demanding more participation in museums, with important reflections emerging from collaborative work with originating communities, including the theory of the ‘contact zone’. Another concept that has been applied to CE is the ladder of participation; however, both have a number of theoretical limitations, including the persistence of community control as the single focus and end goal of participation. Instead I argue for a more holistic approach to the study of the nature of

engagement work and a more nuanced account of the agency of museum engagement practitioners.

The first focus of this review has been on the different logics that animate participatory work: 'good for us', 'good for them', 'not good for anyone' and 'good for us all'. While stylistically these were separated in how they are written up here, clearly they are not mutually exclusive, as I will discuss in Chapter 5 in terms of the different yet interrelated interests, expectations and logics of participation that animate TWAM.

A key aspect of this review has been to situate my research within a current critical impasse of critique and desired contest – a yet-to-be-realised practice. I would suggest that this dynamic in fact defines 'community engagement'. The critique-contest sets out the ambivalent power imbalances within which community engagement takes place. The aim of this thesis is to move beyond this impasse to examine the politics of practice *inside* institutions and their possibilities for institutional, political and social change. Within the review of the literature, the clear gap that appears is that no study so far has taken an organisational perspective on CE. This is where my study provides a significant contribution, by presenting an organisational perspective to link theory and practice. Through my own research, I wish to present a politics of community engagement practice that focuses on the specific and the small. As Andrea Cornwall (2008, p.281) has argued clearly, specificity matters in studies of participation, a point that is also raised by Bennett (1998, p.84) who has long called for a politics of specificity in the study of museums (see also Graham, 2012). It is this focus on the *doing* of participation which is my unique contribution to the field. Through this close examination of practice, I will support my argument for a distributed model of the museum that moves beyond the contributory model that has so far dominated theory and practice (Chapter 9). In the next chapter I outline my methodology and the literature that informs such an approach to the study of practice in museum organisations.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The broad aim of this research is to analyse CE in museums from an organisational perspective across two levels: in terms of staff practice ‘on the ground’ and in terms of institutional practice. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodology and describe the research process. First, I outline the theoretical approach to the study of practice, following the account-abilities framework presented in Chapter 1. Next, I present the research design which combined embedded ethnographic approaches – researching ‘on’ – and participatory approaches – researching ‘with’ – for the study of museum organisations. I refer to this combined methodology as a *collaborative organisational ethnography*. I argue that moving between these different forms of research ‘on’ and ‘with’ can help negotiate the purpose, practicalities and politics of researching organisations and the particularities of the CASE studentship model (Morse, 2013b)¹⁰. In the third part I reflect on the research experience, during which the need for ‘safe spaces’ for research within hierarchical organisations came to the fore and flexible approaches were required to negotiate the impact of austerity on the museum. Finally, I consider the process of ‘writing up’ and some of the other outcomes of the research.

3.2. Studies of practice

The overall research methodology of this thesis is grounded in a practice perspective which forefronts the everyday accounts, actions and micro-decisions of a range of staff as vital to understanding organisations. The study of practice draws on wider theory of practice, including the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1993a) and Schatzki (1996, 2001). The premise of these approaches (although crudely condensed here) is that practice is shaped by both the intentional actions of organisational actors and by external circumstances and conditions (cultural, discursive, material, social and political arrangements). The practice perspective that guides this research draws on three theoretical lenses with methodological considerations which are presented in turn here.

¹⁰ The reflections here have formed the basis of a chapter in an edited book on ‘Collaborative Geographies’

3.2.1. 'Peopled and practised' institutions

A starting contention, outlined in Chapter 1, is that current studies of museum organisations (of which there are relatively few) tend towards external or textual readings which present organisation as a homogenous, rational and functioning machine or as inescapably bound within theories of governmentality, while studies of practice tend to focus on a single project or gallery, in isolation from the wider workings of institutions. My approach to organisation focuses instead on complexity, and takes a view of the museum as a loosely-coupled system (Rounds, 2012) where different elements contend for influence and authority. In particular, I take a view of organisation as 'peopled and practised' after Askew (2009). Such an approach values organisational actors as "knowledgeable people who communicate diverse meanings, understandings and ethics through their everyday working practices" (Askew, 2009, p.658). In this view practice does not simply follow orderings of state power, for example, 'top-down' policy implementation (Gray, 2012). This approach links with the 'account-abilities' framework in Chapter 1 on two important levels: first, it recognises the often overlooked accounts of museum workers as significant reflections on organisations (indeed, accountability emerged empirically as a theme within these accounts); second, it recognises everyday ordinary practice and the abilities (skills, knowledge, values and dispositions) of staff as influential in shaping organisations. Significantly, this reading opens up the possibilities to reconceptualise practice in other ways which can be creative, vibrant and ethical (Askew, 2009; see Gibson-Graham, 2006). In my own research, I will go on to talk about these practices of CE in terms of care and craft.

3.2.2. Institutional work

The second theoretical lens for research on practice is the notion of 'institutional work', defined as "the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting organisations" (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006, p.215). As Lawrence and Suddaby (2006, p.219) emphasise, "adopting a practice perspective on institutions points research and theory toward understanding the knowledgeable, creative and practical work of individual and collective actors aimed at creating, maintaining and transforming institutions". The practice perspective of institutional work highlights the ways in which the activities and actions of actors may or may not achieve their intended or desired ends, and how they interact with existing operational structures and cultures of

organisation in intended or unexpected ways. Such a perspective emphasises how staff working in institutions also work *on* institutions (Ahmed, 2012, p.22). Analytically, this draws our attention to the daily bureaucratic struggles and creative negotiations of a range of staff. In the later parts of this thesis I will describe this institutional work as the work of ‘adjustments’.

3.2.3. Ecologies of practice

‘Ecologies of practice’ is the third lens, which links ideas of work and professional identities. It enables to further examine how professionals negotiate their institutional settings and external work directives (for example, policy, audit culture, sector trends, funding requirements) and how professionals’ experiential knowledge, dispositions and commitments (individual or collective) influence these negotiations. I draw in particular on the work of Stronach et al. (2002) who define ‘ecologies of practice’ as comprising a range of interrelated registers, including professional commitments (individual and collective); the accumulation of experience; opinions of what constitutes ‘good practice’; commonly held beliefs; policy reception; and so on (Stronach et al., 2002, p.122). Empirically, ‘ecologies of practice’ enables to link the concern with ‘institutional work’ to individual and collective (moral/ethical) commitment, in order to investigate the different dimensions – including contradictions and dilemmas – that influence how staff construct and operationalise community engagement in varying ways. In term of the Outreach Team in particular, I will go on to describe how their ecologies of practice have developed through collaborations with community partners and how they have connected up with alternative registers.

These three dimensions all relate to situating the politics of CE practice that is a central focus of this thesis. Collectively they have influenced the methodological choices that I will describe in the following parts.

3.3. Researching organisations

A particular concern of this thesis is to bring museum theory and practice into close correspondence. As such it proceeds from an *iterative grounded theory* position for organisational research (after Orton, 1997), which moves back and forth between deductive and inductive research; between participatory and ethnographic impulses. As

deductive research, the thesis builds upon the literature and the findings of the recent *Whose Cake* report to consider institutional power and politics in museums (Chapter 2). The inductive grounded theory approach enables staff accounts and research empirics to come to the fore and also influence research questions and directions. In this thesis I distinguish two broad typologies of social research in organisations that have influenced my research design. As a *collaborative organisational ethnography*, it combines elements from each, a choice which I will justify in the discussion.

3.3.1. Researching ‘on’ organisation: organisational ethnography

The first methodological framing for this research draws on organisational ethnography in order to examine what I refer to as the ‘conditions of possibility’ for CE in museums (Chapter 1). That is, the research aims to examine institutional contingencies as they enable and constrain CE practice. Organisational ethnography enables such observation and analysis of the complexities of the everyday in organisational settings (Neyland, 2007; Ybema et al., 2009). In its broadest terms, as an empirical methodology and strategy, ethnographic research is described as involving “some combination of observation, with whatever degree of participation; talking to people (often called ‘interviewing’ when the formalities of setting up appointments are involved); and the study of material artefacts, in all three to understand their meaning for situational actors” (Yanow et al., 2012, p.331). I describe the specific methods employed in my own study in the description of the research (3.5).

Ethnography involves the reporting on first-hand, field-based observations, and experiences of participating in organisational activities with members of staff. It involves the researcher ‘being there’ (Geertz, 1988) long enough to be able to understand the cultures, habits and norms of organisations. At the same time it situates organisations as parts of society and wider organisational ‘fields’(DiMaggio, 1991; Watson, 2012). An ethnographic sensibility looks for the ‘extraordinary-in-the-ordinary’ reported through ‘thick’ description of events (Ybema et al., 2009). Yanow et al (2012) position ethnography as holding the promise to elucidate two particular aspects of organisations which are relevant to my concern with practice. First, the ‘hidden’ dimensions of organisation: the “often overlooked, tacitly known and/or concealed dimensions of meaning-making, among them emotional and political aspects” (Yanow et al., 2012, p.335). Secondly, providing context-sensitive and actor-centred analysis: “an orientation toward subjective experience

and individual agency with sensitivity to the broader social settings and the historical and institutional dynamics in which these are embedded” (2012, p.335). Through an ethnographic orientation, then, it is possible to situate the study of practice within a specific attention to institutional and external contingencies, a central concern that was highlighted in Chapter 2, as a methodological starting point to overcoming the critique-contest discourse.

Another aspect of ethnography taken from an interpretivist approach is an engagement with multivocality. This approach explicitly breaks away from fixed, homogenized and univocal accounts of organisations, and instead favours a multiplicity of narratives. Such an approach enables in this case to investigate the varied meanings, roles and purposes attributed to CE within the different departments of the museum case study. The ethnographic approach also takes seriously the tensions and discrepancies between official policies and ‘unofficial’ practices, between the managed and ‘unmanaged’ aspects of organisations (Gabriel, 1995). Ethnographic accounts reveal complex, intertwined configurations of organisational structures and cultures and their non-rational, often unintended consequences. In the context of this research, it enables to begin to address the paradox in Chapter 1, whereby museums that are committed to participation are also experienced as resistant by those staff employed to ‘do’ participation (see Ahmed, 2012)

There are also related empirical considerations to applying an ethnographic approach to the study of museum practice. Indeed, it is likely that organisational staff may wish to ‘tidy up’ accounts of their practice according to expectations of what they think researchers want to hear and what they want researchers to hear (or not hear) – in the context of museums, such accounts are likely to privilege clear plans and conscious decision-making over messiness and contingency (Macdonald, 2002, p.87). In the UK, museums must constantly compete for funding and as such there is a strong advocacy logic in museum ‘speak’ which can shape the stories that are told. This links to what Goffman (1971) has termed ‘impression management’, which is a process, conscious or unconscious, whereby people seek to influence the perceptions others have about a person, an event, or an organisation. It is created through a ‘front stage’, where accounts are managed and polished for an external audience, and a ‘back stage’ with insiders codes which are more relaxed. While this neat division of social life has been critiqued for its simplicity, Goffman’s work is helpful to understanding the relations of power and influence in hierarchical organisations such as the local authority case study museum. My own research

methodology moves iteratively between front stages and back stages of museums in order to examine some of the more unintended consequences of 'impression management'. Another consideration is that 'practice' is not easily translatable into words for participants (Hastrup, 1995). Some practice is taken for granted or 'got on with', while others seem to operate on an abstract level. Looking at what staff *do* (not just what they say they do) is central for studies of practice (Herbert, 2000), and central to this thesis.

There are also particular challenges to organisational ethnography. One such challenge surrounds questions of reflexivity: while there is a need to become as familiar as possible with organisational culture, at the same time, the researcher must maintain the analytical distance in recognising the 'extraordinary-in-the-everyday', the common sense, the unwritten and the tacit (Yanow et al., 2012). A related challenge is researcher positionality and a consideration of power relationships between researcher, researched and organisation. Indeed, in some cases, researching 'on' can be viewed pejoratively as serving narrow academic interests only. This is where a specific integration of methodologies for researching 'with' organisations can help engage with some of these issues. Taken together, such a research design can provide new ways of thinking about organisational ethnography and towards fuller accounts of organisations (Dover and Lawrence, 2010), such as museums.

3.3.2. Researching 'with' organisation: participatory commitments

Researching 'with' links to my concern with staff's accounts of practice *in their own words* as valid and significant reflections of working in organisations. To this end, the organisational ethnography approach is complemented (intervened, in fact) by participatory commitments.

Researching 'with' evokes collaboration where the organisation is more actively involved in the research process. A distinctive approach to more radical collaboration is Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Kindon et al., 2007) which has inspired and guided the participatory commitments in this thesis. The first principle of PAR is that actors are themselves the 'experts' in their life-situations and therefore should be involved as co-researchers in all aspects of the research. At the heart of PAR is a direct concern with recognising and redressing power differentials between the researcher and the researched, to include all actors in the co-construction of knowledge. PAR projects focus on valuing and understanding insider knowledge (Park, 2001) that comes from participants reflecting

together (for example in workshops) on their unique everyday experiences and situations. The second principle of PAR projects is to provide a framework for using research processes and outcomes to create the social and material conditions necessary for change. PAR aims to result in research that is 'appropriate, meaningful and relevant' to the groups working with the academic (Kesby et al., 2005, p.164).

Bringing PAR with(in) institutions however presents particular challenges for researchers. There are only a limited number of examples of PAR projects inside organisations (see Dover and Lawrence, 2010 for a review). Indeed, PAR is an open political statement which views organisations as the centre of power and oppression (Cameron, 2007), and researchers usually work to empower participants to expose institutional structures and practices (such as racism or sexism) and devise ways to confront them (see for example Fine and Torre, 2004). In fact, PAR ultimately requires researchers and participants to challenge the structures of the very organisations in which they are located – not always a desirable outcome for management. Within the context of a CASE studentship and working in a hierarchical organisation, such challenges must be taken into consideration from the outset of the research design (see Stoudt, 2007). The ethics of this research, approved by the departmental ethics committee, focused on establishing appropriate levels of confidentiality to ensure museum workers would be identified by team membership only or pseudonym¹¹. I return to this important point in the description of the research below (3.5).

Another challenge with PAR is the issue of time. On a very practical level, staff often do not have the time to fully engage in all aspects of the process as co-researchers. This was a very immediate difficulty within my own research. As such, the research does not reflect the levels of co-production demanded by PAR, and its impact in terms of action are perhaps less direct; hence I talk instead of 'participatory commitments'. There are still only few examples of doctorates undertaken by PAR, although it is becoming increasingly common in the social sciences, especially in human geography (Kindon et al., 2007). The literature specific to PAR doctorates has tended to present PAR as more demanding, more difficult and more time consuming than conventional research (McCormack, 2004; Moore, 2004), although Klocker (2012) has questioned the effect of this 'despondent rhetoric' which presents overly idealistic (and unattainable) methodological standards. My doctorate is

¹¹ Because of the embedded nature of research I did not ask staff to sign consent forms; rather consent was sought verbally, and re-confirmed at various points through the research.

deeply inspired and influenced by the approaches and methods of PAR, which it aimed to include in iterative ways to reflect the thesis' orientation to museum staff. Through participatory research commitments, my aim was to invite staff, and in particular Outreach staff (as key CE workers) to share in shaping the theoretical and epistemological grounds of the research. These commitments also aimed to allow staff to tell their own stories about organisation, particularly in terms of operational structures and cultures, and their experiences of the barriers to CE work. Participation also implied my own active participation in and contribution to the diverse day to day activities of museums. The aim of these different commitments was to create, in however small a way, a community of research based on a mutuality of interest between researcher and researched. It is also an attempt to reduce the distance between researcher and researched to sharpen complex understandings of museum organisations and enable collaborative articulations of practice.

The following sections describe specific aspects of how the research was carried out, and in particular, the challenges and tensions experienced in research on/with organisation and through the CASE model.

3.4. The CASE model

This research was undertaken as part of an ESRC CASE studentship, which informs its approaches, methods and outputs. The basic premise of this collaborative scheme is that there are mutual benefits to research (Craggs et al., 2013). Practically, students are co-supervised with an academic and a non-academic supervisory team, and the topic and parameters for research are typically set out in advance of the appointment of the postgraduate researcher. For students, the model provides access to institutions as well as opportunities to produce research that explicitly bridges theory and practice. For partners, it offers the opportunity for new research to feed into policies, programmes and practices; as such there are specific expectations in terms of 'useful' outputs (such as executive summaries) alongside the delivery of the academic thesis. For TWAM, the main interest was having an 'outsider' researcher examine the structural barriers to CE and provide recommendations. As one of my CASE supervisors put it, I would be able to "see the bigger picture with fresh eyes". As such the museum was willing to be researched 'on', in order to illuminate the 'hidden' dimensions of its decision-making and their unintended consequences. Additionally the research was associated with the PHF 'Our Museum'

programme of organisational change (see Chapter 1). As such, elements of the research are oriented more explicitly towards organisational learning.

As collaborative projects, CASE doctorates offer significant opportunities for co-producing knowledge; however, they also come with a number of challenges, including the inescapable power dynamics that animate any negotiation between a university context and external organisations. These are discussed in relation to the research process below.

3.5. Description of the research

In undertaking the research, I employed four primary methods: ethnographic observation including participant observation, document analysis, interviewing, and participatory workshops. The details of participants are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Details of Interviews and Participatory Workshop Participants (for the research conducted between June 2011 and February 2013)

<i>All interviews lasted approx. 1 hour</i>	Interview Participants (Number of interviewees by team)
Individual Interviews	Outreach Team: 7 Collections: 4 (including Conservation, 1) Senior Managers: 6 (including the Director) History: 6 Learning: 3 Digital: 1 Development: 2 Venue Managers: 4 Volunteers: 2 <i>Previous Directors (2) and members of staff (2)</i>
Group Interviews (group interviews ranged between 3 and 8 staff members)	Communications Team Shipley Team 'What's Your Story' project board Open group interview 'Stories of the World' project team: 2
<i>The research has also included some interviews with community partners (but these are not the main focus of the thesis)</i>	<i>2 individual and 4 group interviews</i>
Participatory Workshops <i>The workshops lasted approx. 2 to 2 ½ hours</i>	Workshop 1: Defining CE Workshop 2: Barriers to CE Workshop 3: Outreach ways of working Participants ranged from 5 to 7 Outreach members across the workshops

The organisational ethnography of the museum began in late 2011, whereupon I became deeply embedded at TWAM for over 14 months. There were no issues of negotiating access as this was facilitated by the CASE supervisors. As such, I was able to move freely throughout the organisation and observe different levels of (inter)actions between different members of staff, across different teams, events and activities.

Participant observation is a common method for ethnography which describes the first dimension of my research process. In the initial months of the research, I attended a range of management and team meetings across the venues to introduce myself and the research, and at the same time, to observe how these meetings functioned (as an important feature of organisational life, see Schwartzman, 1987), as well as finding out about the current activities at TWAM. I was also encouraged by my CASE supervisors to check staff member's calendars to find meetings and events that I thought would be of interest to the research. I was specifically interested in the 'backstage' workings of the organisation, and as such, a large part of my time was spent attending different types of meetings and 'hanging out' in offices, joining in conversations and asking questions. I shadowed a variety of staff, including curators, senior managers, project coordinators, and Learning Team members, and actively assisted on a variety of museum activities such as store visits, adult learning workshops, and exhibitions preparation. I made extensive field notes throughout. This form of ethnographic observation enabled me to get an initial sense of the everyday in the museum, as well as make initial choices in consultation with staff on the activities, events and projects that I would follow and become more involved in (see Table 2)¹². One such early decision was to focus my time in the Discovery Museum, as the largest 'administrative' venue where the central teams have their main offices, including the Outreach Team¹³. Not all of the projects and activities observed are included in this final thesis; deliberate choices were made to publish some of the materials elsewhere during the time of the ethnography (see Morse, 2013a; Morse et al., 2013).

¹² While staff made suggestions, the choice of activities to follow was mainly left to the researcher.

¹³ I am keen to stress, however, that the research aimed to take a much wider organisational view not restricted to this venue.

Table 2: Main museum projects and activities observed and participated in during the research

Projects and activities	Description
<p>Exhibitions: <i>What's Your Story? Discovering Family History</i></p> <p><i>Journeys of Discovery – The Curious Case Of...*</i></p> <p><i>CultuRISE</i></p> <p><i>Benwell Wedding Tales</i></p> <p><i>Something Old, Something New</i></p> <p><i>West End Voices</i></p>	<p>History led exhibition on Family History with first person narratives (gained through oral histories and community involvement) and a volunteer-led website</p> <p>Youth-led exhibition projects over 14 months</p> <p>Youth engagement programme</p> <p>Community exhibition (in a community venue)</p> <p>History led exhibition focused on contemporary collecting (including objects and oral histories) around wedding traditions</p> <p>Community exhibition (in the museum)</p>
<p>Gallery re-display <i>Destination Tyneside**</i></p>	<p>Major re-display of the fashion gallery into a gallery focused on migration to Tyneside through the ages</p>
<p>Outreach Projects</p>	<p>Various sessions with groups from Moving Forward (Mental Health Concern), NECA (North East Council for Addictions) and Northumbria Probation Trust</p>
<p>'Our Museum' Paul Hamlyn Foundation programme of organisational change</p>	<p>Various meetings, workshops and peer-review meetings with other museums part of the initiative</p>
<p>* This research has been published elsewhere ** This project does not feature in the final thesis</p>	

During the fieldwork I was primarily based in the Outreach Team office as their work most directly focuses on CE. Over the course of the ethnography I became most deeply embedded in the day to day of this team. I attended meetings with partner organisations and many outreach sessions, as an observer and as a more active participant. This led my ethnography to move beyond the boundaries of the museum organisation to follow CE practice across multiple community sites (see Nicolini, 2009).

A second element of research was the document analysis of the TWAM 'archive' to examine organisational beliefs and values in relation to wider policy and sector trends. Over several weeks I examined past annual reports and marketing materials in order to investigate the development of CE practice at TWAM, and how it was constructed and presented in these 'official' documents (see Harper, 1998 on the ethnography of documents in organisations). I also conducted interviews with two past directors and previous members of staff to complement this analysis (see Chapter 4).

A third element was interviewing. I conducted 45 semi-structured interviews with members of staff: most were individual interviews or in small groups (Table 1), which I recorded with their permission. The interviews focused on asking staff what they understood by 'community engagement', how it related to their practice, and their perceptions of the barriers to this work. The research deliberately focused on TWAM staff and as such there is only a limited engagement with community participant views. This choice follows the research's central aim to give voice to museum professionals and their aspirations and frustrations in organisations, which have not yet been given much space in the literature. Throughout the interviews and more informal conversations, I encouraged staff to view my research as collaboration and provided opportunities for staff to direct some of the research enquiries – which they did. In relation to CE, staff were particularly interested to know how their structures ended up getting them somewhere they had not planned and did not entirely like. It is worth noting also that the context of the museum had much changed from the time of the original CASE proposal and that other questions were perceived as being more timely and significant for staff¹⁴. Through discussion with my museum and academic supervisors, I was able to put forward an argument for revisiting the research project in light of these changes, staff concerns, and my own interests in bridging theory and practice. At the end of the fieldwork, I coded field notes and interviews using

¹⁴ The original research was to examine the museum as a 'contact zone', as a space of intergenerational and interethnic encounter.

NVivo. I highlighted observations and quotes that related to provisional codes established through a deductive methodology (in particular relating to the *Whose Cake* report), as well as generating new codes and concepts as these emerged through the data.

A final dimension of research was a series of three participatory workshops undertaken with the Outreach Team (Table 1). The aim the workshops were to explore CE practice *with* staff. These workshops involved different methods from PAR such as participatory diagramming and cycles of story-telling and reflection. The first workshop identified the team's understanding of CE and the barriers they experience within their institutions. The following workshops focused on articulating the skills for CE, putting practice into words and getting 'under the skin' of the taken-for-granted aspect of this work. Further details on the workshops are presented in Chapter 7 and 10. While this deeper engagement with Outreach was successful in introducing participatory elements to research, a wider collaboration within the organisation was more complex than expected, and as the research developed in the context of austerity, issues of confidentiality became critically important. In the next part I review my strategies for creating 'safe spaces' for research.

3.6. Creating 'safe spaces' in organisational research

In the context of public-sector cuts, there were restructurings, redeployments, and even redundancies across the museum service, with a significant emotional impact on staff (see Chapter 6). The strict hierarchical distribution of authority in the museum meant that open conversations about some institutional practices could be risky and this risk to staff would be heightened in a time of redeployment and redundancy. Staff tended to view my research as aimed at producing recommendations for organisational change – i.e. as oriented towards management. My attempts at involving staff in a more participatory manner were often viewed with scepticism—some saw this as futile or symbolic only since they felt their concerns would not be taken seriously by management. Others were concerned by how my 'critical' observations on their work might be acted upon. Others still saw the research as my personal endeavour, entirely separate from their own or wider organisational concerns. In PAR projects these challenges can often be overcome through involving participants in the process of generating research. In my own experience, however, issues of time prevented deeper staff involvement, and my efforts at participation were often messy and limited.

My central ethical concern from the outset of the project was about the potential for the research to be hurtful to staff involved if they shared information that was critical of the organisation. Participatory researchers work hard to create 'safe spaces' for participants to engage with the research processes—spaces that build up relationships of trust and which are non-exploitative and non-judgmental (Stoudt, 2007). As austerity further affected the research context, such safe spaces were also necessary to protect staff within their own institution. For me, it was imperative to communicate clearly and repeat the right of staff to opt out of the research and withdraw any comments at any stage. 'Safe spaces' focused on making clear the relation between my position as researcher, the research itself, and the institution; in particular by explaining the forms through which the research findings would take. As a CASE award, there are expectations to produce certain outputs (e.g., reports, web pages, and executive summaries) for the partner organisation which are often, although not exclusively, consumed by managers. It was therefore crucial to ensure that staff could not be identified and that their words could not be used against them in another work context. In order to encourage more open conversations between staff, partway through the fieldwork I created a participatory blog where staff could start their own discussion topics and engage with the research themes. The blog is restricted access (staff need to sign up) to further ensure a safe space for inter-organisational discussion. I did not moderate the content posted, although staff must have accepted the terms of use of the blog before registering (staff were asked to use non recognisable usernames and to agree not to post anything whereby the identity of another member of staff may be inferred). The blog was particularly welcomed by staff as it provided an anonymous space 'outside' of the organisation which enabled staff to discuss organisational issues without fear of retribution. One member of staff commented that "it is good to have a space where we can really say what we think". The blog will also extend the participatory element beyond the timeframe of the research and will be used to post chapters and findings, and staff will be invited to challenge my analysis.

3.7. Writing up

An interpretive and collaborative approach to ethnography demands a particular attention to reflexivity and positionality throughout fieldwork and in writing up (Herbert, 2000). It is important to acknowledge the personal underpinnings of my research: I wanted to try and understand the day to day constraints of staff working in museums, and to get 'under the

skin' of the myriad of sensibilities that CE work entails. Clearly, studies (and experience) have shown that outreach work often remains on the margins of museum work and is most at risk in a time of budget cuts (see Chapter 4). To me, the importance of this methodology and its participatory commitments also lay in a sense of solidarity with staff doing this work. As the research progressed in the emotional context of austerity, it was further necessary to anchor myself in solidarity with the Outreach team.

In a sense, writing ethnography is the act of *curating* an account of what happened. Much like museum exhibitions, it is a purposeful selection and organisation to represent events, people, cultures and materialities of organisation. In many ways it reflects my own choices in terms of what gets told, and how, and what is omitted from the final exhibition text. It is crafted of moments that aim to exemplify wider issues and the themes of the research. It is interwoven with selected excerpts from interviews to represent the voice of participants, where only their team membership is indicated. I view this research as a mix of co-produced knowledge and single-authored text. I view the participatory commitments and ethics as important in situating my act of curating-writing.

In terms of the 'outputs' of the research as a CASE project, alongside the thesis (which presents recommendations for organisational learning in Chapter 10), an executive report will be produced for TWAM. There have also been other outcomes throughout the research, including an organisation wide online survey (see Appendix II), the research blog, an outreach video (in which they describe their practice), internal seminars, four external co-presented conference and seminar papers (alongside my own academic presentations), and two collaborative papers (Morse et al., 2013; Brown and Morse, forthcoming).

3.8. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the rationale for the research design which combined organisational ethnography and participatory commitments for the research of CE in 'peopled and practised' organisations. A key framework is the focus on the 'institutional work' of museum staff and their 'ecologies of practice'. Methodologically, this extends the attention from what museum workers say (in their own words) to reflections on what they do, and critically, situates practice within institutional contingencies. In this way, the methodology enables to examine the practice of 'doing' CE in museum organisations which

I presented as the central contribution of this research. It also opens up the possibilities for exploring a politics of practice aimed towards change within the organisation.

There is also a wider point to reflect on the nature of collaboration itself, and particularly in hierarchical organisations. While research design is often presented as a neatly-defined and linear process, collaboration is much messier. Furthermore, the context of austerity, and the emotional ways in which it plays out in research relationships and shifts the perceptions of research, has serious implications for any kind of collaborative or impact work (c.f. Pain, 2014). Collaborative research therefore requires more iterative research methodologies that are improvisation-friendly, participation-centred and that foreground safe spaces for participants.

Although collaboration was messy, the knowledge claims produced in this thesis are the outcome of a long-term engagement with the diversity of views of a range staff and a deeper involvement in the practice of the Outreach Team. In the context of CASE doctorates, moving between different forms of researching 'with' and 'on' organisation can create a community of interest between researcher and researched for work of applied relevance, which is presented in the following chapters.

Chapter 4. The Story of Community Engagement at TWAM

4.1. Introduction

As part of the collaborative research, and in line with the participatory commitments, I was asked to write ‘the story’ of CE at TWAM to create a baseline understanding of past practice¹⁵. The story provides a context to the ethnographic site, Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums, focusing on the last three decades from 1990.

The aim of this chapter relates to two main concerns of this thesis which I argue are key to understanding CE practice: first, to explore the organisational beliefs and values that underpin engagement work at TWAM; and second, to highlight the complexity of the context within which contemporary museums operate. The story reveals the different drivers of CE in museums, in particular, the role of government policy, the influence of local council agendas, sector organisations, and the requirements of funders, like the Heritage Lottery Fund; *as well as* the influence of internal strategy and leadership. The chapter draws on three forms of empirical material – archives, policy and storytelling

Archives: drawing on research of the TWAM organisational archive, this chapter examines how the museum has presented and constructed CE in these documents (Chapter 3). While it is worth noting that these are not neutral texts but rather advocacy documents, they are nonetheless significant for considering the development of museum professionalism (see Wilkinson, 2013) and providing an overall philosophy of engagement practice. As the museum’s first director, David Fleming makes clear: “missions, values and vision were essential devices not only in helping transmit a new sense of purpose and a new way of doing things, both internally and externally; but for involving staff and governing bodies in the process of re-envisioning the organisation” (Fleming, 2012, p.74) .

¹⁵ The aim of the Story of CE is to create “a cohesive story of our community engagement progress through time (...).The purpose of this is to make this more visible within the organisation, and to get everybody to the same point of understanding about where ‘we’ as an organisation are.” (Our Museum TWAM Proposal, 2011).

Policy: In terms of the thesis, the chapter provides a review of the ‘grey literature’. The events described in this story are mapped onto the policy landscape of the time to examine their influence on the development of the practices of CE:

“The trajectory of policies ... they are very poorly written about, but they are the number one skewer of projects, as in skewing because people will frame their projects in whatever way they can to get the money.” (Former History team, interview, 2011).

While it is clear from the interviews that these trends have been important in shaping the development of museum practice at TWAM, at the same time these policies have also been interpreted, mediated and managed in different ways, as this chapter and the thesis more generally aim to explore (see Tlili, 2008; Gray, 2012).

Storytelling: Storied accounts of organisations provide a unique insight into how individuals make sense of their work-worlds (Chapter 3). The Story of CE presented here is not a full factual account of *all* past projects, events, and exhibitions; the story is told instead through a number of key moments, as chosen and recounted by a small number of staff – including interviews with the current director and two of his predecessors. The accounts of directors provide an overview of the strategic discourses circulating in the organisation. However, I am not suggesting that these developments were only driven by top-down management (heroic or dictatorial), or that these are the only stories of organisations. A central aim of this thesis is to examine how a range of staff also exercise a degree of agency in shaping their organisations. The chapter refers also to some other accounts of organisation by two former staff members and several long-serving members of staff from Outreach, History and Learning Teams.

The story is told in three sections which trace how ideas of community engagement have evolved at TWAM:

1. Access and Audience Development: 1990-2000
2. Social Inclusion and Diversity: 2000-2010
3. Co-production, Austerity and Innovation: 2010 – today

The sections broadly reflect the span of three directorships. I suggest that it is possible to draw out three different discourses at play over this period: *inclusivity*, *social inclusion* and *co-production*. The chapter considers these discourses in broad terms and examines how

they have configured CE at TWAM. Key events, projects and exhibitions are only referred to briefly in the main text and more details are provided in appendices.

The contention I put forward in this chapter is that rather than these discourses replacing one another, they have created organisational structures and vocabularies which remain to this day. As such, this chapter provides an introduction to the organisational context of TWAM which enables me to set up the discussion of the following two chapters: Chapter 5, on the understandings of CE, and Chapter 6, on the management of CE.

Note: TWAM is a very large museum service and it is not possible here to discuss the differences across its venues. Equally, the stories of the development of Learning, Access and History Teams are important in understanding organising at TWAM; however, they are only briefly sketched out here as they are beyond the scope of this study. This chapter instead gives a broader sense of the development of the organisation with a specific focus on CE.

4.2. Access and Audiences – 1990-2000

“The organisation didn’t have such a good reputation in the 80s. People worked to their venue and their collections and that was that” (SMT¹⁶, interview, 2012)

If collections were the early focus of the museum service, by the early 1990s, the focus was decidedly turning towards audiences.

“And that’s where it starts making sense. With people. We took collections off the pedestal where museums have them and we said we want audiences on the pedestal.” (David Fleming, interview, 2012)

4.2.1. The ‘inclusive museum’

David Fleming was director of Tyne and Wear Museums¹⁷ from 1991 to 2001. During his ten year tenure, Fleming developed what he described as the idea of ‘inclusivity’. Partway through our interview, Fleming picked up a large stack of reports. ‘These’, he said ‘are the annual reports I wrote – these explain what we were trying to do at the time’. And he continued his story, annual-report-prop in hand:

¹⁶ I use the abbreviation SMT throughout to refer to the Senior Management Team

¹⁷ The Archives joined the museum service in 2010 so the acronym changed from TWM to TWAM.

“The 92-93 report. That’s the first time that we really showed that there was an institutional approach to inclusivity. I mean the terms for this kind of work vary over the years. And you pick them up, [according to] what government’s saying. At this time I was talking about widening access. And being an agent of social change.” (Fleming, interview, 2012)

The idea of ‘inclusivity’ was based on a commitment to creating public institutions that are (freely) accessible to all and do not exclude individuals or groups on the grounds of gender, race, class, sexuality, disability etc. Notions of engagement first focused on broadening *audiences* – the idea of ‘community’ only gains currency in the mid-2000s. The discourse of inclusivity focused on breaking down public perceptions of museums as elitist and irrelevant (c.f Bourdieu and Darbel, 1990), and moving towards the redevelopment of a cultural institution in the service of the public. In this sense, inclusivity was essentially a moral/ethical discourse about the social role of the museum.

Over this period, the discourse of inclusivity manifested in the museum through a number of developments which I will briefly review:

Audience Development

TWM was perhaps one of the first organisations to start analysing its visiting audiences and diversifying audiences from a socio-economic point of view (Fleming, 1999). Between 1989 and 2002 the proportion of C2, D and E¹⁸ visitors doubled from around 20% to 40%, and audiences increased threefold to 1.4 million a year (TWM Annual Report 2002/03, p. 54). This work was aimed to create a ‘popular’ museum – in the sense of ‘for the local people’; this was also based on creating family-friendly institutions, and families with children became a core audience for many of the venues. The Communications Team would play a key role in broadening audiences.

Access

Demands to broaden access to culture and museums can arguably be traced to a range of different factors, from specific advocacy groups to wider legal frameworks (Sandell, 2007). Access at TWM was also driven by an underlying organisational belief in ‘inclusivity’: museums are for *everyone*. Early work focused on improving physical access to buildings;

¹⁸Social categories are often used in museum visitor research studies in the UK, and are based on occupational groups, where C2=skilled manual workers. D=semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers. E= people dependent on the state through sickness, unemployment, old age or other reasons.

quickly this developed into a much broader understanding of access focused on removing barriers that restrict choice and participation for people (see Dodd and Sandell, 1998, 2001; Merriman, 1989).

Education

“I remember saying to the Education Team you are the guys I’m now looking for to diversify our audiences; you are the shock troops, the attack brand; everybody else will support you in building big and diverse audiences” (Fleming, interview, 2012)

Within the discourse of inclusivity, the social role of the museum was imagined primarily as linked to its educational role and the practice of inclusivity at this time was the task of the Education Team. In the early years of access, the Education Team was responsible for growing and diversifying audiences; ensuring schools provision; improving standards in terms of access for people with disabilities; and strengthening links with local communities (Education Team Plan 1996). The first Outreach post was established in 1992 within the team with the title ‘Assistant Education Officer (Outreach)’. This role was attached to the creation of a new temporary community exhibition space, *The People’s Gallery* (see below).

Exhibitions

In terms of exhibitions, the policy of inclusivity meant organising a varied programme of temporary exhibitions (“we do difficult contemporary art exhibitions at one end; we do big roaring rubber dinosaurs at the other end”, Fleming, interview, 2012) and a number of permanent re-displays that focused mainly on regional identity to attract local audiences. The Millennium Commission funded two major community-focused exhibition and contemporary collection projects at TWM led by the History Team: *Objects of Desire* and *Making History*, which involved over 1 400 local people through 350 community-based groups

“[The Millennium projects] symbolised the ways in which we try to be a truly democratic public service” (TWM Annual Report 1999/2000, p.3)

Throughout the mid-1990s, the curatorial teams ran a number of small-scale exhibitions where community groups were invited to choose objects from the storerooms and create and display their own works inspired by their choices. *From the Vaults* had 13 iterations, and *Clothes from the Closet* and *The People’s Choice* led to over 8 community displays (See Appendix III). These and the millennium projects are perhaps one of the earliest

articulations of the idea of 'community' – working with individuals or groups to collect and interpret objects from their multiple perspectives.

The People's Gallery

The year 1993 marked the opening of the *People's Gallery* (PG) in the Discovery Museum, a space which would extend the ideals of inclusivity:

“The People's Gallery is a pioneering community facility, and encourages participation regardless of age, gender, race or ability. This develops confidence and skills and promotes a positive image of West End communities, to the broader audience who visit Newcastle Discovery” (TWM Annual Report 1993/1994, p. 24).

The PG was supported by the first outreach post funded from 1992 to 1997 through *City Challenge*, a Newcastle city council regeneration project. This connection reflects a policy of culture-led regeneration in the West End, an area with high social deprivation (Bailey et al., 2004). The beginnings of the Outreach practices of CE then, were connected to local authority priorities and projects. PG projects focused on training and developing skills for display, to devolve some of the interpretive authority of the museum. Many of the first exhibitions were photographic displays carried out by community groups; others were displays of contemporary social issues, primarily curated by staff but with input from specialist groups (see Appendix III). The Outreach post was restored in 1998 with support from core Newcastle Council funding and North East Museums (the regional museum fund).

The opening of the People's Gallery can be seen to reflect Fleming's vision for a museum 'for *and* of the people' based in the principles of social history:

“[The] essence of our interpretive work at TWAM; scholarly, socially aware and relevant to modern issues, but also accessible and popular. [...] about the lives of ordinary people in the North East” (TWM Annual Report 1995/96, p. 5)

Through this gallery, the discourse of inclusivity was linked into a wider representational discourse focused on the local identities and histories. The central tenets of social history would continue to guide the work of the museum to this day. The *People's Gallery* was a democratic experiment inside the museum which began to think through the practice and processes of CE. As a symbolic space also, it plays an important part in the story of CE.

External influences

For Fleming, the social role of the museum was fundamentally about a moral/ethical discourse of reclaiming the museum and its collections from the elite few. Widening access – which in a sense is the precursor to CE – was about engaging non-visitors, and involving people through education and exhibitions. At the same time, the inclusive museum was situated within a more complex set of national and local contexts and reduced public funding.

In terms of funding first, local council contributions remained the primary source of funding for TWM over this period, providing between 50% and 30% of the museum's income. Central government grants were reduced from 22% to 12% between 1992 and 2002. Other grants and contributions were sourced to replace this shortfall, including monies from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). Established in 1993, the HLF was hailed as the 'saviour' of culture (Fleming, interview, 2012) and provided new sources of funding, especially for major building works. For larger grants application, HLF required demonstrable community links. As this chapter will go on to show, the shifting requirements of HLF would be very influential both at TWAM and across the heritage sector. HLF funds were only available as match funding, increasing pressures on museums to fundraise and seek private finances (Audit Commission, 1991; Kawashima, 1997). In 1996, TWM established a Development Team to focus on income generation.

From the beginning of the 1990s, access in public institutions came to be a mainstream political issue under the Conservative government's New Public Management policies, with a particular focus on data collection to demonstrate public value for money (Belfiore, 2004; Lang et al., 2006). In Fleming's 'story of community engagement through annual reports', it becomes clear that the discourse of inclusivity (as the moral/ethical imperative) was also an overtly political advocacy programme, with a national but also a particularly local inflexion. Notions of access and equity were used to legitimate public expenditure in museums and audience research was about presenting a case for political support. This translated into an emphasis on evidencing the relevance of museums through value for money measures such as net cost per visitor, rather than more intrinsic values. Here we start to see the use of data collection to demonstrate local accountability and relevance to the local, tax-paying, public (see Chapter 5). Equally, advocacy was about convincing the elected group of

left wing Newcastle councillors of the role of museums in strengthening communities¹⁹. As a previous member of staff recalled, “Fleming was waving the red flag with the politicians (...) he was a renegade”. Thus, the discourse (and politics) of inclusivity was also about creating a museum that was of value to local constituents and linked to the representative democracy model.

The inclusive museum was quickly extended to acting ‘as agents of social change’, as the opening quote revealed. In this way, the ideas of *social inclusion* (see below) were already being developed at TWM during this period.

Fleming’s assessment was that an inclusive way of working was institutionalised at TWM by the end of his tenure through developing a culture focused on access and audiences. This first section shows some of the intellectual foundations of engagement and participation work, as well as highlighting the importance of local politics and contexts in relation to the development of the social role of Tyne and Wear Museums.

4.3. Social inclusion and Diversity: 2000– 2010

The New Labour years in the UK (1997-2010) were characterised by regular policy statements and funding commitments to museums and galleries which did much to shape the sector and recast its role to incorporate a social policy function aimed at tackling social exclusion (Selwood, 2001a; Tlili, 2008). A large body of literature has already addressed the links between social inclusion and museums (e.g. Sandell, 1998; Newman and McLean, 1998b; Belfiore, 2002). In this section I highlight some of the key aspects of this policy only, to examine how the discourse of social inclusion has shaped the development of CE activities and practices at TWM. In a final section I consider some of the main critiques of the policy and how teams have negotiated these.

4.3.1. Social inclusion

New Labour’s ambition was to realize a ‘fairer’ society ‘for the people’, where ‘the people’ was understood as constituted of *communities* defined by categories of difference – race, class, gender, and disability – and by their status of social inclusion/exclusion in civic society

¹⁹ Fleming recalls how at the start of his tenure it was reported to him that the then leader of the Newcastle City Council had declared the best thing to do with TWM was to ‘put a bomb under it’ (Fleming, 2012, p.74).

(Levitas, 2005). Social exclusion came to represent more than just poverty itself but a wider process which creates a lack of confidence or belonging in society for those excluded (SEU, 1998, 2001); it was also seen as a condition resulting from unsuccessful participation in training and education (Lister, 2000). The solution promoted by government was a multi-agency approach to bring about social change through a policy of social inclusion. The most important influence for museums and galleries came through the Department for Media, Culture and Sport (DCMS) which officially extended the policy through explicit demands that cultural organisations should further government objectives linked to funding agreements (DCMS, 2000, 1998; DCMS and DfEE, 2000). Museums were required to work in partnership with local and community organisations to contribute to areas less commonly attributed to museums such as rehabilitation, employment, health promotion, urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal (Sandell, 1998). DCMS set out categories of 'socially excluded' groups, or 'communities', as a target for museum projects, such as disabled, Black Minority Ethnic (BME), Not in Education, Employment or Training youth (NEET) and social categories C2, D and E groups.

In the DCMS statements, it is argued that museum can deliver benefits on three interrelated levels – individual, community, and society (Sandell, 2003, p.45) – a rhetoric that was also quickly adopted by museum practitioners (GLLAM, 2000). Such reports, and subsequent research, have shown that museums can deliver positive outcomes to individuals such as self-esteem, confidence, creativity, skills development, sense of place, active citizenship, and reduce social isolation (see Sandell, 2002). The argument is that such 'soft' outcomes can lead to individuals engaging more fully in society, and this can transfer onto wider social contexts (DCMS, 2000, 2005; Hooper-Greenhill et al., 2007, 2004). At a community level it is argued that museums can foster inter-community dialogue and social cohesion²⁰, as well as being a catalyst for regeneration (Message, 2009). At a societal level, it is argued that museums can promote tolerance and challenge prejudice through collections and displays (Sandell, 2007).

²⁰ This shift signalled a greater focus on race/ethnicity in policy, and after the riots of the late 2000s, the focus of 'community cohesion' would become about security (most recently, focused on religious groups) (Worley, 2005)

4.3.2. Diversity

'Cultural diversity' was identified as another cultural policy priority, as government argued that publicly-funded cultural and arts organisation should attract as well as reflect the diversity of the British public. On a macro-level, the government's interest in the diversity work of museums was also linked to pursuing social cohesion policies and the wider aims of tackling social exclusion (Dewdney et al., 2012a). Issues of diversity in museums were to be addressed on three levels: workforce diversity, targeted approaches to audience development and participatory approaches to collecting and programming. DCMS (2007) set out three 'priority groups' for museum engagement: disabled people, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities and lower socio-economic groups, as under-represented museum visitors and users. These priority groups, and the other 'socially excluded' target groups, would greatly influence the development of wider CE practices.

4.3.3. Funding: Renaissance in the Regions and Heritage Lottery Fund

The ten years between 1998 and 2008 marked a time of unprecedented funding for museums. This period was the 'golden age' for TWM: revenue funding from both central and local government rose from c. £4m in 1997/8 to c. £7.5m in 2009/10. By 2009 the museum's overall budgets was around £16m. Over the same period, the number of employees rose from 200 to 360 staff.

In 2002, the government-funded initiative *Renaissance in the Regions*, co-ordinated by the Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA), was launched with an investment of almost £150m aimed to support major regional museums in England in implementing the social inclusion agenda (Resource, 2001)²¹. TWM took the lead in the North East Regional Museums Hub.

New Labour introduced the National Lottery Act in 1998 which refocused the purpose of the HLF funding away from the big spend on buildings that had characterised the early years towards people and activities, and aligning with the cultural policy of social inclusion (Selwood, 2001b). This new direction also renewed the emphasis on community consultation and involving people in decision-making processes about heritage.

²¹ *Renaissance* was the direct result of a lobby by Fleming and others for central government funding for local authority museums.

4.3.4. The ‘socially responsible’ museum

While socially inclusive practices were being established in the early years of TWM, the most direct articulation of the ‘socially responsible’ museum came in 2000/2001, under its new Director, Alec Coles. Coles’ directorship can be seen as building upon that of Fleming while also driving changes in a different policy, local authority and funding context. The shifts in the museum over these two periods are also captured in the evolution of the museum mission statement (see Appendix IV). An analysis of the official rhetoric at the time shows how social inclusion and cultural diversity became the key discourses framing the purpose of museums. These can be seen to appear in the 2003 mission: “our mission is to help people determine their place in their world, and understand their identities, so enhancing their self-respect and respect for others”. This mission overtly marked out the museum as a socially responsible institution, and, with a minor alteration, this remains the mission statement of the service to date.

A review of the museum activities over these years shows how the museum understood its task of social inclusion and cultural diversity in four ways: through audience development and access, with a particular focus on disability; through Learning, focused on school children; through Outreach and the development of partnerships with external organisations with wider social goals; and through exhibitions, working with diverse communities to address issues of cultural representation and involving them to become active contributors to museum displays and collections. These different areas are considered in more detail here.

Audience development

During this period, visitor research continued to develop through an increase in benchmarking and exit surveys for general visitors, and a primary focus on demographics and visitor satisfaction, reported on through Best Value indicators (see section 4.3.5). The role of the Communications Team was re-oriented towards a marketing role linked to visitor numbers and income generation, and the task of developing broader audiences became dispersed into the objectives of all the teams (especially Learning, Outreach and curatorial teams). There is an uneasy connection that begins to draw itself here between marketing and audience engagement, which is itself wrapped up in the tensions between the business and participatory domains of the museum. These tensions are even more apparent in the final part of this story.

Access

TWM continued to pursue the principles of widening access and established two specialist posts to support this work. This work focused on equalities areas such as race, gender, LGBT, and religion, but most specifically on disability access, linked in major part to the DCMS priority groups²². A number of consultation forums and working groups were established to develop policy and best practice guidelines. Specific exhibitions were also developed as a direct response to this consultation work; the most significant were *One in Four* (see Exhibitions, below) and *Mind the Gap* (see People's Gallery, below).

Learning

Under the *Renaissance* programme there was a huge investment in museum learning (which shifts from 'education'²³) and the TWM team grew considerably. Within the policy context, museum learning programmes were re-articulated in terms of instrumental social outcomes to support the social inclusion agenda (West and Smith, 2005), for example, through the TWM literacy programmes. The *Inspiring Learning for All* framework was launched as a response to these changes and introduced a toolkit for measuring museum learning. The work of the Learning Team over this period focused primarily on school children, linked to the high DCMS key performance indicators connected to venue targets (around 9000 school children visits per venue per year).

Outreach

The new TWM Outreach Team was established in 2004 as an independent team to deliver a coordinated approach to engaging communities with TWM collections and displays. Seven new posts were created (three permanent funded by central funds, and four temporary funded through the *Renaissance*). One full time Assistant Outreach Officer was assigned to each of the five districts of Tyne and Wear in order to facilitate contact between the local communities and the museum service. A dedicated part time post for the People's Gallery was also renewed (funded by Newcastle City Council). Additional funding enabled the creation of temporary outreach posts for project specific work over the years, which were

²² This focus reflects research in the early 2000s that showed that 25.8% of North East residents could consider themselves to have a disability, impairment or major health concern (conversation with Access Officer, 2011)

²³ For a discussion of learning in museums, see Hooper-Greenhill (1999, 2007), and Falk and Dierking (1992)

often match-funded by the HLF, with the team reaching 17 staff members at one point. The rapid growth of the team can be seen to be directly related to the social inclusion agenda which unlocked funding through *Renaissance* and which specified a targeted approach to CE.

One member of the team recalls when they started, and the influence of external drivers of CE:

“I was part of *Renaissance*, the remit was 4 categories under the social inclusion agenda and they were BME communities, to engage with young people and disaffected youth, older people, and people with disabilities. I remember very much soon after social inclusion you had that push towards cultural diversity (...) Beyond that you’ve got government agendas. Some of those were the *Every Child Matters* agenda, targeting young people who wouldn’t access services necessarily. There were 5 points about children’s wellbeing, and happiness, and contributions under the ECM agenda. And then there are cultural initiatives, like Mela,²⁴ that are plugged in, that we need to work towards as well. But I know that my yearly remit was 22 small projects, 7 medium projects (that’s more long term), and 3 large projects which was more about public engagement in terms of festivals that sort of thing. So we had definite targets to meet. It’s been quite complex in that way.” (Outreach, interview, 2011)

As the quote begins to reveal, over these years CE was constructed through specific ‘target groups’ set by government agendas (via DCMS and *Renaissance*), national initiatives and local priorities and the focus was on numbers of people engaged (see Appendix V). The focus of Outreach was to work with post-16 year olds, as children were the remit of the Learning Team. While Outreach started within the Education Team, this policy distinction would influence the way future TWM team identities were formed, and how museum practices became separated through processes of departmentalisation and line management (see Chapter 6)

Very early on, the team developed close partnerships with statutory bodies such as the probation service, social services, local authority youth teams, and with voluntary social and health organisations. The partnership projects engaged directly with the different dimensions of social exclusion (unemployment, poverty, racism, poor health, and crime) by focusing on empowerment through increasing individual’s skills, confidence, self-esteem and wellbeing (see also Dodd and Sandell, 2001). Early documents related to Outreach reveal the diverse objectives for the team, ranging from working in partnership with local communities to create displays and exhibitions; engaging groups in developing collections

²⁴ Mela is a South Asian festival.

for the museum; providing support for community groups developing their own funding applications; liaising with workers to support the goals of organisation working for vulnerable and excluded people; to building new audiences for museums (Outreach Team Plan 2004/2006). These elements all framed the development of the ideas and practice of community engagement at this time.

Relatively small core budgets were directed for work across the five districts, while the main bulk of activities was project funded, for example through HLF monies attached to exhibition projects (see *Exhibitions*, below). These funding arrangements would have a significant impact on the practices of CE, which are examined in Chapter 6. With over 130 projects a year, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to account for all the Outreach activities that took place over this period. Instead, 'long serving' Outreach staff were asked to suggest some of their favourite projects from these years. These are presented in Appendix VI, to present an overview of the diversity of their work.

Exhibitions

"I think public museums are for the public and we should never forget that. And therefore the public have a role to play in helping create the content. It's about many voices; it's about empowerment. It's not 'the museum is going to tell people stories' – [it's] 'the museum is going to help people tell their own stories' (Coles, interview, 2011)

The discourse of social inclusion translated into a renewed focus on developing CE practices to engage groups and communities in exhibition-making, collecting and public consultation. DCMS demanded more systematic community consultation in museums, as well as opportunities for people to engage not just as visitors, but also as producers of displays and exhibitions (DCMS, 2000).

Over this period, the turnover of temporary exhibition was extremely high, averaging about 70 to 90 exhibitions per year across the venues²⁵. Key projects over this period, such as *Memory Net* (2005), led by the History Team, were primarily based on local history and the team developed practices around gathering oral histories, personal testimonies and personal objects (See Appendix VII for exhibition projects that influenced History's practices of community involvement). These projects were predominantly funded by the HLF which demanded an element of community involvement. While a few notable projects

²⁵ Some of these were exhibitions that would often tour between the main TWM venues.

were managed and delivered entirely by History, more often the community element was delivered by Outreach. This would lead to model whereby CE would eventually become 'bolted-on' to the exhibition process, with far reaching effects to this day, which are further discussed in Chapter 6.

During this period, several venues set up community consultation panels, such as the *People's Panel* and *Collective Minds* (youth panel) at the Laing Art Gallery, and the *Children's Panel* at Discovery Museum, to inform museum programming and events. There were also a number of large scale consultations with the public during the redevelopment of certain permanent galleries funded by HLF.

All this work built upon the ethos of social history already established at TWM: "we embraced it – we opened up things in that way. It was about letting go: about trusting people" (Coles, interview 2011). 'Letting go' was a phrase often used by staff who recounted this period. It refers to expanding the idea of authority over collections and museum narratives (see also Adair et al., 2011). Notions of expertise were effectively challenged at this juncture, and ideas of CE became central in much of the public-facing aspects of the museum's work. While early project like *People's Choice* and *From the Vaults* had involved working with groups to make displays with objects from the stores, these were very much short-term projects, often displayed in a single case, in a corner of a gallery. As a former member of the team explained, these projects were not necessarily about influencing mainstream curating practice or developing alternative knowledges and understandings of the collection. Work with these communities was not part of a collecting or documentation strategy: choosing what to collect, what information to record, and therefore deciding on what is of cultural value and importance, remained the preserve of expert curators.

The cultural diversity strand of work in the museums over this period began to address these questions of representation and cultural value in the museum, through projects and exhibitions. A new post of Keeper of Contemporary Collections was created in 2005 to develop wider representation of people living in the region through participatory collecting practices. Another exhibition that staff identified as having significantly influenced the development of the team's practices of CE was *One in Four*. This exhibition reflected the fact that one in four of in the North East population is likely to have a disability, impairment

or major health concern²⁶. The project developed new participatory approaches to exhibition decision-making by involving people as part of the exhibition team: a consultation group made up of eight local disabled people was set up to consider issues of representation (rather than simply access as previous consultation groups might have) and decide on the key message of the exhibition. With support from the History curator, other groups were approached to provide content, which were selected by the consultation group for the final exhibition.

Much of the collaborative curating practice over this period can be viewed as experiments in involving communities in representation on various levels: as oral history participants or as representatives on an exhibition steering committee. The broad view of these curatorial activities reflects an understanding of CE related to a contributory model of participation, where participation is about individuals and communities contributing stories, opinions and objects to the museum (see Chapter 2). In this way, CE was primarily linked to objects, either through involving individuals to record oral histories or through inviting groups and individuals to suggest items for the museum to purchase and accession into the permanent collections. This form of CE was partly shaped by the requirements of HLF which placed objects at the centre of community engagement. Indeed, as one former staff member recalled: “participation at that time that wasn’t the mantra [of HLF]. The focus then was objects, objects, objects – you’ve got to get more objects out.” (Former History Team, interview 2011). This work was also partly linked to an internal recognition by TWM staff of the limits of curatorial knowledge relating to both objects and lived experiences, building upon the social history principles and driven by an interest (again both internal and external) in cultural diversity.

The People’s Gallery

Much of the community-led exhibition work over this period was effectuated through *The People’s Gallery*, programmed by the Outreach Team. Key exhibitions included *Punk79* (2006-07), working with local punk fans; *Street Skate Style* (2006), working with young skaters; *Sound & Vision*, working with young refugees and NEETs (2008), and *HMP & Me* (2008), working with prisoners (see Appendix III). The PG continued its work of providing communities with opportunities for creative expressions through skills development and

²⁶ *One in Four* was part of a national project called ‘Rethinking Disability Representation’ led by the Museum Studies Department at the University of Leicester.

confidence building, and providing spaces to explore topics that are important in their lives, as identified and presented in their own voices and choices. The temporary exhibitions addressed the discourse of social inclusion also by challenging prejudice and promoting understanding and tolerance. A key project identified by Outreach was the *Mind the Gap* exhibition, which followed a similar approach to *One in Four*, and which focused on mental health (see Appendix III). The PG was an important space to develop and experiment with a more radical participatory practice in terms of collaborative decision-making processes.

Over this period, History and Outreach worked closely together, often attending each other's team meeting, training, study days and developing joint exhibitions and projects. These cross-overs were important in terms of developing the practices of CE across the museum. At the same time, it raised challenges by highlighting some of the more fundamental differences in the priorities driving each team's work (see Chapter 5). The sharing of practice was so successful that it was deemed that outreach ways of working (in relation to CE) were now embedded in the work of the History Team – and so, according to senior management, there was therefore no more need for *The People's Gallery*. Over the years Outreach would lose control of this community gallery space as it became booked up, sometimes up to 4 years in advance, for various history or touring exhibitions. This act is a key moment in the Story of CE, and a grievance that was often repeated during interviews with Outreach staff.

Volunteers

The first volunteer coordinator was appointed in 2000, funded through the HLF. Initially focused on student placements, this role would later respond directly to the social inclusion agenda through volunteering programmes linked to developing skills and confidence towards employment objectives.

National partnerships

Over this period, there was a sense of an organisation developing two identities: while *The People's Gallery* was developing innovative work focused on local communities and local issues, other parts of the organisation were turned towards London and the Nationals. This period was marked by a stream of national initiatives, in particular anniversary celebration and festivals, which would eventually take staff's attention away from community-led exhibitions in the final years of this period.

4.3.5. 'Performing' the socially inclusive museum

'We were always driven by targets...'

This sentiment was repeated across *all* the accounts of staff. A review of the changing corporate plans over this period reveals the key influences of external parties on the production of the 'socially inclusive' museum, as well as the management landscape within which staff framed their practice. The strategic aims of the socially inclusive museum were constructed at a management level through the amalgam of diverse national and local client objectives including: Local and national government shared priorities for public service delivery; Inspiring Learning for All framework; DCMS Strategic Priorities; Renaissance in the Regions priority areas; and Local Area Agreement priorities. While the specifics of these aims would shift over the years, the focus of museum work was identified across these client objectives through six priority areas linked to education, access, collections, social impact, economic impact, and efficiency. At a corporate level then, we can see the socially responsible museum being assembled through a skilled matching of rhetoric and merging of priorities (see Appendix VIII).

Staff identified *Renaissance* as the government initiative with the most significant influence in reshaping the activities of the organisation along instrumental lines²⁷. The DCMS initiatives over this period can be seen as an explicit attempt by government to reconfigure the museum profession through user-based values and objectives (Tlili, 2012). Within the context of evidence-based policy, government (via DCMS) insisted on robust evidence to demonstrate 'value for money' and to monitor access initiatives and contribution to wider social and economic development. Measuring performance against quantitative indicators was part of the government's focus on accountability which became central to the Department's activity (Selwood, 2001a, p.22; see also Clarke et al., 2000). The visitor numbers which had previously been linked to growing local audiences in the discourse of inclusivity now became central in addressing museum performance as regulated by DCMS. Indeed, a review of the annual reports over this period reflects a clearer articulation of the democratic role of the museum in terms of a taxonomy of 'publics': public value, public ownership and public accountability. As Tlili et al. (2007) have argued, social inclusion policies were specifically about reconfiguring the museum as a public service with the

²⁷ Because Outreach was funded through *Renaissance* there was less direct influence from local authorities over this period.

taxpaying public at the centre, and citizens as consumers of public services (see also Cornwall and Gaventa, 2001). These changing understandings of audiences as communities and as consumers would have a particular effect on understandings of CE and its purpose across the organisation (Chapter 5).

Perhaps the most significant effect of the New Labour cultural policies for museums has been the further introduction of performance management regimes. At TWM, this new regime was announced through the growth of a quantitative audit culture of audience attendance, a new focus on measuring performance and delivering value for money, the implementation of quantitative data-gathering techniques and the adoption of an analytical language derived from Best Value, such as inputs, outputs and outcomes, with which to evaluate performance – all of which have framed the administrative work of engagement. In TWM's agreement with the DCMS, the negotiated budget was (until 2011) linked to targets set over a period of three years, focused almost entirely on numbers: for example, total number of visitors, number of under 16 visitors, revenue generated per visitor (see Appendix VIII).

In a paper written at this time, Coles noted that a consequence of the increasing need to justify the receipt of public funding had led to a state where: "sensible evaluation evolved into a performance management regime that was considered, by many, as both unnecessary and draconian" (2008, p.330). The effect of this managerial dimension is rarely written about in accounts of participatory practice in museums, and is a key concern of this thesis which is discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. This shift was particularly marked in the development of the Outreach Team (and to a certain extent, Volunteers and Learning Team), where inclusive practice was discursively reframed in terms of communities (rather than audiences) and translated into processes of targeting specific identity groups, and reporting on the numbers of people engaged. At a senior staff level, the discourse of social inclusion was made manageable and understandable through processes of data gathering to evidence the social impact of museum engagement work. Over the years, the list of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) grew exponentially – everything that could be given a numerical attribute was recorded and reported quarterly; over time, performance management and evaluation through data became routine in particular in Learning and Outreach. The implementation of auditing practices at TWM would also have a range of effects on the development of museum practice, most significantly in terms of the

differentiation of teams through target groups, as Outreach, Learning and History became separated and specialised through their specific priorities.

4.3.6. Social control or social responsibility?

Social inclusion policies have provoked a lively debate across the sector and academia over the coherence, feasibility and appropriateness of this reconfigured role of the museum (Tlili et al., 2007). This is often referred to as the instrumental debate, in contrast to the intrinsic values of museum work, and has taken on a largely polarised form, of social engineering vs. elitism. Many have highlighted the lack of clarity in policy (Newman and McLean, 2004; Tlili et al., 2007), the lack of a clear definition of the term social exclusion which remains “fluid and ambiguous” (Sandell, 1998, p.403), and the lack of a clear direction in terms of the processes of social inclusion in relation to culture and how to evaluate these²⁸(West and Smith, 2005).

Another response to these policies has been a profound sense of unease about the greater involvement of government in shaping the activities of the museum in relation to the public. One expression of this concern has been around the changing role of museum professional into social workers – an area of contest that resonates still in the interviews with TWAM staff (see Chapter 5). Such criticisms find some support in the writings of cultural theorists who argue that embedded within these policies is a soft-disciplinary discourse of creating better citizens (Bennett, 2003) – CE is here a form of control that is ‘good for them’ (see Chapter 2). In terms of DCMS policies, the model of targeting specific groups derives from a concern to remedy cultural and social exclusion using ‘deficit models’ of correction. In this model people are excluded because of their own cultural/social deficiencies, and the institutional response to this is to produce a needs-based programme of museum activities as a form of cultural compensation – participants are ‘beneficiaries’ (Lynch, 2011c). In this context, CE moved away from a framework based primarily on universal cultural entitlement to a more liberal-instrumental orientation of participation. As the following chapters will show, while this model has affected the framing of CE across the Tyne and Wear Museums in terms of how many staff have come to understand its purpose, it has also been actively resisted by staff, in particular Outreach. Chapters 6 and 7 focus on

²⁸ However there have been a number of high-profile case studies to evidence these links, see Dodd and Sandell (2001)

the Outreach ways of working which have reversed this deficit perspective in favour of a capabilities model of CE.

A single analysis of outreach work through reports and project evaluation could suggest that this work was developed as a direct implementation of top-down instrumental social inclusion policies. Rather, in this thesis I will suggest that staff accommodated the language and requirements of policy while at the same time determining their own purpose for outreach work; rather than simply fulfilling policy demands *per se*, the team also positioned CE as the social (and moral/ethical) responsibility of the museum linked to social justice beliefs (see also Tlili, 2008). Such a contention of staff agency is further demonstrated through the empirical material presented in the following chapters.

What is clear over this period is that the availability of funding enabled the museum to develop a range of partnerships with external organisations with social aims, as well as developing new forms of CE, especially in relation to exhibition-making. As Coles reflected, the policy and discourse of social inclusion was a key influence in driving the work of the organisation at the time, but it also opened up the possibilities to build upon and expand the established discourse of inclusivity:

“In one sense it would be dishonest to say we were walking around with our eyes closed and not listening to what the policies of the day were saying, but I was always very clear that (...) [Some organisations] felt liberated by this [and] embraced it because they thought it was the right thing to do. I like to include myself in that last group but others can be the judge of that...” (Coles, interview, 2011)

4.4. Co-production, Austerity and Innovation– 2010-today

Iain Watson took over as director in 2009 just as the museum’s funding was being dramatically cut as public sector austerity set in, linked to the banking crisis of 2008. His directorship begins in another entirely different set of contexts for museums, which also reflects the contexts of this research. A first change, of course, is the merging of the Archives into the service and its acronym – TWAM.

The main focus of this section is to present the changed policy and funding contexts and consider how this is currently re-configuring CE practice. I do not consider the same categories in detail as in the previous sections; instead I highlight some key shifts and their initial effects in relation museum work. In particular, I consider the emergence of the

discourse of co-production across policy and museological theory. This final section also sets out the background for the discussion in the second half of this thesis (Chapters 7, 8 and 9)

4.4.1. Coalition Policy

In May 2010, the Labour government was replaced by a Conservative–Liberal-Democrat coalition. A central focus of the coalition policy discourse – originally expressed as *The Big Society*²⁹ in contrast the big state advanced under New Labour³⁰ – is a localism and decentralisation agenda, intended to devolve power over funding and policies to local authorities and empower communities to address local issues (Conservative Party, 2010a; b). Policy statements express ambitions to engage local communities in taking over and running local services, such as schools, libraries, and possibly even museums (HM Government, 2010a; b). Another key theme in policy has been a renewed focus on the concept of co-production as a way to improve public service provision in the UK. Co-production emphasises the active role of individuals in shaping the services they use, including planning, design, delivery and audit of a public service (Boyle et al., 2006; Bovaird, 2007; Needham, 2008; Bovaird and Loeffler, 2012). It is also a central theme for reshaping health and social care focused on patient and public involvement (see Mockford et al., 2012). This notion ties in with many recent UK policy initiatives that position the role of third sector organisations in community-based health programmes which are part the wider agendas of localism and decentralisation. Notably, the Health and Social Care Act 2012 announced radical reforms to the delivery of health services by devolving the responsibilities for public health to local authorities. The restructuring in health and social care has also recently moved towards the personalisation of budgets (Department for Health, 2007).

The emerging opportunities in the local authority and public health commissioning restructure are currently being investigated by the Outreach team which is looking to commissioning partnerships with health and social care services and social prescribing as possible funding streams to sustain community engagement initiatives (see also Camic and Chatterjee, 2013; O’Neill, 2010). The new commissioning landscape is in fact re-defining the

²⁹ This once-flagship project seems to have now all but disappeared from political rhetoric.

³⁰ Despite the rhetoric of innovation, New Labour also introduced similar ideas (Needham, 2008)

CE practices of the team through partnership working and towards health and social care objectives. This is the key focus of Chapter 7.

The ways in which museum work is changing as a result of these shifts revives questions about the contemporary role and purpose of museums. It has been argued that the invocations of localism and communities are being used to garner support for new forms of 'roll-back' neoliberalism, involving the further dismantling of the public sector and the retrenchment of the welfare state in favour of privatisation and market-based initiatives (Peck and Tickell, 2002; see also Featherstone et al., 2012). Chapters 7, 8 and 9 address this critique and how the museum might respond.

4.4.2. Austerity

Across the UK, widespread public sector austerity has deeply affected museum budgets with significant reductions to cultural funding bodies from 2010 onwards, and further cuts to be announced³¹. Local council budgets have also been cut significantly across the five North East districts. In November 2012, Newcastle City Council, one of the main funders of TWAM, cut its contribution to museums by 50% over three years from 2012/2013 (Atkinson, 2012b), with other councils proposing similar reductions. By the end of 2012, the service's budget has been cut from around £16m a year to £12m and staff numbers have come down from about 330 to 290. In March 2013, Sunderland City Council officially left the museum Joint Agreement to take on direct management of the museums in Sunderland. Given the economic challenges of local authorities, which remain a key funder, the instrumental requirements placed upon museums to demonstrate value for money and impact across a range of social areas at a local level have gained further urgency. As the next chapters will show, austerity is affecting the work of the museum as it focuses on alternative sources of primarily socially driven funding and for the first time perhaps, nearly every team have been given income generation targets. This particular area of tension is key to understanding the current context of TWAM: "if you are aiming to be socially relevant, and socially engaged, but at the same time you have to support yourself by generating some of your income, you have to be prepared to live with that tension and negotiate that through" (Watson, interview, 2012).

³¹ The MA provides a useful timeline of cuts:
<http://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/funding-cuts/19122012-cuts-timeline>

It appears that austerity politics in the cultural sector has been broadly accepted. Leading sector bodies such as the Arts Council England (which now has responsibility for museums, see Cultural policy, below) have largely failed to challenge austerity politics and the sector's response has been a call for investment in developing philanthropy and business donations, whilst encouraging cultural organisations to become 'cultural entrepreneurs'. Since the beginning of the cuts, community engagement and outreach have arguably become most at risk, as these projects have been perceived as resource intensive. Since 2012 DCMS has dropped six performance indicators that relate to social inclusion, learning and outreach work, and there are concerns that this could lead to museums cutting outreach programmes³² (Atkinson, 2012a). There is also an 'unofficial' sense from museum professionals that the Arts Council is 'much more conservative' and this is likely to affect the projects that they will fund: the feeling is that diversity and equality work risks becoming marginalised in the pursuit of 'excellence', however defined (see below). There is also a wider criticism of the national funding picture which privileges London over the 'regions'. The context of austerity has to be recognised as a central theme in this thesis in order to understand how the museum is renegotiating its relations with communities, and how CE is being re-configured in this context.

4.4.3. Cultural policy and funding

The cultural policy has shifted dramatically as the responsibilities for museums were transferred from MLA to the Arts Council for England in 2010, and in April 2012, funding arrangements for museums were transferred from DCMS to ACE through a new funding portfolio programme of Major Partner Museums (MPM). These shifts signalled a new set of criteria for museums, announced in *Achieving great art for everyone* (2013), the Arts Council's 10 year strategic framework. This meant a large scale review of the TWAM strategies and team plans to respond to ACE priorities. This review took place right at the beginning of the ethnography and the meetings attended as part of the research revealed how institutional knowledge, values and ambitions were re-assembled along the Arts Council five strategic goals, and current programmes re-moulded through a new language to fit new categories, while all at the same time, attempting to accommodate the changing priorities of local authorities.

³² Indeed, cuts to CE have recently taken place across the sector in high profile organisations: the Victoria and Albert Museum in London has scaled back its diversity team (Atkinson, 2013) and English Heritage has closed down its outreach department (Atkinson, 2010)

TWAM was successful in its MPM application: the MPM activity plan comprises of seven interrelated work programmes related to the five ACE goals³³. Goal 1 is the notion of 'excellence', and, along with the notion of 'innovation' (part of Goal 3), these terms have become central in the reviewed institutional rhetoric of the museum. Community engagement does not feature within this activity plan; however, the new MPM activity plan does include a set of targeted groups but these are not directly linked to numerical targets. They include: Deaf and Hard of Hearing Communities, BME community groups, young people, ageing population, looked after children and young people, disability groups and local community groups³⁴.

Excellence is yet to be defined by the Arts Council which is currently investigating the term in relation to 'quality'³⁵. While the notion of excellence is of course not new in museum management, it is a term heavy in connotations of aesthetic elitism, the very elitism that the 'inclusive museum' shunned in the 1990s. Excellence in strategic goal 1 is related to promoting 'research curatorship, scholarship and the role of experts'. A new post of Principal Officer, Curatorial and Research has been created to drive a programme to develop collections access and facilitate research at TWAM. While this thesis was not able to review this programme, it is important to note this shift as a potentially regressive return to collections and expertise. I share the slightly nervous apprehension described to me by another member of staff: "it's called excellence but to me it sounds like connoisseurship".

Under the banner of 'innovation' the Learning team was restructured to create a new the Learning Innovations Team, with a particular focus on adult learning. A project Co-ordinator for Innovative exhibitions was also appointed; what 'innovation' means in practice however, remains ambiguous and contested. What is interesting to note is the ways in which the term is deployed to mark out a new identity for the organisation: it presents a

³³ The five goals are: Talent and artistic excellence are thriving and celebrated; More people experience and are inspired by the arts; The arts are sustainable, resilient and innovative; The arts leadership and workforce are diverse and highly skilled; Every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts

³⁴ In fact, these groups reflect the partnerships built up over the years by Outreach staff, Access staff, and Learning (for looked after children). Once again, as the research will go on to show, the new programme is not a simple direct implementation of top-down policy, rather staff also exercise a degree of agency in creating their institutions.

³⁵ ACE has recently published 7 Quality Principles for work with young people (Goal 5) and has commissioned pilot research on 'quality metrics' (<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/our-priorities-2011-15/quality-metrics>)

breakaway from 'old' practices towards 'new', innovative ones³⁶. I suggest this is revealing of a constant need to reinvent museum professionalism– which is also a well-known trope of academic writing about museums.

4.4.4. The 'co-produced museum'?

“Active engagement with our users ensures our service is accessible and relevant to all.” (TWAM Annual Report, 2010/11, p.4)

As I outlined in the introduction and in Chapter 2, active participation is a central theme across the museum sector and its funders, in particular HLF, further by emphasised by the recent publication of the HLF guidance notes on community participation (2010). I suggest the third period in the story of TWAM is emerging through a discourse of co-production which demands for more (and more radical) forms of participation in museums. This discourse is further reconfiguring CE practice at TWAM in particular ways.

One key project highlighted by staff was *CultureShock!* (2008-2010) which has been important in shifting modes of thinking about community knowledge (see Graham et al., 2012). *CultureShock!* was a digital storytelling project which enabled participants to tell their story, compiling the narrative through their personal photographs, rather than responding directly to the museum collection. The result of the project was (unexpectedly) to accession close to 6, 000 personal digital stories as artefacts in the museum collection – up to now community work and oral histories had never been accessioned, and instead had sometimes been included in the object database record as 'additional information'. These are two important shifts in both CE and museological practice. Digital storytelling is now a key way to include community voices into exhibitions, where they are displayed as digital objects on LCD screens.

Two large scale curatorial projects took place over the research period: the Cultural Olympiad 2012 initiative *Stories of the World – Journeys of Discovery*, and *What's Your Story? Discovering Family History*. A central feature of both was for participants to have control over the project direction – young people as curators of world collections in *Journeys of Discovery*, and volunteers managing a family history website in *What's Your Story?* As I will go on to show in Chapter 6, co-production's focus on participant choice and control is currently reframing understandings of CE across the organisation, and particularly

³⁶ In a similar way, 'social inclusion' was once one such term.

within curatorial teams, with unintended consequences. At a wider institutional level (and possibility inspired by the public sector view of co-production), notions of co-production are driving an interest in involving communities in museum governance and decision-making processes: “I really want communities to have much more involvement in the management of the organisation” (Watson, interview, 2012) – that is, the top end of the ladder of participation (Chapter 2).

Co-production is thus used to describe a *new* direction for the organisation. At this time, social inclusion has all but disappeared from the organisational rhetoric. I want to suggest that this semantic rupture implicitly reflects the perceived need to position social inclusion as an ‘old’, no longer fit-for-purpose practice. The drive for innovation means that new practice is positioned *against* past practice; however this is often at the expense of organisational learning, in particular in relation to engagement work. There is also a real danger in this innovation as it risks erasing the inclusion and equalities issues that previous practice addressed, in the search for ‘newness’ and reinvention (see Chapter 5). This constant renaming of professional practice observed in this research is one of the ways in which staff have enacted the shifts in policy and organisational direction.

Reinventing the museum is a central theme of TWAM’s ‘Our Museum’ proposal for the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF) programme of organisational change (Our Museum Proposal, TWAM, 2010). The three-year programme aims to move the museum from a model of largely resource-led planning towards needs-led planning focused on community issues and aspiration, re-making the museum ‘rooted in communities’. The programme also aims to provide communities with opportunities to influence decision-making within all areas of the organisation and how it prioritises its work. On a strategic level, the programme aims to ensure the principles of community engagement influence the way in which every part of the organisation works. While CE is not part of the core museum activities described in the MPM plan, it is now being driven through a programme of organisational change. This research is linked to the PHF process and aims to contribute to organisational learning, which is returned to in the conclusion. It is worth noting here however, the potential tensions around the status of this programme as separate rather than core, and the tensions inherent in driving a programme of organisational change in a time of austerity.

Two other shifts are also worth briefly mentioning here. In terms of performance management, from 2010 museums are no longer required to report numbers to DCMS,

although TWAM continues to collect data about visitors and programmes participants. The direct influence of government in shaping the sector through implementing reporting structures has lessened and there has been a shift to a more peer-led forms of influence across the sector. Late 2010 saw the introduction of the Equalities Act and to reflect these changes, the Disability Access Officer post has become a generic Equalities post. This shift from targeting to having all groups under a single equalities agenda was at the time of the research beginning to raise issue in terms of provision and resourcing.

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter has considered the influences of a range of external actors, from central and local governments, to funding agencies, and their changing priorities. The chapter has aimed to show that external policies have had *at least some effect* on the development of museum practice, sometimes imposing constraints on the museum, for example, through the introduction of rigid performance regimes; at other times, creating opportunities to experiment with new forms of participatory practice. Certainly, one of the main ways in which CE is organised at TWAM is through its funding structures. However, the implementation of policy and external priorities is not straightforward and organisational actors are also active in shaping the particular directions and intentions of the organisation – such negotiations are part of the evolving ‘ecologies of practice’ of staff (see Chapter 3). The analysis identified three discourses which have contributed to the development of CE practice.

Within the discourse of inclusivity, CE was first configured in terms of access and cultural entitlement. These were framed within a moral/ethical discourse, and became manifest through the development of access policies, the establishment of social history as the main approach to exhibitions, and audience development, primarily led by the Education Team. The ‘inclusive museum’ was broadly set within the cultural and educational domains. The section also highlighted broader shifts in society’s relationship with culture, and the need to secure the museum’s legitimacy through ideas of relevance to local constituents and public accountability.

Social inclusion fundamentally repositioned the museum to a social role and purpose. The discourse of social inclusion built upon the discourse of inclusivity by refocusing access not as a goal in itself but as a means to wider social goals – thus further reconfiguring the

museum as a public service with a social impact. This was a period of significant investment in community projects and the creation of the first Outreach team. CE was here constructed (and funded) in relation to social outcomes and areas less commonly attributed to museums, such as employment, rehabilitation and health promotion. The discourse defined communities through specific identity groups and CE practice developed through a targeted approach. This period enabled TWAM to develop a range of diverse partnerships and participatory practices. At the same time, the chapter has highlighted some of the areas of tensions within social inclusion, in terms of 'bolt-on' projects, a deficit model of engagement, project funding, as well as its effects on demarcating teams. Another key structural feature of the discourse was the ways in which CE and its purpose were constructed at an organisational level through processes of performance management and mediated through quantitative targets imposed by external forces (local and central government, and funding requirements). However, this section also showed how the 'socially responsible' museum was also configured through staff's own motivations.

The final section highlighted the shift to Arts Council and the growing climate of austerity. It examined how CE is becoming further reconfigured in the discourse of co-production, which itself has different origins and meanings. There is a renewed focus on social outcomes as well as new possibilities emerging in public services commissioning. The museum is also looking to now involve communities in museum governance: CE is taking on more radical and 'innovative' dimensions. At the same time, the service is negotiating a new direction for the sector under Art Council's 'excellence' agenda.

By sketching out the story of CE, this chapter has set out the context for my analysis of CE practice through detailed empirical research and interviews with current staff in the following chapters. My contention is that rather than these discourses straightforwardly replacing one another – despite the current rhetoric of 'innovation' – in fact they have created organisational structures and vocabularies which remain to this day. Some are visible in administrative and performance management processes, while others remain in the organisational memory as engrained mind-sets, with both positive and problematic effects, which are further explored in Chapters 5 and 6. In particular, the discourse of social inclusion, while no longer politically-led, still influences CE both structurally and in terms of how staff understand its purpose. The discourse of inclusivity has two effects: its moral/ethical inflection can still be seen as a foundation driving team's work values;

however it also has another unexpected effect in that the focus on access can at times narrow CE to 'getting people into the museum'.

In the next chapter I examine how CE – its aims and purpose – is currently defined at TWAM, and consider the institutional commitment to this work. As the chapter has made clear in different places, the story of CE has also developed within different patterns of accountability (to the public, to tax-payers, to local audiences, to a moral ideal, to a multitude of clients such as local and national government). Returning to the accountabilities framework of analysis I presented in the introduction, in the next chapter I consider current configurations of CE by examining their logics of accountability.

Chapter 5. Defining Community Engagement: Patterns of Accountability

5.1. Introduction

This chapter follows directly from the discussion in Chapter 4 which outlined a changing set of contexts which have shaped engagement work at TWAM. In this chapter I move to a deeper engagement with museum professionals' experiences, views and perceptions of CE. My discussion in particular focuses on three main groups: Outreach, curatorial, and Senior Management³⁷. I am interested in how these groups of museum professionals define 'community engagement' and how they relate it to their own work identities and priorities. This chapter is based on empirical materials drawn from semi-structured individual and group interviews, as well as ethnographic notes, and an anonymous online survey (see Chapter 3). The mixed methodology reveals different 'versions' of the organisation, highlighting many of the tensions present below the surface. In discussing these different perspectives the purpose of this thesis is not to provide a final definition or model for community engagement; rather, the aim is to map out some of the commonalities and frictions in definitions and use of words, so as to account for complexity and contradiction, rather than attempt to smooth these over³⁸.

In the first part of the chapter, I sketch out the multiple meanings of community engagement at TWAM, including, first of all, the meaning of community itself. I then address the question of institutional commitment to CE work. In the second part, I engage with one of the main themes of this thesis, announced in the introduction: the notion of accountability in museums. I employ the lens of accountability to examine the different meanings, purposes and practices of CE across staff groups. I want to suggest that in the museum context, accountability is both a driver – either moral or pragmatic – for

³⁷The deeply embedded nature of the ethnography meant that I also had conversations with much broader range of organisational actors. The three main groups form a methodological choice through which the vast amount of data was selected, linked to the teams that most directly or most often 'do' CE, as well as those which manage it at an operational level.

³⁸ It is interesting to note however that many respondents stated that it would be useful to have a set of definitions, "to nail down the meaning of community engagement once and for all!"

community engagement, *and*, following Graham et al. (2012), community engagement is also a tool that is used to re-articulate the legitimacy of the museum, in particular, the legitimacy statements through which decisions are made. Decision-making is a question that staff (in particular the Director) identified as an important issue for research. Their broader concern might be articulated as such: what decisions are legitimate in a museum that sees itself as a *public* institution which has a *social role* and wants to become '*rooted in communities*'? Already, the complexities appear. The key way in which the question of decision-making is addressed here, rather than recounting *what* decisions are made, the research examines *in whose name* decisions are made. Decision-making continues as a theme throughout the rest of this thesis.

In this chapter I suggest that there are four different positions of accountability that the museum can have towards CE, which I term: Local-Public, Managerial, Social History, and Social Responsibility. The analysis reveals how multiple meanings of CE co-exist in museums, which are set within these different forms of accountability. Each dimension has different operational logics, as well as its own logics of legitimacy, which I suggest flow in different directions. I am interested in investigating these flows; how each dimension alternately mesh into one another, and other times push away and against each other. Clearly there will be differences between the forms of accountability that different members of staff are most aligned with. For example, accountability to local councillors through reports on Best Value presented by senior managers is not the same relation of accountability as the Learning Team's reference to the National Curriculum; nor is it the same as the mutuality developed between an Outreach Officer and a participant during a museum project. These relations of accountability are, it follows, configured through various politics that negotiate a balance and direct which take priority, and often result in conflicts between different museum venues, departments and groups of staff. It is these politics that matter since certain accountabilities always come up on top.

In the final section of this chapter, I consider how the idea of scale may help us to provide a *modified* settlement of accountability, through which community is brought back *onto a level* with other forms of public and managerial accountability. My aim is to address the critical impasse presented in Chapter 2. I propose the more practicable idea of accountability as an alternative to the abstracted notion of reciprocity which has currently dominated critical museum studies. I argue that accountably *can* do more in the museum

by connecting community to notions of ‘value for money’ and ‘public interest’ and towards more democratic, generous and, most importantly, more committed museum institutions.

PART 1: DEFINING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In the following sections I present some of the key themes emerging from the ethnography, and highlight some of the tensions and ‘discursive displacements’ (after Tlili, 2008) that occur as staff discussed community engagement in relation to their own work demands and pressures.

I begin however in the tricky terrain of terminology. All staff were familiar with the idea of community engagement, but many highlighted the ambiguity of the terms; identifying ‘community’ was frequently the first stumbling block, and staff often deflected with the question ‘*what do you mean by community?*’ back to the researcher.

5.2. Defining community

For TWAM staff, defining community was an inherently “tricky thing” (Learning, 2011)³⁹:

“It's always going to be difficult because the whole concept of community is very different to different people (...) We can really stretch the definitions here in terms of communities of interest; there is communities defined by geography, there is communities defined by disadvantage” (Collections, 2012)

These three defining categories – interest, geography and disadvantage (or ‘hard to reach’) – were the ones most often highlighted by staff. All three imply commonality between their members, through either spatial or social ties. Communities of interest were seen as self-defined, while communities of geography and disadvantaged communities were seen as externally defined. The boundaries of locality were often associated with local wards, while disadvantage was seen as a label imposed on certain groups by policy and local authorities. It should be noted that the Outreach Team favoured the term ‘under-served’ communities, referring more explicitly to the responsibility of the museum towards these communities (a key point I will return to below). The views of museum professionals at TWAM reflected many of the challenges highlighted by established social science theory: that communities are fluid, contingent, and unstable; that people can belong to more than one community;

³⁹ All the quotes are here from interviews unless otherwise stated.

and that communities can also have negative connotations as exclusive (Mason, 2005). Some staff also reflected on the challenges of representation – both in terms of exhibitions and display, and in terms of group dynamics (do community leaders really convey the views of the community they claim to represent? Is their authority accepted by the community?)

For a significant number of staff across TWAM, community was first and most often associated with the work of Outreach, which was itself associated with targeting specific groups:

“People have different understandings of community - so if you say 'have you worked with a community group?' People will immediately think it's a specific group, it's like NEETs or it's just the West African community” (Venue Manager, 2011)

In this sense, ‘community’ predominantly refers to the different target groups identified in the social inclusion agenda. It also associates community to non-visitors. Staff defined each other’s professional perceptions as either ‘narrow’ or ‘expanded’ views of communities, depending on whether they included only disadvantaged and minority groups (or, in other words, ‘outreach groups’), or if they included other self-selected groups that interact with the museum such as volunteers and ‘Friends Of’. There was also a long-standing internal debate over whether ‘schools’ could be described as a community. This is where we begin to see how the word is mobilised to different ends by different teams (emphases added in all the quotes):

“What we just mean by working with the community we just mean *everyone* who is in our region” (SMT, 2011)

“In its broadest sense it means interacting with any *visitor* that walks through the door and anybody who comes online and wants to have some interaction with the museum” (Venue Manager, 2012)

“We talk about communities but it’s about the *individuals* that we are doing work with” (History, 2011)

Community is here alternatively used to signify ‘public’ (*everyone* – although a specifically local version), ‘audience’ (*visitor* – in person or virtual) and ‘participant’ (*individual*). Other terms were also discussed in the same breath as community, including ‘customer’, the ‘public’, and councillors as community representatives. These references map out onto the recipients of the particular services that are being provided and thus become the main ‘community’ of that team – for example Learning Officers refer to school groups as communities, curators refer to audiences, and management is concerned with customers and councillors.

These ‘discursive displacements’ between public/audience/customers/community are not trivial since the use of each term allows for (and impedes) different forms of engagement. Whether schools are a community is not just a matter of philosophical debate, it has to do with how practice is qualified and defined within the hierarchies of the organisation, which can in turn affect how practice is valued and resourced.

There are also other problems with such displacements. The ‘public’ was often used in opposition to community, where community would stand in for excluded groups. The question then became ‘how are we serving the general public?’ There were increasingly conservative intonations in this statement, where it was implied that CE was taking attention and resources away from engaging (presumably white and middle-class) regular museum visitors. Similarly, those staff who would classify groups such as ‘Friends Of’ or councillors as a community also deployed the term to conservative ends. Furthermore, these groups are likely to already be involved in museums, and able to exert influence. Naming these groups in the same way as under-served communities can in fact erase the issues of inclusion that are the basis for CE.

Additionally, several venue managers used the word community to refer to family visitors, which other teams, such as Outreach, would more readily refer to as core audiences. If communities are core family audiences, then the museum can be said to be responding to their needs through programming and family friendly venues, and CE is embedded. However, if community is meant to refer to something wider, the work of CE becomes much more complex, and it can no longer be said to be mainstreamed. As one member of staff remarked: “I think sometimes we get wrapped up in those professional words and the labels we put on ourselves and it narrows us in the way we reach out to people” (Outreach, 2011).

The aim of this research is not to define ‘community’; rather, it is suggested that understanding how the term is *used* is more productive – that is, understanding how it is used in a set of museum practices such as the broad work of ‘community engagement’, and within this, ‘community exhibitions’, ‘community collaboration’ ‘co-production’, and so on. Talking about ‘what’ is community was so tricky that it nearly closed down conversations about ‘how’ and ‘why’ work with communities. In my interviews with staff, it was thus important for me to present my own definition of community, as it underlies the reflections and critiques I make throughout this research:

For the purpose of this work, the essential defining characteristic of a community is a sense of belonging that links those who are a part of it (after Kavanagh, 1990). Communities are created around the needs, interests and wishes of people. Communities may exist outside of the museum, or they may emerge through specific museum projects (after Witcomb, 2003). It is not the target audiences, which is often a reductive set of demographics; it is not the public, which is too general. There is something about community that implies immediacy and connection: for me it is a term that links diverse individuals with a common purpose/need/interest and I am interested in how the museum can become more responsive to communities.

I further reflect on community as an outcome of the research in Chapters 8 and 9.

5.3. Defining Community Engagement

During the research, staff offered a whole range of different events, activities and programmes as examples of CE:

- The museum putting on a free annual fireworks display for the local community
- A curator's blog entry about an object in the museum collections
- A year-long co-produced exhibition project working with young people as young curators
- A curator receiving an object donation from a member of the public
- The museum's public Flickr account
- A talk for the Friend's groups
- A gallery redevelopment consultation
- The schools' programme
- A 10 week reminiscence project with a dementia patient group, culminating in a series of digital stories that are accessioned in the collections
- A member of the corporate hire team liaising over a wedding booking
- *The People's Gallery*, a space programmed and co-curated with local communities

The examples represent a broad range in terms of scale, time-length, number of people and their levels of involvement, revealing the stark difference in terms of what can be considered CE. The term compresses a whole range of activities, from one-off events, short term projects, to more in-depth partnerships and transformative encounters. There is no single or coherent definition; instead, it is related, as above, to the personal experience of

staff and their own job priorities. In the following section I consider the consequences of these fragmentary conceptualisations of CE.

5.3.1. Multiple Meanings

On a strategic level, TWAM does not have a CE policy or action plan that might lay out a definition of CE⁴⁰. Across interviews and conversations with staff, there lacked a shared understanding of the term. At the same time, many staff clearly identified CE as a key element of the museum's work and its institutional goal⁴¹. A typical response for many staff (indeed nearly all staff across all teams) was to describe CE by referring to the mission statement:

"I suppose it all has to do with TWAM's mission statement (...): all of our collections, they don't belong to us they belong to the people of Tyne and Wear so we should be promoting access in whatever way is possible" (Learning, 2011)

At a basic level then, the purpose of CE is to make the museum accessible and relevant: "we do community engagement to make our collections and displays relevant to the public which we serve" (History, 2012). It links to the representational role of the museum, and the notion of custodianship: the duty of care for collections, as well as the duty to make these accessible. In this way, it becomes used to refer more generally to the public function of museums as a 'people-focused' institution.

Three main aims for CE can be drawn from the interviews (see also Chapter 1): for the majority of staff, CE is associated with wider social outcomes so it has multiple aims depending on the project; others (curators and manager in particular) spoke of 'better knowledge' for the museum; while a small number of managers positioned the primary aim of CE as 'getting people into the museum'. These aims can all be seen as emerging within a contributory model of the museum (Chapter 2); the more restricted definition of 'getting people in' in particular would close down the possibilities for participatory practice (see Chapter 6). Staff then gave a number of different reasons for doing CE: here a concern with diversity and equalities; here a challenge to professional expertise and a way to include

⁴⁰ In fact, at the time of this research, very few UK museums have a Community Engagement Strategy, with the exception of Manchester Museum.

⁴¹ As part of the Our Museum programme, I produced a short online survey and report on perceptions of CE at TWAM. Within this survey, 85% of respondents stated that CE was a strategic goal of the organisation. The executive summary of the report is available in Appendix 2 and provides some of the empirics used for the analysis here.

multiple voices in collections and exhibition; there, an anti-elitist and inclusive approach, and a social responsibility to reach out to those vulnerable or otherwise excluded; or, more pragmatically, to fulfil funder requirements. I return to these inflexions in a moment.

Staff identified numerous approaches or models for CE at TWAM. Staff interviews replicated a separation that could be expected, between CE *inside* the museum (“400 000 community people come in [to the museum every year] — so that's engaging with people isn't it?” [History, 2011]) and CE *outside* the museum, or outreach. As highlighted above, each model of CE is linked to different versions of ‘community’:

“I guess the way that [History] differ from other teams is that other teams might have more set audiences that they are trying to reach. So for Outreach it's harder to reach audiences, under-represented audiences, with Learning they have their targets with school groups so I think we are well placed to be able to offer to a wider more core audience of TWAM” (History, 2012)

CE is different according to who is being engaged and their specific needs and interests:

“Now arguably your community of interest you can engage simply by putting on a conference. Your community in the [local] area, if you do it right you can engage simply by opening your doors. Your community of need you probably have to do something else as well.” (SMT, 2012).

Broadly across the organisation then, CE was imagined on a ladder, or spectrum, of participation (see Chapter 2):

“You are going through a spectrum of community engagement there, from entitlement to basically you still have to take the initiative right through to something where people are actively engaged in a partnership with it” (History, 2011)

“I see it as different ways of engaging people in that whole spectrum – and at what point – obviously inform, some way along the line consultation happens, no matter how big or small, then you start involving” (Outreach, 2011).

At the higher levels of this ladder, CE was linked to shared decision-making, and participant choice and control:

“I think we engage with communities in lots of different ways at the most basic simple level by inviting them in to see what we have got. (...) But strictly speaking community engagement is about allowing people to have more of a voice and an influence over what services they are being provided with. So I don't think we have cracked that at all really” (SMT 2011)

While CE could refer to activities across the spectrum, for many staff it also signified the top end of the ladder where it became an ideal that the museum had yet to achieve. Participant control was the 'true' meaning of CE – an ideal with unintended consequences that I discuss in Chapter 6.

The Outreach Team – as the key cohort of staff who 'do' CE – felt that defining outreach practice into strict models would be restrictive, even counter-productive:

“There isn't one formula for speaking to a community group because community groups can be some many things so what works for dealing with a specific youth group can be completely different for dealing with a group of octogenarians!”
(Outreach, 2012)

For Outreach, the meaning CE needed to be responsive to a variety of contexts: the sensibilities and need of different groups, the nature of the museum objects, as well as the atmosphere and mood on the day. A further exploration of their work is a key focus in the second half of this thesis.

On first reading, it might appear that such a broad range of activities could mean the museum is working towards the same goal (the museum mission or the top of the ladder), and that different parts complement the whole. I want to suggest that the multiple meanings of CE are not trivial: they have consequences for how the work of engagement is distributed and managed across the museum organisation, which 'versions' are valued and resourced, and which are side-lined and obstructed.

5.3.2. Words and associations

Another interesting dimension of the meaning of CE is its associations as well as its *dis*-associations. The arrival of the word CE is linked to the retreat of other words, such as 'social inclusion' and 'diversity'. Some staff suggested that CE had gained currency as 'social inclusion' had lost its rhetorical appeal since it faded from government policy. Social inclusion, and indeed 'outreach', was most directly associated in many staff's minds with hard to reach groups, which in turn inferred difficult groups to work with. The appeal of CE is that it seems an easier, less confronting and more positive term. It is seen as a productive term; as a 'solution' in and of itself, it has institutional appeal. With CE, it is hoped that the museum can move beyond the 'problems' of social inclusion: CE is (supposedly) collaborative rather than tokenistic; (supposedly) consensual rather than patronizing (see Chapters 2 and 4). It is as if naming it as such, as something new, can move it beyond the

challenges of its practice. So it becomes a useful catch-all phrase for staff, and in becoming a catch-all signifier, it becomes everything the museum does. *At the same time*, however, as a word with institutional appeal, it also allows Outreach staff to *do more* in their institutions, as the next chapters will show.

The idea of ‘co-production’ is also interesting in how the *word* itself, when written in the project brief, enabled more: it seemed to hold the museum to much more participatory ways of working, especially in terms of participants having choice and control over the exhibition ideas and content, and made it more difficult for the institution to exert direct influence (although it often does in other more invisible ways).

CE was also closely associated with ‘participation’ although there was a general sense that participation was much more of an active verb, something that the public/visitors/community/participants do in the museum, rather than an approach or a museum professional way of working. On another level, CE was sometimes associated with ‘social work’ which held pejorative connotations as detracting from the ‘core’ functions of museums around collections and display⁴².

There are also terms that are *not* associated with CE. Talking about community engagement was also a way to avoid talking about equalities and social justice – two words that only very occasionally came up during interviews but which signify more ‘radical’ and activist calls for participatory museums⁴³ (Sandell and Nightingale, 2012). As I discussed in Chapter 4, these dis-associations also carry a real danger of erasing inclusion issues.

5.3.3. Institutionalising community engagement?

Speech acts in museums are associated with the work of advocacy and the role of research is to get ‘underneath’ these. As one member of staff put it “the things we like to say can be quite radical but end up being conservative” (Venue Manager, 2012). As it emerged through the interviews then, there are two principal, but distinctive, approaches to conceptualising the role of CE in the museum. They seemingly co-exist and were often referred to by all staff, and often in the same interview. The first views it as a set of

⁴² ‘But we are not social workers’ was a phrase often heard in conferences and events about museum participation attended during the research.

⁴³ When these terms were used, I had an uneasy sense that they were being picked up as ‘buzzwords’, the arrival of which would often coincide with the annual Museums Association Conference (which several senior managers attended).

techniques or tools designed to involve more people in museums: here CE is designated as a specialised *practice*. The second conceptualisation of CE sees it as an overarching philosophy or *ideal*: one which places community at the centre of the museum's functions, via the mission statement, and which, to a lesser or greater extent, involves community in its operations. In this conception all staff and the institution itself are enlisted in this approach. As one senior manager put it, "community engagement is everything we do"⁴⁴.

Yet when I asked staff *whose role* it was to *do* CE, the answer, more often than not, was 'Outreach'. To continue the quote I truncated just above: "Everything we do is community engagement as far as I am concerned, *and* Outreach is a specialist branch of community engagement that spearheads our routes to the hardest to reach groups and sets a good example to the rest of the organisation" (SMT, 2011, emphasis added). This senior manager's quote reflects a paradoxical statement that was made in nearly all the interviews: that CE is 'everything we do' (it is institutionalised) and at the same time, it is the specific role of the Outreach team (it is a separate concern). In this way, the institution is committed to CE, but the *responsibility* for CE remains (strictly) with Outreach. While in rhetoric it is presented as core, it is also pushed to the periphery.

This chapter draws its approach (and inspiration) from Sara Ahmed's book *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity Institutional Life* (2012). Ahmed offers an account of diversity work through interviews with diversity workers in Higher Education. Her observations are similar to the paradox above: "Many comments by diversity practitioners pointed to this paradox: they remain dependent on the ongoing work of committed individuals even when diversity and equity have become embedded within the strategic missions and operational procedures of the organization" (Ahmed, 2012, p.135). A common theme in the interviews is the ambivalence of the commitment to CE: "our intentions have been very good in terms of community engagement – and it's not just about meeting funders agendas it is a *genuine commitment* to want to explore these kinds of relationships" (SMT, 2011). The language of CE is ubiquitous across organisational documents and their reiteration by staff – indeed it is focus of the 'Our Museum' proposal

⁴⁴ While CE is not 'officially' part of non-Outreach staff's job description, many considered CE to be an important part of their job (Appendix IX). Many indicated that they were personally interested in doing more of this work. As I will describe in the following chapter, there are a number of barriers which mean other staff could not easily become involved more directly in CE.

for organisational change (Chapter 4). These can be seen to 'commit' the museum to CE, and even more, to commit it to *changing* for communities. Or do they?

Reflecting on commitment diversity in Higher Education institutions, Ahmed makes clear that committing to diversity (in the sense of 'pledging') is not the same as being committed to diversity (in the sense of 'being bound'). In a similar way, committing to CE, for example, at TWAM, through saying that CE is a key value and referring to the mission statement or the institutional tradition, does not *necessarily* evoke commitment to action. Ahmed puts forward the argument that statements of commitment are often non-performatives: "they do not bring about the effects they name" (Ahmed, 2012, pp.114–21). As she explains:

"In my model of the non-performative, the failure of the speech act to do what it says is not a failure of intent or even circumstance, *but actually what the speech act is doing*. Such speech acts are taken up *as if* they are performatives (as if they have brought about the effects they name), such that the names come to stand in for the effects. As a result, naming can be a way of not bringing something into effect." (2012, p.117 emphasis in original)

Lynch (2011c) and others have discussed the issue of embedding CE in museums. Seeing commitment as a non-performative offers another lens to examine the institutional practices of CE in museums. Naming everything that is already happening in the museum as 'community engagement' was in fact a way of unintentionally not bringing it into effect. In particular, naming, through reference, the tradition of CE at TWAM (see Chapter 4) *as if* practice was mainstreamed becomes a way of further holding this work in the margins.

Naming does not mean that the institution has to do or change anything – which joins a contention I made earlier (Chapter 2): that most of the participatory impulses of the museum are contributory, they are bound inside its own boundaries, with no real intention of changing the institution. The conditions are not available for change to happen. One staff commented:

"I see [CE] as just making people feel good and getting them into the museum. And other than the relationship and what people think about museums, that doesn't affect what we are doing inside the museum" (History, 2012)

Furthermore, the labour of commitment is unevenly distributed at TWAM and is organised as the responsibility of Outreach. When community engagement is taken up to describe what is already happening, it avoids giving CE workers the additional support that is needed. Several members of the Outreach Team commented that there was a perception that the team 'acts of the consciousness of the organisation': doing 'good' and therefore

absolving the rest of the organisation from enacting its commitment towards communities, it stands in for institutional commitment. 'Everyone's' commitment quickly becomes diffused to Outreach and the labour of commitment is absolved and even refused by other parts of the organisation. Rather than consciousness being at the centre, it is pushed outside of institutional boundaries. In this role, the Outreach Team is also expected to speak out for communities. And yet, as the following chapter will discuss, the hierarchies, structures and cultures of organisations constrain Outreach's ability to influence change in the museum. The 'consciousness' role was even extended, as one member of the Outreach team put it, to fulfil the 'corporate social responsibility' of the organisation⁴⁵, which again, frames it as a marginal concern.

The rhetoric of commitment further broke down when I asked staff whether they felt CE work was valued and recognised across the organisation – which, overwhelming, they felt it was not (see Chapter 6). Naming Outreach as the only team responsible for CE also had other problematic effects: "History is also doing it but it is not recognised – there is a lot of community work being done but it's not labelled as that"⁴⁶ (Outreach, 2012). The question of whose role it is to 'do' community engagement was often returned to in the 'Our Museum' (PHF) staff meetings. In an early meeting, it was stated by senior management that there was 'a danger' in the programme 'of *reducing* everybody to an engagement officer' (field note, 2012). There is much bundled up in this statement that is revealing of the place of CE and CE workers in the organisation. While of course there will be differences in how staff can become more involved in CE, there remains something in this statement that reverberates uncomfortably: the responsibility for participation remaining with Outreach and as a periphery concern.

Furthermore, there was a sense that because of its positioning as an ideal and because it is so difficult to 'crack' (as the senior manager in the previous quote described), as an a desired goal it is possible for it to remain aspirational – the commitment is only to trying. Take this common story:

"Every so often a project will come up and somebody will say 'oh this is a really good thing for community engagement' just because it seems to be a good idea, (...) But it certainly hasn't been a constant it just seems to be every once in a blue moon 'oh let's give it a try'. It fails so then it's a bit once bitten twice shy so we will

⁴⁵ It is interesting also the ambivalent way in which Outreach both rejected and embraced this role.

⁴⁶ Outreach seemed to hold an ambivalent position on History – sometimes stating that History was *not* doing CE when it claimed it was; other times stating that they had a different model of doing CE.

just leave it for a bit and then we will try and go back to it. (...). It's almost like prodding them every so often and then running away and then coming back and giving them a prod and then running away again." (Collections, 2012)

In a sense, CE is both a problem (there is not enough, and it is difficult) and its own solution (there needs to be more) (see Chapter 2).

Thinking through commitment also enables us to address the paradox presented in the introduction to this thesis: namely, the disjuncture between institutional commitment and how staff doing community engagement experience institutions as resistant to their work, a paradox also observed by Ahmed on diversity in Higher Education. In the following chapter, I return to address the staff experiences of doing CE, and the difficulties they encounter.

Ahmed asks "what does diversity do?" to consider what diversity means, how it is framed, but also what actions and outcomes it enables and prevents. Her deceptively simple question allows an exploration of the politics of diversity and its institutional practice; she politicises the common sense and taken-for-granted of diversity that naturalises uneven power relations in Higher Education institutions. This attention to the politics of practice (or praxis as she puts it) allows me to ask the question 'what does community engagement do?' in the institutional settings of the museum: what assumptions does it make? What does it perform? What power relations does it reproduce and what does it naturalize? What and whose work is recognised and valued? These concerns frame the rest of the discussion in this chapter and the next.

In the following chapters I will show how the gap between intent and experience is not simply a result of cynical false will; rather, this gap also appears around the institutional barriers that various staff members (not just Outreach) come up against in their attempts to work collaboratively with communities. In my own analysis, I want to expand Ahmed's argument by suggesting that the non-performative nature of institutional commitment is itself complicated by the multiple understandings of community engagement and *the effects it ought to have* – the effects that it names are multiple, sometimes contradictory and often unacknowledged. As one member of the Outreach team commented in relation to other teams "it's probably because they have good intentions, but they need to know what their intentions are before they go out, otherwise it just gets messy" (Outreach, 2013). 'Good intentions' therefore need to be unpicked.

Tlili (2008, p.125) who has done similar research around receptions of social inclusion in science museums, argues that research needs to allow for the “incoherent, heterogenous interpretations and enactments of the concepts” as these are a common feature of organisations (Kirkpatrick and Ackroyd, 2003). Following Tlili (2008, p.125), in the following part of this thesis I want to orient my empirical research to “map out the contingent configurations of these local incoherences”. As one member of staff put it: “some people think [CE is] about working with the public; others it's about working with a targeted group. (...) I think over the years these things have tried to come together, and other times they have collided” (Outreach, 2011). I argue that these collisions are due to the different patterns of accountability that circulate in the museum, and how different staff members inhabit these patterns, which shapes how they construct the meaning and purpose of CE.

PART II: PATTERNS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

As described in the introduction, this chapter seeks to look at community engagement through the lens of accountability. My attention to accountability is first and foremost an empirical one: being accountable was a constant theme in the interviews in relation to questions around the meaning and purpose of CE.

5.4. Dimensions of accountability

I suggest there are four different positions of accountability that the museum can have towards CE: Local-Public, Managerial, Social History, and Social Responsibility. These positions are mirrored in the four intersecting dimensions in which museums operate: the economic, political, cultural and social dimensions. Here my discussion draws on Bourdieu's (1993b) idea of 'fields' and Weber's (2002) idea of 'value spheres'; it also has parallels with Sandell's (1998) discussion of the role of museums in combating the multiple dimensions of social exclusion in museums. The four dimensions represent the different institutional roles of the museum: simultaneously a cultural, social, public and increasingly, an economic institution. These different dimensions have commonalities and overlaps, and I will highlight these flows at various point; but critically, they have distinct operational logics (Bourdieu, 1993b; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Runnel, 2011). The different dimensions of museums means that different aspects of CE are more or less relevant to each of these dimensions, and different positions are assigned to participants in these CE arrangements.

In Chapter 2, I discussed how CE is associated with different logics of participation that are used to renegotiate the legitimacy of the museums in different ways (Graham et al., 2012). This chapter examines the politics of community engagement as it emerged at TWAM.

In order to understand these differences, I conducted an analysis of the patterns of accountability described by TWAM staff, whilst remaining attentive to their 'local incoherences'. These relations of accountability are outlined in four discursive areas and are discussed in turn below.

5.4.1. Local-Public Accountability

The Local-Public sphere focuses on the role of the museum as a public institution in civil society. For staff, the political role of the museum was first experienced through the relations between the museum and the local authority and their specific configurations in governance structures. As such, in the context of TWAM as a local authority museum, it was found that this public role was most immediately perceived on a local scale and in terms of the museum's accountability to local people/communities; hence my term 'local-public'.

As a public institution, the democratising role of the museum is constructed within a populist (or at least anti-elitist) rationality: the claim is that public institutions should provide an inclusive service for everyone and promote a sense of public ownership: "You are constantly going to groups and saying this is your museum, you are paying for it, this is yours. Use it as you would" (Learning, 2012). Across a large majority of the interviews across all staff groups, public accountability was first rendered in terms of the *taxpaying* public (as it flows into managerial accountability, below). In this formulation, the meaning of CE was often narrowed to focus on access and getting non-users into the museum.

A second feature of the democratising role of museums at TWAM is practically settled within the discourse of representative democracy. At TWAM, governance is assured by a Joint Committee made up of elected representatives from the member councils:

"Our strong senior management team provides a clear strategic lead for the organisation and the Director reports to a Joint Committee. The support of elected councillors gives both a democratic accountability and a community based focus" (MPM bid, 2010)

Here, accountability is situated at the centre of modern representative democracy as it produces the arrangement through which citizens are connected to their representatives

(see Bellamy and Palumbo, 2010). Within this model decisions and actions are made in the public's interest and for the public 'good'. The museum's governance structures derive legitimacy from having elected councillors sitting on committees who have a mandate from the people by virtue of having been democratically elected. In an early PHF meeting, the Director commented that arguably, the museum 'already had the most democratic representation' and was already *de facto* accountable to communities through the Joint Committee governance model, as well as through the client relations with the five districts. This is not to say that the Director was not supportive of efforts to develop further participatory approaches in the museum; however this comment, delivered as an aside, is revealing of management's liberal concern with democracy at a distance over more direct democratic forms.

At the same time, securing legitimacy through appeals to representative democracy is no longer enough. Museums as public institutions also have to renegotiate their legitimacy in this context of new political rationalities (from the left and the right) which shift the democratic-theoretical understanding of participation to include communities in the co-production of government services in the context of public reform (Gannon and Lawson, 2008; Chapter 4). As part of the PHF 'Our Museum' programme, senior staff have proposed an alternative management team. While it is still unclear at this stage what issues such a team would be asked to address, or what their own mandate would be, it continues to focus on a form of representative governance as the 'solution' to securing wider legitimacy.

The research found that nearly all 'front-line' staff were deeply suspicious of the power of councillors in steering museum work. This tension was described by a senior manager:

"I still think (...) that we are accountable to a democratic process at a local authority level and that sometimes very often councillors do interfere with what we want to do (...) but actually if you have an elected member saying you should be doing this, then that is probably what you should be doing. Where it gets irritating and where people get annoyed is where it is a pet project and a personal interest rather than something that is more socially or politically motivated. So to that extent we have been influenced in our programming: we are doing an exhibition (...) that is about the art collections which we probably wouldn't otherwise have done, we might have got round to it eventually, but we wouldn't have done it now had it not been for pressure from the portfolio holder⁴⁷." (SMT, 2011)

⁴⁷ I had further fascinating and worrisome conversations with staff about the influence of councillors in this district and their obsession with a specific white, male, industrial history of the city

Similar comments were made in this vein in other parts of the museum, and referring to other events. Overall, front-line staff considered representational democracy as failing the case of the museum for the people⁴⁸; and yet, it remained a firm belief in management levels.

This brings into relief another facet of museum professional competencies: the advocacy role. As a result of the pressure for local museums to justify their existence primarily in terms of local council priorities, senior management staff especially see their role as having to make a case for the public value of museums. In this context, CE becomes an advocacy tool, a political argument to demonstrate policy value:

“The whole advocacy side of community engagement is important because it helps you to justify your existence. There are different levels to it and the most obvious one is outreach work but I see it as much wider than that. And probably my role is (...) in general advocacy and increasing awareness of the service and what we actually do.” (SMT, 2011)

It is interesting that TWAM management, although (necessarily) detached from the delivery of engagement work, associated with CE through this advocacy role. It re-joins an earlier utterance, that ‘everything we do is community engagement’. One consequence of the re-articulation as advocacy is that the distinction between CE and public relations becomes blurred.

Even in a single dimension, we can see how the multiple relations of accountability draw out different meanings and uses of CE. Its most powerful expression in this dimension is through its inflexion as part of a system of representative democracy, which is first directed towards politicians.

5.4.2. Managerial Accountability

As I detailed in Chapter 4, the museum sector has become increasingly embedded within a stringent performance culture linked to its funding arrangements. In fact, one staff put it thus: “at TWAM, performance culture is institutional culture”. This new model of governance in public organisation is described as managerialism (or ‘new managerialism’) (Clarke et al., 2000; Shore and Wright, 2004; Strathern, 2005). Managerialism can best be

⁴⁸ This feeling was further compounded in response to the disproportionate scale of public cuts to the North East and the choices made by local councils: for example, the decision by Newcastle City Council to close 10 out of 18 libraries, and reduce funding to cultural venues by 100% (and 50% for museums) as well as significant cuts to other key social services.

described as a set of business-like values, discourses and practice; it is manifest by what anthropologists have termed 'audit culture' (Strathern, 2005) and the principles of efficiency and effectiveness especially have remodelled the museum sector (as the policy review outlined in Chapter 4 has also shown):

- A focus on the organisation's efficiency that ensures the taxpaying public is receiving 'value for money' services. As a public service, museums should be responsive to their users rather than some professional, cultural or aesthetic criteria. Efficiency also links to entrepreneurship: the need for museums to fundraise and increasingly, to develop income generating activities.
- A focus on effectiveness is linked to external regimes of audit and performance that prescribe specific outcomes against short-term targets and based on standardised indicators (usually numerical), as well as internal performance management structures.
- Monitoring and evaluation is the key element of both efficiency and effectiveness in making museums auditable to funders and accountable by making reports and evaluations public.

As could be expected, the language of managerialism rippled through the interviews with managers: 'best value', 'national performance indicators', 'outputs', etc.; but a consciousness of audit was also found across interviews with all staff groups. The research found that at TWAM, the discourse of managerialism was institutionalised and made routine in most all work structures through reporting and others forms of administration that affect every team. Through numbers, statistics and KPIs, museum work is 'rendered visible' for the public and for the State (Robson, 1992). In this view, the claim is that value for money should deliver a utility return (benefits such as 'stronger and safer communities', 'health and well-being' and 'strengthening public life') to the public, underpinning the accountability to the public, and flowing into the social dimension (Chapter 2). While all respondents indicated that targets such as visitor numbers were not the most significant indicator of the value of museum work, there was recognition that overall performance management was necessary as it was seen as a way to ensure quality, transparency, and accountability to the public (flowing into the Local-Public view). Ironically, however, as it was put to me, community engagement isn't actually a performance indicator in the organisation.

Within the managerial frame there are overlapping local configurations of CE. First, CE is a response to external funder priorities, especially HLF; it is a tool access funding. This view was often related with cynicism, as illustrated by these staff comments: "I dont see that

everyone values community engagement that much even though there are big projects - I think sometimes people just respond to funders" (History, 2011), and "from purely cynical view [CE] looks good to funders - that's terrible isn't it? But it shows that you are reaching out" (Learning, 2012). It is a rather straightforward form of accountability, where the museum must deliver CE as described in the successful funding bid.

Second, CE is constructed as a means for museums to contribute to wider social aims, as stipulated in local authority funding agreement:

"There's no point having a mission statement and a corporate plan if you are not going to have measures to check whether you are following them. Ultimately, community engagement, part of it has to be to demonstrate to the people who have given you the money in the first place that you have spent the money in the way that you said you were going to and that you added value to them in however they wanted to engage with you." (SMT, 2011).

CE here becomes an instrumental activity through which museum work is aligned to council's priorities which are often social aims rather than strictly cultural ones, and where outcomes (often numerical) come to define CE, against a view that engages with the wider processes of CE. Furthermore, 'value' is defined outside of the museum and in numerical terms, either as net cost per visitors or number of new visitors.

Naturally, this view was mostly expressed by managers who are responsible for relations with funders, but it also found echoes in other staff interviews. In both these conceptualisations, CE is operationalised as text, in a strategy or grant application, alongside treasurer's accounts and corporate reports to prove the good investment of taxpayers' monies. CE becomes data, a collection of numbers; its participants are mostly absent or only appear as percentages or aspirational quotes. Managerialism also demands that CE become efficient and effective, which it rarely is.

At times, there was also an uneasy coupling of CE activities and market research. This effect was observed several times during the early discussions within the 'Our Museum' Core Engagement Team where several management staff envisaged the key aim of the programme as engaging people by asking people how to *improve* the service; rather than the much more open dialogue the programme aimed to establish.

The spread of new managerialism has received a lot of academic criticism, in particular, a sustained critique of a form of 'coercive accountability' based on neoliberal techniques of governance, manifest in an incessant drive towards ever more detailed forms of audits

reshaping public work place and professional identities (Shore and Wright, 2000; Watson, 2011). For a small number of staff, auditing practices were directly internalised into their professional identities:

“For me it's fundamentally around the fact that the public pay for these services out of their taxes full stop” (Collections, 2011)

“The public pay my salary therefore I am accountable” (Learning, 2011)

The research at TWAM found that while there was a widespread consciousness of audit, the internalisation of the values of audit by staff was not straightforward; it was also resisted in a variety of ways that hold onto the intrinsic values of museums. There are other reasons for CE that add onto this form of accountability. There was however an overwhelming sense that all staff considered accountability to the taxpaying public as central, and, by extension, this view could reformulate communities as consumers, their rights codified as consumer rights (right to choice, to quality, etc.; see Clarke et al., 2007; Clarke, 2007). I explore some of these tensions further in Chapter 6.

Within the managerial dimension then, CE becomes a rhetorical tool to legitimate the public value of the museum by being accountable to the taxpaying public via its response to council priorities. Accountability to the public is settled in theory through evidence of impact and value for money – as such, it is an external techno-bureaucratic accountability first, rendered through text and data, and directed at funders and politicians.

5.4.3. Social History

Within the cultural dimension, relations of accountability are settled in the custodian role of the museum; as such, it is principally associated with the History Team⁴⁹. The Social History discursive statement presents another set of reasons for inviting people to participate in museums:

“I would see community engagement being mainly in the sense of content in a museum's terms so that history is what people's everyday lives were. But I guess the other way we think about community engagement apart from building content for galleries or websites or temporary exhibitions [it] is co-curation as well – so sharing curatorial decisions in terms of exhibitions. (...).But I also think it also offers the chance for innovation and for staff to think of different ways of doing the work

⁴⁹ It should be noted TWAM's collections are wider than history collections; however, during the research, the most salient issues concerning CE were discussed in terms of the social history collections.

that they would normally do⁵⁰, and I think that it offers value for money in a local authority museum that you are engaging people to make sure you are offering a service that they want and a story that they want to hear” (History, 2012).

It becomes clearer in the quote above how each dimension actually overlaps: the cultural dimension at TWAM is linked to the practice of social history (hence my term for this dimension) *and* value for money.

The first purpose of CE in the Social History dimension is described as ‘building content’; here CE is principally a tool used by curators to add to the value of the museum and the knowledge in/of the museum. Largely it fits within a contributory model and the ‘Good For Us’ rationale (see Chapter 2). In many of the TWAM interviews with History, however, CE is also more than simply building content: it is part of a self-conscious attempt to reconfigure the professional-public relationship – disrupting claims of professional expertise and authority, especially in relation to the curator’s role (see Chapter 4). Its purpose is “to give voice to communities which have previously been under-represented; so in the past that has been women and working class people and more recently it has been minority ethnic groups and disabled groups, gay lesbian groups” (History, 2011). As one staff member simply put it, “if it’s about someone’s life you should consult them”. However, this dimension is not given its strength as a moral argument; rather, all this work is once again understood as providing ‘value for money’ for local communities, as in the quote above.

Involving local people in telling their own story was also seen by History staff as fundamental to the museum’s relevance, and by extension, its legitimacy. Take this staff member’s comment:

“I exist as a curator to collect objects but I think the way I do that sometimes is through community engagement ... so it's a method, it's something that *legitimizes* what I collect – so sometimes I can't justify buying something without asking someone. If we are talking about a community or a person or a group I feel like I am not doing it *factually correctly* unless I have asked that community” (History, 2011, my emphases).

In a sense, accountability here is oriented towards professional standards of ‘factual correctness’ in terms of historical narratives, or at least, better knowledge through consultation and including multiple interpretations. It is about earning legitimacy for the museum’s cultural activities of collection, interpretation and display; but ultimately it is

⁵⁰ I have spoken about this orientation of CE and some of its challenges in relations to the *Stories of the World* youth-led exhibition projects at TWAM (Morse et al., 2013)

also a political argument to support hierarchies of expertise. In theory, CE is aimed at balancing power relations, or at least, it is about acknowledging the knowledge and contribution of participants. However this balance is not easily shifted; it depends what assumptions are made about 'knowledge', what is given priority and whether and where information is stored (see Chapter 6).

Co-production (or co-curation) was seen as a more promising form of CE to share authority by sharing decision-making with participants. However co-production is also set within particular institutional structures as well as a specific version of 'public interest' linked to the role of the museum as a space for public display. This is a temporal form of accountability (Gray, 2011, p.54) that is particular to the museum sector. It is inherited in the custodian role of the museum and concerns the responsibility of museums to the past (preserving collections), the present (displaying collections for contemporary audiences), and the future (holding objects in trust for future generations). As one staff put it, "our role is to care for the collection, because that is what we are employed to do, to preserve those objects for future generations, so that is our top priority, so community groups getting something out of it comes slightly below that" (History, 2012). How far this exact view was shared by other members of the team is not clear, however it does point to some of the tensions in managing CE as a 'present' concern and other forms of accountability with the past and the future, as well as the attendant issues of collections access. As such, a balance is required (a theme I return to in the final part): between now and the future, and between specific individuals and 'the public interest' (see Museums Association, 2008 'Code of Ethics'). However, the use of 'public' in museums is not a neutral description of what museums 'do', it is, in fact, a political argument: public interest "comes through museum professionals' imagination" (Graham et al., 2013, p.107). The 'public' isn't manifest: it is an idea which the museum calls into being when it frames its accountability to it. This work of balance usually happens around co-production with communities and their public display where public interest is invoked when the museum disagrees with community choice and voice. I return to these tensions in the following chapter.

Interestingly at TWAM, this public interest was once again imagined in relation to public funding:

"There are elements of public life and some elements are controversial, and so we should be sensitive because we are funded by the public purse" (History, 2012)

“This is all public money and you can’t do anything with it because you have to remember that might just be a small community - one of the things we need to do ensure that it is not the most vociferous people in a community, the most pushy people that end up calling all the shots - that’s the big risk isn’t it?” (History, 2011)

Overall, the Social History position is one that requires constant negotiation of its legitimacy especially as it is the most visible work in terms of public exhibitions and displays. Its patterns of accountability are most often pulled in the direction of professional standards and expertise: in short, it is a professional accountability first, imagined *via* public funding accountability.

5.4.4. Social Responsibility

The social dimension focuses on making museums accessible and offering opportunities for learning, empowerment, and well-being. At one level, the social role of the museum overlaps with its other dimensions, since managerial (instrumental) cultural policy also positions museums as having a social role. In essence, for TWAM staff, participation in this dimension is understood in terms of the mission statement: “to help people determine their place in the world and define their identities, so enhancing their self-respect and their respect for others”. This position is also associated with the educational role of the museum and volunteering. At another level, as I discussed earlier, CE at TWAM is positioned as the responsibility of the Outreach Team. As such, the Social Responsibility dimension circulating at TWAM is principally linked to the ethos and practice of that team.

I only provide a brief overview of the team’s work in this chapter as it is discussed in detail in Chapters 7, 8 and 9, which aim to get ‘under the skin’ of CE.

In the first participatory workshop, Outreach defined CE in this way:

“We set the conditions for creative ways of working with people who maybe had never thought about museums and galleries as places where they belonged in, or could contribute to, [or] could offer them anything that could benefit them in their lives” (Outreach, 2013)

In terms of outreach, the focus of CE is working with under-served groups and communities that have largely been excluded from the museum. The work of CE by Outreach is defined through bespoke projects and through facilitating community-led or co-produced exhibitions (which flows into the cultural dimension). CE projects use varied museum collections as inspiration for creative projects such as arts and crafts, creative writing, or photography. The Team further defined CE as “crossing the disciplines, since culture is all

these different things for everyone”. It is founded on the principles of access and equality. Here cultural participation is framed as a right (to access) and CE is about enabling groups and individuals to exert that right. But more than this, for Outreach, CE is positioned as the *responsibility* of the museum (hence the name of this discursive dimension of accountability). Fundamentally, for the team, it is a moral/ethical argument: “all the reasons [described above] but we do it because we believe in it. We want to make a difference to people’s lives, and believe we can do this through art and culture” (Outreach, 2013). It is surely because of the strong ethical dimension of outreach work as CE that the Outreach Team was described as ‘the consciousness of the organisation’.

As described in Chapter 4, CE has its origins in the social inclusion policy. As its critics have shown, social inclusion was based on deficit model of CE: participants are ‘beneficiaries’ and CE is ‘good for them’ (See Chapter 2 and 4). While this logic still lingers in the structures of TWAM (see Chapter 6), over the years, the practice of Outreach has evolved beyond the deficit model towards a partnership model, where participants and their organisations participate in deciding how they engage with the museum: “I think it is important not to be seen as going out and almost like Lady Bountiful giving people something that they ‘need’. It has to be collaborative” (Outreach, 2012). For Outreach, a key priority of CE is about empowering people through participation – or more precisely, providing creative opportunities for people to empower themselves. CE is here rendered analogous with dialogue and equal partnership: it is seen as mutually beneficial rather than strictly contributory. As such it is a ‘different model’ to History: “[we] don’t go to them and say ‘we [the museum] think this is important what do you think?’, [we] go to them as say ‘what do you want to talk about?’”

Another important dimension of the CE described by Outreach is providing participants with opportunities for life-long learning and life-long engagement with the museum after the Outreach project has ended (see Chapter 9).

Fundamentally, CE is understood as a duty of care towards communities (see Chapter 7). As one staff put it: ‘there is a sense of responsibility to the people you work with on the ground – if you lose that you lose the point of what’s being done’ (Outreach, 2012). What is particularly noteworthy here is that the ‘sense of responsibility’ is rarely expressed as *accountability*. Clearly however, here the relations of accountability focus on the site of the engagement, and the relations developed between Outreach workers and participants. As

such it operates on a much more direct and intimate scale. Indeed throughout the rest of this thesis, I will argue that this scale of CE is a more productive scale to examine CE, and a significant place to start to rethink embedding community engagement across the organisation through an intimate notion of accountability.

5.5. On balance, scale and accountability: re-settling the logics of community engagement

One of the objectives of this thesis is to consider engagement work not as an isolated feature of museum activity but to examine its place within the complex organisational structures of museums. Such complexity can be analysed by looking at the different dimensions of museum work from the perspectives of diverse organisational actors. I have argued that the meaning of CE depends very much on the situatedness in these particular fields. Community engagement is understood, practised, and made legitimate within and through different patterns of accountability. Here I have argued that institutional arrangements re-contextualise the meaning of CE to fit with their own operational logics, for example instrumental (i.e. value for money), representative (i.e. governance structures), representational (e.g. value of personal stories) and moral/ethical (wider social responsibility). The concept of CE is appropriated and re-articulated in accordance with the lines of accountability that take priority in each of these different dimensions.

In each of these four modes, CE is positioned as either advocacy, as data or text, as a tool to gain better museum knowledge, and as ethical/moral responsibility. These different positions orient benefits in different ways: participation is either aimed at improving the museum or aimed at benefiting participants; participation is directed at everybody (the 'public') or aimed at specific groups. Each dimension has different drivers: government policy objectives, funder requirements, exhibition ideas, or participant needs. Each dimension has different key stakeholders: politicians, funders, audiences, and participants. They define the museum's relationship with communities: either indirect or direct accountability, either upwards or downwards accountability. As such CE appears in forms that are nearly unrecognisable to each other. Indeed the organisational conceptions of CE (mostly represented by manager's views) do not necessarily fit with the organising conceptions at the level of different 'front line' teams (especially Outreach and History): they operate on different *scales*.

However, as I observed through interviews, staff could shift from one mode to another, one language to another, sometimes within the course of a sentence. The apparently contradictory logics can be used simultaneously: the managerial dimension and the social history dimension can be used together, or there is a rapid switching between them. In addition, accountability isn't straightforwardly internalised by organisational actors, it is consciously negotiated through the works practices of museum staff. In fact, as Neyland and Wooglar (2002, p.272) make clear in the university setting (like Ahmed), "the messiness of accountability in action" comes through "whole series of flows, circuits, connections, disconnections, selections, favourings, accounts, holding to account and attempts at analysis". To a certain extent, museum staff can see that there are different models of working with communities, as well as differing priorities that direct museum work; certainly they experience their effects when the dimensions collide. But in the day to day of museum work, within their own organisational silos (see Chapter 6), this complexity fades from view. More than that, the 'disconnections, selections and favourings' are rarely ever acknowledged; the different intentions of CE are never fully discussed.

Having laid out some of the multiple meanings of CE and their patterns of accountability, in this final section of the chapter I want to consider the notions of balance and scale in terms of the practical effects of this multiplicity and its politics.

5.5.1. On Balance

It is important to recognise how these different dimensions of operation generate different demands for museums and museum workers which they must negotiate into a balance. For example:

"There is a pull on the one hand to be more instrumental. But I also want [...] the wonder, the beauty, the awe, the inspiration (...) My own personal approach is that it is both – I think some of my staff see this as a tension. This is the journey that we need to go on. We can't remove that tension it is about getting to a point where we can live with those tensions" (SMT, 2011)

In the museum, balance ('living with these tensions') is temporarily achieved through reference to the mission statement (balance intrinsic/instrumental value), the recognition of audit value (balance professional autonomy/public value for money), custodianship (balance care of collections/access), and 'public interest' (balance professional expertise/public participation). For presentational purposes (only), the multiple dimensions co-habit unproblematically to present the organisation to the outside as a coherent entity.

However these settlements aren't static rules, they are a social practice: balance is enacted, skewed, reshuffled. It is negotiated and influenced through the daily decisions and actions of staff, as well as cajoled or simply over-ruled by external forces. As one staff put it, "there is a whole ballet around that" (Outreach, 2012).

By way of example, I start with one of the most current and contested grounds: the balance between income generation and use of (public) museum spaces.

"The fact that in order to support the organisation we have to maintain, for instance, trading operations, so we are reliant on doing things like corporate hire, retail, cafe sales, and I do think, in an organisation this size, they have to be run as businesses.(...). But that can create conflict. You can have a conflict between your business arm that says 'actually we want to generate income for that space' and your community saying 'we want to use that space for our community parliament'. And that is where you face challenges (...) And that is quite a simplistic conflict if you like, but it sort of exemplifies things that probably happen all the time and that are less clear." (SMT, 2011)

Dilemmas arise for example when a request was made for a wedding booking on a Saturday during the hours when the museum is normally open to the public, or when a private hire request is made for a meeting room that is usually used by a self-led group free of charge (see Chapter 6).

Another two stories:

An outreach youth group is doing a photography project about life in their neighbourhood. Their photos are of desolate estates, of chicken wire and graffiti walls; the themes emerging are quite tough and raw. The local councillor (who suggested the project) doesn't approve; it's not what he had expected, and he doesn't like the way it portrays the neighbourhood it was meant to celebrate. The pictures aren't shown and the youth group is moved on to something else.

The museum has been working on an exhibition called HMP & Me. They have spent months with prisoners and wardens finding out their stories and about their lives in prison. In the project brief it is not called a 'co-production' project, but the team want to tell the prisoners' stories in their own words, and present the themes they have chosen. Senior management is getting anxious with some of the outcomes; it's not what they expected. Some text uses 'foul' language (a nickname for wardens by prisoners, offensive in its origin but now so established it is innocuous), and some objects chosen by inmates to represent their comforts are too... comfortable. Public interest is invoked and they are both pulled from the final exhibition.

In both these examples the *public* role of the museum is negotiated with its *social* role. Earlier, its public function and *managerial* function presented itself as a series of dilemmas. These conflicts are, to return to the quote above, "the things that probably happen all the

time but are less clear". These things only become clearer once they are operationalised: each dimension has differing priorities and CE is reconfigured in accordance.

These priorities follow power relations and hierarchies, so that museums are more accountable to some relationships than others – or, as it were, some relationships gather more 'weight' and more urgency in the balance. Accountability to councillors or accountability to the principle of value for money often exceeds accountability to project participants. Upwards and indirect forms of accountability tend to be favoured over downwards and direct relations with participants/communities.

A final example, infamous in the museum. "If you want to know how *not* to do community engagement", I was once told, "ask about the brass plaques":

One of the main venues is undergoing a major redisplay, and during its closure, a group of local people are working with Outreach to create some brass plaques based on the collections, to be displayed around the museum. Twelve are produced. Inevitably, there are delays with the re-opening. (A first stall). Then there is a security issue: the plaques can't be displayed outside as originally planned as they risk being stolen. (A second stall). Then in the re-opening other priorities predictably take over, and the plaques end up bottom of the list. It will take nearly four years for the plaques to go up. In this time, one of the participants has died, while the others, to quote a member of staff, "are really pissed off".

In this example, other priorities (and their incumbent accountabilities) took over. Those in position to execute the decision to install the plaques and communicate the delays were too far removed from the relationships developed with the participants to feel a part of these relations of accountability. Accountability to the group just stalled and then it got dropped.

As these examples show, within the politics of accountability, certain accountabilities always come up on top. The decisions are made within but without reference to these patterns of accountability. The different value-rationalities nearly always go unacknowledged or they are made visible too late, *after* they have been operationalised, in the *fait accompli* of cancellation or censure. Those who make decisions in museums are nearly always those who are situated in upwards forms of accountability. As such, those working on the ground with communities are not able to challenge these decisions within the museum hierarchies of organisation. In addition, communities often lack the bureaucratic language and capacities to hold the museum to account as they do not inhabit its norms.

The key issue is that the ‘on the ground’ relationships with communities are not represented in the museum’s current systems of accountability, nor, correspondingly, in the proposed solutions to the problems of legitimacy, since CE is both the problem and its own solution. I suggest this also happens precisely because the relations with communities are rarely thought of as relations of accountability – rather, they are about mutuality, partnership, or collaboration. While the Social Responsibility dimension can be viewed as a dimension of accountability, it is not necessarily spoken about in these terms. I suggest that talking about these relations as relations of accountability can do more for community engagement in museums.

5.5.2. From reciprocity to accountability

In the literature, community-museum relations are rarely written about in terms of accountability; instead, the focus is on *reciprocity*. Reciprocity is named as the effect of community engagement: it relies on dialogue (Clifford, 1997) and ‘radical trust’ (Lynch and Alberti, 2010) to access more democratic forms of the museum. It aims to ‘pluralize and relativize’ museum activities such that the relations between museum and communities are renegotiated in more equal and less hierarchical ways (Clifford, 1997). There are two effects of the use of reciprocity. First, as Dibley has commented, it is principally a liberal redemptive narrative and “appeals to ‘equal reciprocity’ can only return the marginalized and colonized to relations of ‘hegemony’” (Dibley, 2005, p.22). In this way it fails as an emancipatory impulse. A second, perhaps more mundane but equally problematic effect, is its elusiveness: as more of an abstract concept it is difficult to know what it means exactly. It is a term often used in museum offices, but equally, staff find it difficult to explain; others reject it as academic jargon. To be clear I do not mean that staff do not understand it – certainly, CE workers know what it looks like, and certainly what it *feels like* (see Chapter 7) – but as a speech act, its effects are limited. It has very little purchase in the organisational procedures of the museum. It is not able to gather ‘weight’ to effect that which it names. It can be easily dismissed by management as that which happens during engagement projects, and therefore not a wider concern. Conceptually, it also tends to end up as the top of the ladder of engagement – where again, it becomes an ideal rather than a practical orientation.

I want to suggest that accountability *can do more* because it is an already accepted dimension of museums work which enrolls all its members, albeit in different ways. Indeed

it is a term that *all staff* used in their interviews: 'I am accountable' was an important marker of their identity as museums professionals in a local authority museum. As such it is a more practicable term that can more easily become translated into other parts of the organisation. And yet simply naming it does not guarantee a different balance. We need to find ways to reconnect it to other forms of public, managerial and professional accountabilities that animate the other museum dimensions. I suggest the notions of *scale* and *relational accountability* to effect this reconnection.

5.5.3. On relational accountability

The different patterns of accountability described above all have substantial merit, but as primarily representative and technical forms of accountability, they provide an incomplete rendition of the accountabilities at stake when the museum directly engages with participants. I want to suggest that there is a need to attend to and take care of the *relational* dimension of accountability that arises through CE.

I draw the idea of *relational accountability* particularly from Joy Moncrieffe (2011) who has written about this approach in the context of development. For Moncrieffe, relational approaches are framed in "a critical human and society-centred approach: starting from the view that human a primarily 'social creatures and actors', relational approaches recognize that wellbeing, freedoms, capacities, willingness to act as well as the quality of political involvement also depend on social relationships" (2011, p.40). As such it is a contingent and specific accountability that is cultivated between the museum, museum workers, communities and participants. The aim of relational accountability is to focus on the conditions for participation to ensure that participants possess the ability to formulate and express interests and defend these interests. It also allows for other patterns of knowledge and meanings as expressions of these interests. In relation to the examples of 'closure' described above, relational accountability, is about, for example, being open to participants about the parameters of the project, and not cancelling or censoring projects part way through, but rather finding more collaborative ways to resolve 'public interest' arguments. A relational form of accountability does not end when the project ends; it is also about letting people know if their work/story is being used in a future exhibition, how it will be presented, and inviting them to the opening; as well as the more mundane acts of simply 'keeping in touch', especially if a project is stalling.

Relational accountability challenges those parts of the museum that approach communities at a distance rather than engaging in an equalising dialogic process. The point is not to say that managers need to be always 'on the ground', but rather that they become much more aware and sensitive to local engagement work. It also requires that front line staff are enabled to be the intermediary when necessary so that community interest can be better heard and defended in the processes of institutional balance. In fact, community engagement will remain on the periphery of organisations until its relational dimensions are acknowledged. This does not mean a rejection of public accountability or other forms of accountability, or a demand for a strictly relational ethics (where the museum is only accountable to those who participate); it still requires a balance, but one in which the in-practice relations of accountability of museum engagement projects cannot be so easily dismissed, and can begin to exert more influence. Relational accountability does not discard the value of other dimensions but challenges what is expected of the museum.

5.5.4. On scale

Scale provides a useful lens to think through the notion of multiple accountabilities. It can be used to examine the different 'scales' as sites where CE is operationalised in the museum. These different scales have already been implicitly mapped out: these are formulated from the micro scale of the bodies enrolled in museum engagement projects to the organisational scale of the paper trail of 'value of money'. There is also another scale at which the local councillor's remarks operate, to the macro scale of 'public interest' or the social role of the museum. My concern with scale is one that views scale as inherently political, drawing from the research in human geography (see Marston, 2000). This brings to attention the ways in which these sites are differently valued. As I have described above, some scales are made visible and preferred while others are obscured or discarded.

My aim in talking about scales is to effect a reconnection between the different patterns of accountability that circulate in the museum. The new dimension I have just introduced, of relational accountability, allows for reconnection of these different scales: of in-practice community engagement (here I am referring specifically to the intimate encounters between individuals or groups and the museum) and of other forms of CE in the museum (for example, as advocacy or data). Rather than dismissing the latter's appropriation of CE as simply 'wrong' or misguided, the aim of analysis is to try and reconnect these different meanings by zooming in and out so that the intimate scale of a museum engagement

project can gather as much 'weight' as, say, the scale at which representative democracy and audit operate.

Or perhaps more precisely, the aim isn't to provide fully corresponding connections so much as to provide a *partial reconnection*, necessarily. Using Marilyn Strathern's (2004) deployment of scale as enabling interpretive shifts that make visible 'partial connections', Helen Graham suggests how such partial reconnections can enable the specificity of museum co-production practice (itself a part of CE in mine and the museum's view) to *mobilize influence*:

"[It] creates the possibility for front line practice to understand itself as only *partially* connected in different ways with institutional and policy contexts. What a theory of partial connection allows is for the work done to be scaled up as evidence for 'social impact' as the same time as not fully constraining or accounting for the *in practice* process of these projects. The politics of such partial correspondence lies in the possibilities generated through the proximate to expand and reshape the policy terms museums have to live by such as 'stronger and safer communities', 'health and well-being' and 'strengthening public life' (MLA 2008). (Graham, 2012, p.585, emphases in original)

Framing this work through notions of accountability further holds the possibility of translation into the procedures, structures and cultures organisation, and towards reshaping of the audit, public and professional terms museums also have to live by. Relational accountability can mobilise the influence to re-settle balance in the museum.

5.5.5. On re-settling

A partial reconnection provides a *slightly modified* settlement where proximity is not the only way to ensure accountability to communities, but a settlement where the museum and its associated practices (bureaucratic, governmental, and representational, of access and of social impact) are reconnected (partially) with the specificities of museum community engagement practice. They are brought into a shared conceptual space where community is articulated with other forms of public and managerial accountability. In practice, this will require that staff reflect more openly and more often about the words they use and their intentions and values, in order that they can map out the logics that inform their meanings of community engagement, and the consequences of such meanings.

The deployment of relational accountability to reconnect different scales of the museum can be seen as providing a framework that is somewhere between the 'conditions of

possibility' of the institution and a politics of museum practice that operates from within the logics of the museum and yet which holds significant political possibilities for participatory practice. It is an analytical shift also which itself opens up the possibilities for change as working through 'adjustments' (Bennett, 1992, p.32, 2007, p.626; see also Graham, 2012, p.568). This shift is significant to move beyond the critical impasse of the literature (Chapter 2), and as a conceptual and practical reconfiguration that enables CE to mobilise influence within institutions.

5.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how multiple meanings of CE co-exist in museum, however their differences are rarely ever acknowledged. The further semantic slippages between community/customer/public also add to this complexity. These differences come to the fore when CE is operationalised. I suggested that looking at CE through the lens of accountability can reveal much about what CE 'is' by drawing attention to the question of 'who' community engagement is for. Specifically, this can reveal the different senses of legitimacy being claimed for CE. This helps us understand how CE can be described as 'everything we do' without necessarily bringing the whole museum organisation in line with a single, coherent understanding of and commitment to community engagement.

When I first approached the research I had assumed that the lack of clarity of CE and its use as a catch-all institutional phrase was a sign of the term's lack of utility, and certainly, a sign that it had lost its critical or political edge. But rather than to suggest a rejection of the term, as an empty sign *and* a full signifier, 'community engagement' can in fact open up new possibilities for museums which the following chapters aim to explore.

My aim in this thesis has not been to define CE; a more useful engagement with the term is for museums to continually unpack the particular configurations of power from which community engagement derives its legitimacy and its purpose. I suggested four patterns of accountability that different staff inhabit, and which shape their understandings of the meanings, role and practices of CE. To examine the effects of these patterns, I argued that the issues of balance and scale are crucial, since the proximate scale of CE is not often able to mobilise influence in the balance of museum priorities, decisions and actions.

I outlined the need for a further dimension of relational accountability (linked to the Social Responsibility position) to address the gap of the 'on the ground' relationships that are not

represented in the museum's current patterns of accountability. It is also presented as a more productive idea than reciprocity to think through and organise museum-community relations. My aim in this chapter was to focus on reconnections to 'adjust' balance in museums, both conceptually and practically. I will return to these ideas in my conclusion, which seeks to address some of these possibilities for more participatory museums and organisational learning.

Having examined how staff define CE, I now turn my attention to how staff *manage* CE. The following chapter examines the specific practicalities of working in organisations, and addresses the organisational sites of tensions where community engagement is currently negotiated.

Chapter 6. Managing Community Engagement: barriers and passage points

6.1. Introduction

In Chapter 4, I considered how external drivers (policy, government agenda and funding requirements) and internal strategies (mission statements, organisational beliefs and corporate plans) have influenced the development of CE at TWAM. I argued that across these shifting contexts previous organisational arrangements are maintained, while at the same time, new structures emerge, creating a layering of old and new practices, established and recent systems. In Chapter 5, I discussed how these drivers are set within different patterns of accountability which in turn shape the multiple meanings of CE.

In this chapter I consider the effects of these layered arrangements and the demands and pressures that structure current practices and processes of CE. The empirics presented in this chapter are drawn from ethnographic notes, the online survey and comments from the research blog, as well as from individual and group interviews with a wide range of staff; but in particular, it focuses on the accounts of Outreach as the team most directly responsible for this work (see the previous Chapter). I examine what Outreach staff described as the *barriers* and *passage points* for engagement work.

My discussion is divided into three parts. First, I consider the barriers to community engagement work which are grouped in two main areas: operational structures and cultures of organisation. In the second part of the chapter, I explore three sites of tension where these barriers are negotiated: in the tangled formations of knowledge, expertise, and authority; in the discourse of 'choiceandcontrol'; and in the perception of the skills for CE. This second section highlights some of the more problematic misunderstandings of the *practice* of CE (rather than its meaning, as in Chapter 5).

In the third part of the chapter, I consider some of the ways in which Outreach negotiate these barriers. As I discussed in Chapter 3, my study of the museum is approached through the study of 'institutional work' (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) and a view of organisations as 'peopled and practised' (Askew, 2009). My discussion in this final part centres on some

of the *tactics* (after de Certeau, 1984) used by Outreach to negotiate organisational arrangements and their various sites of tensions; how they look for and create ‘passage points’ to enable work with communities. I suggest these resistances work through ‘adjustments’ (Bennett, 1992, 2007; Graham et al., 2013) which operate within the logics of the museum, and yet, open up a space for political possibilities by modifying its conditions. This links to the politics of practice that this thesis seeks to put forward.

PART 1: BARRIERS TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WORK

In the first participatory workshops with the Outreach Team, one staff member commented on doing CE in the museum: “sometimes things flow, and other times there are big black lines” (Outreach, 2012). Once more, I draw upon Ahmed’s (2012) writings on diversity work in Higher Education and the paradoxical experience of her respondents: even in institutions that are ‘committed’ to diversity (or CE, see Chapter 5), diversity practitioners experience their institutions as resistant to their work. They repeatedly come up against a ‘brick wall’, “against something that does not move, something solid and tangible” (Ahmed, 2012, p.26). In the workshop, the team stressed the need to examine ‘where it stops flowing’ at TWAM. There was a lot of frustration (but also humour) in the workshop and it is important to acknowledge this emotional work in and of organisations. Through my own analysis of the accounts of Outreach I try to hold onto some of these emotions as they frame the everyday experiences of working in museum organisations.

6.2. Operational structures

The first set of barriers to working with communities identified by all staff – from Outreach to curators to management – is encapsulated in the notion of ‘operational structures’ and linked to the dependency of project funding (see Lynch, 2011c). Operational structures can be understood as the internalisation of the requirements of external drivers of museum work (local and central government, and funders, see Chapter 4) and the wider bureaucratic structures of project management. These are characterised by a composite set of managerial ideas, values and practice and are operationalised through audit culture (Strathern, 2000) and ‘economies of performance’ (Fisher and Owen, 2008). I describe some of these effects on CE practice below.

6.2.1. Outreach practice and ‘scatter-gun’ engagement

As it was argued in the previous chapters, performance management structures have had a profound effect on organising community work at TWAM. The ‘economies of performance’ have operationalised CE through the language of inputs and outputs, in relation to targets and KPIs. Staff recalled the commixing of demands and pressures in the early days of the Outreach team, driven especially by the social inclusion agenda:

“My experience of the last 6 years within Outreach: you have people who are funded by *Renaissance*, and they will have specific targets; (...) where you need to be working with ‘engaging with x amount of people over a period of time’. And there will be definitions of what that means, ‘engagement’: for a long time, this was when we were under the Labour Government it was specific targets like Black Minority Ethnic communities and those kind of terms; working with older people. It seems to me that over the past there has been a heavy emphasis on targets and numbers – which serves a purpose (...) But as I observed the Outreach team have been in the past under pressure, for example, ‘you have to work with some Sikhs now, you have to work with some old people with dementia’... and I have problems with that way of working.” (Outreach, 2011).

While the social inclusion years were marked by a significant investment in CE, there are several issues identified in the quote above. First, Outreach was under constant pressure to go out and find groups to engage to fit with the funder’s criteria. Second, the ‘short-termism’ of projects led, as one staff put it, to a ‘conveyor belt of projects’: “we used to churn people through a mince machine” (Outreach, 2011). Staff would have to move from one project to the next, with few opportunities for follow-up work, or opportunities to develop sustainable relations with groups and organisations. Outreach staff especially expressed their frustration at ‘dropping’ people at the end of a ten week project:

“You feel like you are dipping in and out, like you are parachuting in then zipping off and doing something else whereas there were some organisations that really wanted us to continue working with them” (Outreach, 2013)

In the early years of the team, this pressure was compounded by how CE was operationalised as ‘getting them in’ (Chapter 5). As staff explained, the early MLA focus on ‘access’ meant it was not possible to work with groups long term or on consecutive projects: “they were very suspicious of museums working with the same groups all the time and just counting them over and over again” (SMT, 2012).

The focus on numerical targets was identified as another key issue, and referred to as a box ticking exercise akin to ‘bean counting’, where targeted structures defined which groups to

engage, how many, and for how long: “it felt to me as it became just too much about numbers – where people want to get the numbers in, and tick the boxes – and are the projects we’re doing really having any kind of legacy with people? Are they affecting people’s lives?” (Outreach, 2011). Outreach described how the combination of these past structural conditions led the team to develop through a ‘scattergun approach’ to CE.

Because of their quick turn-around, the structures of projects also made it difficult to develop community-led activities: “in the old days, we had some key aims and we always matched up with what the [external] organisations wanted to get out of the project. But there wasn’t much from the bottom-up in terms of what the group wanted to do” (Project Officer, 2012). Projects generally tended to focus on the museum’s agenda rather than being more fully co-produced: “I suppose [it was] bespoke with a very small ‘b’ because it didn’t actually come from that group or sector” (Outreach, 2011). As I noted in Chapter 4, the social inclusion model of CE was based on a deficit model, with participants as ‘beneficiaries’.

Outreach staff also spoke of the difficulties they felt in terms of planning projects and the pressure to go straight into delivery work: “with the money there was always a need to rush into spending – so bam this project has to happen, there is this money, and you have to engage with this many people and you have to come to the gallery and they have to do something and it would be a bit wham bam book them in” (Outreach, 2011). Outreach often commented on how management was always (and still is) ‘following the money’, regardless of the appropriateness of the programmes for museums, or for participants. Outreach staff spoke of projects being ‘dumped’ on them, regardless of their team plans:

“I do remember [an Assistant Outreach Officer] blew the whistle and said to the Outreach manager basically you've got to get yourself to those meetings and there was all the senior management there carving up this bid with massive outreach commitments. And as an Assistant Officer it's not a high level of responsibility, it's quite lowly paid in the organisation, and they were asking the Assistant Officer at the time if they could deliver : 'you did this before for another project could you do it again?' almost copying part of another bid...” (Outreach, 2012)

There are numerous issues to unpick in this quote which take us back to the rifts between understandings of CE described in the previous chapter. It also brings to light the cultures of the organisation – in terms of hierarchies, communication and professional autonomy and creativity – themes I return to below.

All the various operational requirements of the performance agenda and its audit culture have had the effect of exhausting the Outreach team, threatening ‘burnout’ amongst staff (see Munro, 2014), and after these six or so years, the constraints on autonomy and creativity were leading a lack of professional satisfaction:

“We were doing too many projects and we were running around between one thing and another (...) Just a feeling that we were being overworked and doing a lot of projects and none of it was necessarily being recognised or being communicated” (former Outreach member, 2012)

In particular, Outreach questioned the impact of their work on participants: “we felt we could, and should, be achieving more in terms of social impact” (Outreach, 2013).

Many of these operational structures have since been relaxed with shifts in policy direction (see Chapter 4). However, all staff, including Outreach, continue to collect this information, which is evidence in a sense of how deeply audit structures have become internalised and routinized in museum practice. Furthermore, as I described in Chapter 5, previous models of engagement work – especially the focus on ‘getting people in’ – remain engrained in certain staff members’ perceptions. Another key issue that remains is that of the supposedly inescapable dependency on project funding which leads to short-term project driven by funder’s agendas.

6.2.2. Exhibitions and ‘bolt-on’ engagement

Another key area of engagement practice is exhibition, where Outreach Officers often work with curatorial teams. Typically, exhibition projects, especially HLF funded ones, will include a proportion of budget that is allocated for engagement work⁵¹. This tended to produce what Outreach described as a ‘bolt-on’ form of CE:

“You get touring exhibitions like the Bollywood posters exhibition, and part of that grant would be an x amount of outreach work within in. So you would get boards who are organising that kind of project, and they would get Outreach along to it and we will be involved in some the meetings. I don’t want to keep sounding negative but you keep coming in and out: they bring you in as an Outreach officer, you do the community bit of that exhibition, and then it’s gone. It’s like: ‘we need to find some Asian kids to work with this’. You’ll get an application put in by a curator or a senior manager – ‘we need Outreach to do something’” (Outreach, 2011)

⁵¹ There were no major HLF bids led by Outreach for exhibition work because this was seen as the remit of curatorial teams.

Within such project structures staff felt that engagement work was treated as ‘added-value’ to the project, as an extension rather than a core part of the museums activities. Furthermore, within project structures, project briefs were often written and signed off by management before going out to communities and therefore without consultation. As one Outreach staff put it: “it’s an incidental ways of working rather than thinking who will be interested” (Outreach, 2012). As such it was not possible to change the project objectives or activities once funding had been agreed, and there were few opportunities for participants to be involved in decision-making. Outreach described this model of engagement work as ‘singing the tune of the museum service’ – that is, the parameters of the project would be entirely set by the museum agenda, its timetable, and its ways of working, and communities were often approached effectively to ‘rubberstamp’ pre-existing museum plans (Lynch, 2011c).

The tensions in the ‘bolt-on’ forms of CE can be linked, in part, to the operational requirements of project management. Within the project management timeline and its Gantt charts, CE is nearly always placed at the end of the exhibition process, as a means to deliver specific outputs to be used in the exhibition, for example an oral history. Outreach experience suggested that such project structures, especially the restrictions of time, were not always compatible with more open ways of working with communities. Another aspect of the ‘bolt-on’ engagement, then, refers to the experiences of participants:

“With social history we are asking for people’s stories but we are not always involving people in the design of things and I think it’s hard for us to involve people from that idea stage right through because perhaps the way that we work ... I think we do *drop people off once we have got the ideas*” (History, 2012, emphasis added)

The issues of tokenistic projects which ‘drop’ communities at the end are a central issue in the contributory model of the CE (see Chapter 2).

Curatorial and Outreach staff also spoke of the national initiative overload driving the bulk of exhibition projects, while the rest of the exhibition programme was often influenced by local politics (see Chapter 5). In fact, curatorial staff felt they had little control over programming which was often described to me as a ‘mystery’, even by managers, because of the number of different external influences and the lack of transparency in terms of where, when and by whom programming decisions were being made⁵².

⁵² Sometime in the mid 2000s the programming meetings, which had included representatives from all teams, were stopped. Since then, there had been stories of whole gallery redisplay being

The *People's Gallery* was introduced in Chapter 4. As an experimental community exhibition spaces, it also posed its own challenges, many linked to the operational barriers outlined above, especially the 'conveyor belt' of rapid exhibition turn-around which prevented building long-term relationships:

“To look at it now it was quite a crazy space and the exhibitions were really ad hoc and sort of bundled together (...) And you would get the same people – council community workers, youth workers – and they would just want to use the space, not really care about the space, put their stuff up, and then leg it. Get us to do it, maybe get a bit of money from us because we had a set budget, not massive, like 5 or 6 grand for the year which is nothing. And it just became a nightmare, because you would be chasing up the groups to do stuff.(..) It wasn't difficult in the sense that they were bad people to work with but it was more problematic things to get into this space because *they don't work like we work*⁵³” (Outreach, 2011, emphasis added)

The emphasis in the quote is revealing of the tensions that arise when working with communities that do not inhabit the norms of the organisation.

6.2.3. Evaluations and 'self-referential' engagement

Another aspect of projects and their performance management is the focus on measuring impact through evaluation. However, evaluation was often summative rather than an on-going process and the 'conveyor belt' effect further prevented a more continuous cycle of review: “that's the problem with an organisation like this it's so hard to actually share something because you are always doing delivery delivery delivery” (Development, 2012).

Across the organisation, teams spoke about the constant feeling of pressure to produce positive evaluation reports as a form of advocacy. As a manager commented, the organisation was encouraged to “blow its own trumpet”, especially when the outcomes were ambitious (SMT, 2011). As advocacy documents, any admission of project challenges, mishaps and even failures are not easily accommodated, especially in a climate of competitive funding: “there is always a whole falseness: that evaluations are written to fit. There is always that with any funding” (Learning, 2012). These happy reports soon become

decided in a pub between two managers. More recently, as part of the MPM bid in 2012, a small programming team has been set up (of which Outreach is not a part), and a planned exhibition newsletter (from 2014) so that all staff can feed in ideas and events that join up with the exhibition programme.

⁵³ As I laid out in Chapter 4, there were also many co-produced exhibition in the People's Gallery which were felt to be a real success, both in terms of engagement and their final look. These more successful exhibition were those that had a much longer preparation time and were more inclusive of communities in the different processes of curation.

an inevitable adjunct of 'good practice' which evade any engagement with the messiness and complexity of participation. Good practice becomes that which is written up in 'official' evaluation documents which are destined to circulate externally, rather than that which is tacitly known and which could be better shared internally. Marilyn Strathern has written about this 'self-referentiality' of audit culture (of which evaluation is part): "it has thus becomes 'good practice' simply to be able to describe one's mission through stating aims and objectives and the procedures to achieve them" (Strathern, 2000, p.7) such that the structures of audit pre-empt and even prevent reflection and self-scrutiny (they are non-performative, see Chapter 5). In this way, the forms of evaluation at TWAM can be seen as creating barriers to wider organisational learning for CE.

6.2.4. Bureaucracy and 'system Kafka'

As TWAM is a local authority museum service it must comply with layers of often inflexible council procedures. One curatorial staff commented: "it's hard to balance the corporate procedures with the flexibility you need to work with a community" (History, 2012):

"[Work with communities is] ridden over with the red tape, delays and procedures that we find ourselves plagued with" (blog comment, 2013)

More broadly, 'red tape' was felt to constrain professional creativity and autonomy:

"TWAM is so tied up in its own paperwork and procedures it feels like we can't breathe sometimes. And in addition those documents and procedures make us unemotionally intelligent and careless of our staff, and remove the heart and creativity⁵⁴ from processes and discussions" (blog comment, 2013)

As 'operational structures' the different barriers described above are primarily effects of bureaucratic structures (project and performance management). One senior management staff described the push and pulls of processes and procedures having produced 'system Kafka' – a bureaucracy marked by disorienting and at times senseless complexity and maintained through 'draconian' performance measures. It is within this structural-operational complexity that CE practitioners must negotiate their practice.

6.3. Cultures of organisation

⁵⁴ Notions of 'heart and creativity' will become central to my discussion of the community engagement practice of the Outreach team in Chapters 7 and 8.

In a sense, the phrase 'system Kafka' is equally if not more revealing of the cultures of organisation in the museum— or more precisely, it compounds how technocratic barriers come to be made solid and made durable as habits, as the 'rules of the game', or simply 'the way things are done'. Over time procedures become engrained as common sense and a sense in common, and in turn these can also become brick walls. As one staff member reflected:

"It's not so much the processes and procedures themselves – although they are really frustrating and difficult to manage – but it's more the long-standing beliefs that come along with them. There are some really positive, progressive staff in TWAM who are really excited about change and about having wider conversations, but then there are others who don't want to change their ways of working because of the effort it requires. Perhaps it's one big circle – the processes and procedures create so much of a barrier that only some can climb it successfully" (blog comment, 2013)

There is a vast body of literature, from sociology, anthropology and organisational studies, that examines how (organisational) culture regulate behaviours (Alvesson, 2002; Wilson, 2010; Schein, 2010). Routine, behaviour, norms, customs, habits and rules all form part of organisational cultures (Alvesson, 2002). Culture is a complex concept to describe; it is both evident and opaque. It is that which is tacitly known and sometimes difficult to elicit. In terms of museums, there has been little written in terms of their organisational cultures⁵⁵, possibly linked to issues of researcher access (see Macdonald, 2002 for an exception). Within my own analysis, I take a broad perspective on organisational culture and follow Alvesson's (2002, p.5) focus on culture as a more or less cohesive system of meanings and symbols, over any attempt at articulating an organisational 'reality' for my study of TWAM. As I discussed in the introduction, my methodological and epistemological approach to organisational cultures derives from the 'accounts' of staff's own experiences of working within their own organisations; and in particular, the accounts of Outreach and the barriers they experience. In this next section I consider a second area of barriers that manifest as some of the aspects of the organisational culture of TWAM. My aim is not to offer any comments on the effective (or disciplinary) management of culture; for me, the aim of this thesis in general is to encourage thinking through values, norms, assumptions, and, in turn, using cultural analysis to contribute to more insightful interpretations of museum work.

⁵⁵ Institutional histories being a well-trodden ground, and there is a much wider literature on museum management (for e.g. Sandell and Janes, 2007).

6.3.1. Cultures of hierarchy

A first point often repeated to me through the research was the layers of hierarchy as a barrier to CE work, and as a barrier to innovative and flexible ways of working across the organisation more generally. As I observed it, the museum service functioned as a hierarchical culture which emphasised chains of top-down leadership, efficiency and control. Processes and procedures are managed through this top-down form of hierarchy and its many layers. This is perhaps best illustrated with the long to and fro of the sign-off process for exhibition text panels. As I discussed in Chapter 5, the accountability afforded by such procedures was recognised by staff, however it was felt that the layers of hierarchy had certain problematic effects.

Staff used images such as ‘cumbersome’, ‘turning round the Titanic’ or ‘pushing a boulder up a mountain’ to describe working in the organisation – “slow to operate, slow to rally people, slow to change” (Learning, 2011). This sluggishness was often identified as a difficulty when working with community groups since this work needs to be responsive (see Chapter 8). Another dimension was the deeply set problems of communicating across hierarchies:

“To me it's a one way conversation with [management]: so you can be talking and you don't feel like they are listening to you” (blog comment, 2013)

“The hierarchical pyramid, (...) you can't even talk two lines up, you have to talk to your line manager who then talks to his line manager ...” (blog comment, 2013).

In terms of CE, those working directly with communities are many lines removed from management, so their concerns are rarely heard directly by senior management. This contributes to keeping this work on the periphery of museum activities, and to preventing engagement and participation from being embedded across the organisation. Staff also spoke of a museum management was too often disconnected from ‘front line’ issues:

“We are supposed to work in a certain way because that is the most inclusive way to work but it's not taken any higher up (...) But that is what I think, it shouldn't be one rule for one thing and one for another.” (History, 2012).

6.3.2. Cultures of bureaucracy

Bureaucracy also has its own cultures which staff experienced as restricting creativity. As one staff bluntly put it: “This museum, you really can't do anything, and that's the problem: it stifles creativity, it really does” (Art, 2012). The process-driven management style

appeared to be a major source of dissatisfaction and frustration for many of the interviewees – that is, a concern with procedures compliance over more flexible or intuitive ways of working. This was felt as a particular barrier for CE work in the Outreach Team and the very practical challenges of working with communities that function outside of the norms of the institution. It was described in a joint interview between two members of the team:

A: “If your passion is stifled because of bureaucracy, because when there are guidelines and rules, when you go out and apply them in the real world, when we go out and work with communities, you have to negotiate them and bend them. Because what you are going to find is that nobody will want to work with you at the end of the day. That is the nature of the work we do – it is about negotiation, it's about being positive, is about being flexible.”

B: “You can be all those things within a structure, but within bureaucracy and managerialism and working in such a large place with such a different number of characters... just the pettiness of a large organisationI feel I am being held back”

(Outreach, 2011).

For some staff, the sentiment was that “operational requirements will be used as an excuse for [CE] not to happen by managers” (blog comment, 2013). Once more we are reminded of the ambivalent and non-performative state of commitment in institutions (Chapter 5).

6.3.3. Cultures of decision-making

A third area that created barriers for CE was around the processes of decision-making in the organisation. ‘Lack of consultation and feedback’, ‘lack of involvement in decision-making’ and ‘lack of influence and power’ were problems described across the organisation, from team managers to front-line staff, including Outreach. As one staff member commented:

“There is such a hierarchy of decision-making a lot of people feel frustrated because they feel they are not empowered just to do interesting things. You have to wait for SMT to approve everything and it seems to go on and on and then you get on the agenda but then something more important will come onto the agenda” (Collections Team, 2011)

The top-down forms of decision-making were felt to further constrain professional creativity and autonomy. At the same time, in our interviews, senior management seemed to attempt to dismiss this:

“There is always that concept that 'senior management has to decide' (...) There is a structure of hierarchical responsibility but I don't think there is a hierarchy of

decision making – there is a hierarchy of decision sign off. I think ideas and concepts can come from any part of the organisation” (SMT, 2012).

However the experience of staff contradicted this, and many staff reported they felt unable to influence the balancing of priorities in the organisation (see Chapter 5), and that those decisions affecting them were too often made ‘behind closed doors’, as the early example of SMT carving up outreach commitments has shown.

6.3.4. Cultures of (non-) permission

Despite the dynamic ‘Story of CE’ (Chapter 4) and the recent establishment of the Innovation team, several members of staff interviewed described the museum as risk-averse, especially when it came to sharing authority (including curatorial authority) with communities. This risk-aversion emerges in a particular ways which was described to me as the lack of ‘permission’ to do ‘risky’ or ‘just to do interesting things’, to reflect the earlier quote from the Collections team.

On one level, several staff felt a lack of trust from senior management constraining their professional autonomy. As one member of staff put it: “[I would like the] freedom to try ideas out without being stopped by managers who don't agree or don't understand” (blog comment, 2013). One effect of this lack of permission was the entrenchment of habits: “we become indoctrinated and do things in the same way all the time” (Outreach, 2012), and “we are so locked into what we usually do, it’s difficult to change” (SMT, 2011). There was a tendency then to follow procedures (or feeling unable to work outside of these structures). These habits and engrained ways of working were often cited as a barrier to CE work.

On another level, there were real issues of power and hierarchy undermining more independent working. As one Assistant Outreach officer once stated: “I’m not going to initiate anything now until I get explicit permission to do so in an email” (Outreach, 2012). Several staff in other teams spoke about their interest in becoming more involved in CE work; here as well however, the issue of a lack of management support was highlighted.

However, the issue of permission was not simply about a formal authorization from the top, it was also a difficulty in gaining a more tacit form of ‘permission’ from peers: “you also need permission from everyone around you” (Outreach, 2012). There are complex reasons why such a culture has developed in the museum, linked in part to various

pressures of audit and austerity, which mean staff are less able to develop creatively and work collaboratively (see sections below). In fact, this culture of non-permission could be seen as having damaging effects in terms of staff morale and collegiality, as well as affecting individuals:

“The sin is not trying and failing, the sin is now trying I think. The danger with a local authority pressure if you can’t try anything because if you fail you are next on the line.” (Management, 2011).

This lack of permission was also identified by Outreach as constraining new forms of collaborative work with communities and external organisations.

The more pernicious effect of this culture of non-permission was to contribute to a near-Foucauldian sense of self-surveillance:

“I remember there were people who would always have coffee together in the morning, and you know what, some people would be 'mmm, they are drinking coffee again...' and it was being frowned upon. When actually it's really lovely, just to find out what's going on, or it could be personal stuff, or just a bit of banter, it doesn't matter... but it's important.” (Outreach, 2012).

Another element of organisational life which had unintentionally become a technology of surveillance were staff's shared Outlook calendars: filling these with meetings, events or work activities was part of a practice of evidencing staff's productive labour, to each other and to managers. This was important for Outreach to 'justify' time out of the office for external meetings⁵⁶.

6.3.5. Cultures of (non-) recognition

A troubling feeling that permeated all departments across the museum at the time of my research was a feeling of being overworked and undervalued; indeed, *every team* spoke of their contribution being unrecognised, as well being the team worse affected by the budget cuts. Staff felt undervalued by senior management, as well as feeling that other teams, in particular curatorial teams, were valued more over other forms of museum work; although curators stated they felt equally unrecognised. Many staff explained that they received

⁵⁶ Shared calendars were also a way of arranging meetings, and as a researcher-ethnographer, I had a daily experience of trawling through people's calendars as was suggested to me by my museum supervisors. In a sense, I was also becoming awkwardly involved in the surveillance of staff's labour across the organisation.

little to no formal recognition from senior management. Figure 2 from the research blog, highlights these feelings.

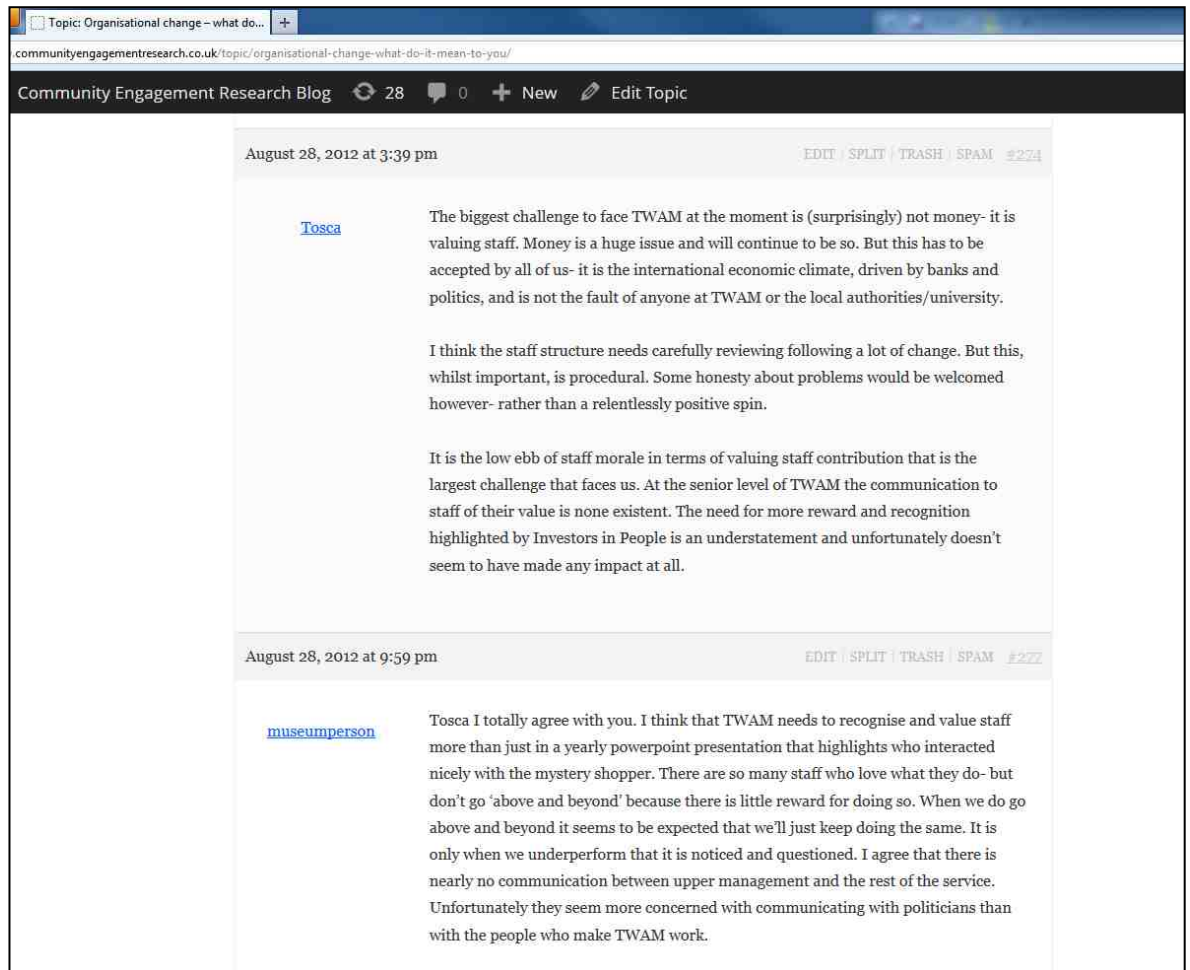


Figure 2: Discussion page from the research blog, August 2012

One senior manager responded in an interview to this more general issue in this way:

“We don't have a reward and recognition system being part of the local authority system. If you talk to any part of the organisation they will tell you some parts are more recognised than they are – so it is a very weak argument. So if everybody is mildly dissatisfied maybe we have hit the balance right!” (SMT, 2012)

There seemed to be a sentiment of acceptance from management around this culture of ‘middling disappointment’ which in fact was having very damaging effects on team and individual morale as I observed it over the time of my research. The dismissal of a need for a system of recognition or reward is not uncommon in cultural organisations as places where people ‘love their work’ and therefore are expected to do more for the

organisation's gain, or be selfless towards the 'greater good', and often at considerable personal cost. In the museum, at the time of the research, there were no conversations taking place about how the organisation might address these issues of staff work satisfaction, or acknowledging their wider impacts.

In terms of CE, the Outreach team felt particularly strongly that their work was not understood, and therefore not valued, in particular at a senior management level – despite the organisation's 'commitment' to participation (see Chapter 5): "outreach is the poor cousin of the museum service. The value is not always seen in what we do" (Outreach, 2011). More specifically, the team felt a lack of trust, which they described as: "[Not] having faith in the outreach officers themselves" (Outreach 2011). Linked to this were issues whereby Outreach felt as though other parts of the organisation did not always 'have faith' in Outreach knowing the grassroots community issues, which again undermines their roles.

Indeed, these were tensions which created a sense of core/periphery as opposed to more integrated museum functions. As a senior manager commented:

"There are tensions in our staff as well in, how should I put it, in terms of the core work of the organisation, where some of them may see Outreach and certainly just going out and talking to people and doing advocacy as not being as important as opening the doors and letting people in and cataloguing the records so that they are accessible" (SMT, 2012).

I address these tensions in more detail in the sections below.

6.3.6. Silos

A significant feature of TWAM is the segmentation of museum functions and the strong demarcation of teams based on work specialisation (see also Macdonald, 2002). These demarcations are partly the result of the culture of audit in museums, in particular the development of funding requirements and targets over time (see Chapter 4). These have contributed to drawing the boundaries of team practices:

"Too often I think museums tend to draw the line. And I think this is because Learning was constructed when *Renaissance* money came in and [then] there was money to set up the Outreach team (...). So Outreach were effectively the sister team to Learning but this artificial line [was draw]: Learning for schools and Outreach to communities. In a way we haven't yet recovered from this" (Learning, 2011).

This compartmentalisation of teams and their priorities has strongly influenced the construction of staff identities at TWAM, as staff stay within the boundaries of their job descriptions. This is maintained by staff's perceptions of their roles and of that of other teams' work: "Curators do this, and I do that", or "Outreach should only do things outside venues, and Learning should only do things inside venues". Over time these boundaries have created deep organisational silos (see Diamond et al., 2002, 2004). On one level, these silos are visible in organisational charts and in the layout of offices. Management and HR on the top floor, curators in an isolated office, and Outreach on the bottom-floor back offices: "we are all separated in our different offices. I think sometimes it feels a bit disjointed" (History, 2012). The imagery of being 'disjointed' or 'disconnected' was a recurrent theme in many of the interviews across all teams. Several staff commented on the lack of strategic planning for CE across the organisation; and a lack of 'joined up-ness' which meant opportunities for programmes and projects to support each other were often missed

In the Outreach team's accounts, there was a narrative by which Outreach and History had once worked closely together, but in recent years these exchanges had stopped (see Chapter 4). It was felt that there were increasing disconnects between the team's priorities. In part, this can be related to issues to reduced capacity, as well as the more structural ways projects are managed, with each team working on a separate part of delivery, with different targets pulling in different directions. At the same time, Outreach felt (and this was backed up in some of their interviews) that parts of the History Team were unwilling to work with communities, and therefore reluctant to work closer with Outreach.

For many staff, silos were used to talk about the lack of communication between teams. Others associated silos with a lack of mutual respect and trust between teams – as if people in one silo were in opposition to staff in another silo: "we are a small team, we have to stick together" (History, 2012). This mind-set was most obvious when staff spoke about senior management being disconnected or disinterested. The silo metaphor also evokes more complex effect of the polarization of teams around the differentiation of specialised skills, knowledge and expertise. One Outreach staff member recalled a story where an exhibition they had led (or curated with the community) was written about in the *Museums Journal* (a professional magazine): "someone from the History office came down and they were all like 'you're not a curator, this is an outrage!' (Outreach, 2012).

In interviews, staff would often make statements (directly or implied) such as ‘what I/we do is more important than we they do’, or ‘what I/we do has more value/importance than what they do’. This was related, at least in part, to the uneven pressures of performance management; for example, the high targets for schools numbers or visitor figures, which are pressures felt by Learning, curators and managers, but are not a shared concern with Outreach. At the same time, the silo metaphor evokes feeling of powerlessness – *every* team also felt that their work was undervalued at an organisational level. In all these ways, silos become solid ‘brick walls’ that fragment the organisation.

There are further silos which draw themselves around the boundaries of different venues. Each venue has its own identity and culture, its own collections and audiences, its own local authority priorities. Outreach staff spoke with frustration about feeling pressured to fulfil venue priorities, which often would not match up to community needs/interest, leading to ‘bolt-on’ forms of engagement (see above). In relation to this, staff often spoke about the difficulties of identifying with the corporate TWAM service identity; this tended instead to denote bureaucracy, branding/marketing and (stultifying) management. This can be seen as creating another kind of boundary between corporate/venue/team.

6.3.7. Stereotypes

Within the silo-mentality, certain stereotypes have emerged, or typecasts of museum activities, reflecting value judgements on different aspects of museum work. Learning’s family fun days are about ‘chick on sticks’ (implying low quality craft activities), Outreach is ‘the paper maché gallery’, while curators are eccentric obsessives who are entirely unwilling to share access to their collections. Here in particular I want to focus on how this affects the Outreach team and CE activities:

“I think there are stereotypes of Outreach and what we do. There were a couple of people I can think of here – really nice – but they have an idea of what outreach is and I think it's improved ...it's maybe something that is airy fairy and that's not part of the core. Maybe as well because we are not venue based and we flit about, we are not in the museum every day , we are not getting the objects out on display so it is maybe something that is not so visible so it is maybe not seen as valuable by certain individuals” (Outreach, 2012)

In the stereotyping of outreach practice as ‘airy-fairy’ against procedural forms of museum work, there is a clear subtext here of professionalism linked to order, rationality and systemization, and a technical notion of professional skills. This perception of ‘flitting about’ also had more pernicious version of Outreach as recalcitrant: Outreach recalled

other staff saying how ‘cushy’ Outreach was because staff could go to the shops during their work hours out of the office. Again, the distinction between the value of labour inside/outside the museum is recalled in this hearsay.

What is particularly interesting with stereotypes is their ability to ‘stick’, however unsubstantiated, and further reinforce the silos as solid boundaries between teams, which contributes to preventing the embedding of CE across the organisation.

6.3.8. The effects of austerity on staff

As I outlined in the introduction and in Chapter 3, austerity has significantly shaped the context of my museum research which was characterised by high levels of anxiety and uncertainty – over budgets, job security, and the direction of the museum service. The climate of uncertainty was compounded by the issues of communication across the organisation; or, as one staff member put it, “the culture of confusion – around jobs and budgets – is really damaging to everyone” (Learning, 2012). As I observed it daily, this climate had a deep emotional impact on staff. Staff felt management was not communicating changes around the cuts, leading to corridors filled with rumours, and a generally debilitating mood of uncertainty. Months of hearsay would end with an emergency address by the director, followed by dramatic press coverage of the cuts, and emails asking staff to consider different options including voluntary redundancy and reduced work hours.

Another effect of the cuts has been to exacerbate certain features of organisational culture: staff spoke of a working climate which was becoming more conservative and more risk-averse (see Chapter 4).

Several staff also noted that the culture of hierarchy and bureaucracy (as a disciplinary culture) was becoming more rigid⁵⁷:

“The time we are in is affecting behaviours so extremely because people are just so worried about their jobs and they will say that they won’t challenge because they are fearful of being seen as being difficult therefore they will be on the list for redundancy and that is a very, very real concern for people at the moment.” (Collections Team, 2011)

⁵⁷ As I am writing up, I was told of a proposed dress code to be implemented at TWAM. The move, certainly ill-thought through at a time when staff morale is still fragile, also reflects some of the more pernicious aspects of a hierarchical management disconnected from its staff and preoccupied with external ‘impression management’.

“When you are told you are dispensable, now I just do what I am told. And maybe that is the result of managerialism.” (Outreach, 2012)

Faced with ever increased workloads directly linked to reduced staff numbers and capacity, there was a sense of individuals and teams becoming inward-looking and focusing on their own tasks only, further deepening organisational silos and constraining collaboration (both internal and external with communities). Staff repeatedly spoke of being asked to ‘do more with less’, and feeling unable to cope with mounting work pressures. Staff’s reluctance to engage with CE work can be seen as being also bound up with the complex effects of the stressful work conditions of precarious labour⁵⁸.

Pressures for income-generation have further affected staff stress level. At the time of the research, staff spoke about a lack of clarity or direction around income generation, and a lack of consensus over balancing priorities, for example, over the sensitive issue of external hire of the museum’s public spaces (see also Chapter 5). So far the debate in TWAM has been settled by parcelling ‘public’ time: private events take place outside of public opening hours. However as cuts to the museums deepen, this is an area where conflict is likely to occur⁵⁹. So far however, Outreach have not been given an income generation target for their work, in recognition of the groups that they work with. Alongside income generation has been a renewed focus on visitor numbers, which Outreach described as a retrograde step to potentially exclusive ways of working.

Recognising the profound effects of this climate of austerity on staff is important for examining the barriers to CE work and conditions of possibility for community engagement work in a time of austerity. The first participatory workshop I conducted with Outreach was in itself an outpour of grief over reduced staff capacity and resources and how this had affected CE work, breaking down partnerships and contacts with community organisations. In terms of staffing, during the time of the research, the Outreach team was reduced from 5 posts (one part-time) to 3.6 posts with reduced working hours. There are also consequences for involving staff in the ‘Our Museum’ Programme, as the three year programme of organisational change is effectively aligned with three years (and more) of cuts. As one staff put it: “we have undergone so many changes in this organisation recently that everyone is really suspicious of more stuff coming along and saying 'oh we are going to

⁵⁸ The issues of the precarization of the heritage profession, while only touched upon here, deserves general debate, including discussion of unpaid labour, placements and volunteering.

⁵⁹ More troublesome perhaps is the role of private catering companies within corporate hire, which make far more profits from these arrangements than the museum itself.

change this now, and everyone's like 'Oh God not again'" (Venue Manager, 2012). However, as I will describe in the following chapters, these shifts also created opportunities for the Outreach team to work in a different way, towards more progressive forms of community engagement.

PART 2: THREE SITES OF TENSION

In this next part I consider how some of the structural and cultural barriers play out around more specific examples of CE work, as described to me by Outreach. I also address more directly some of the staff attitudes that Outreach have felt have blocked their work. As such, this section highlights some of the more problematic misunderstandings of the *practice* of CE (rather than the meaning, as in Chapter 5) and their consequences.

6.4. Site 1: The tangled formations of knowledge, expertise and authority

A first tangled site of tension, and one that figures centrally in current Museum Studies (for e.g. Adair et al., 2011), surrounds the issues of knowledge, expertise and authority in museums. The singular view of the museum as the gatekeeper of knowledge has long been challenged and CE has been part of the movement to share authority in the museum. Indeed, public participation is often cited as the emancipatory solution to expertise; however, it is often the case that participation is a site where expertise is maintained in particular ways (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; see Chapter 2). In the museum, these tensions stem from the different framings of 'knowledge' and how they are valued and validated, especially in gallery display. Investigating knowledge and different ways of knowing is certainly a question that deserves more attention than is possible in this chapter; however it is important to highlight some key points in how it affects CE practice.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Through my ethnography I did engage in much more depth with these issues through my involvement over 14 months in a youth-led exhibition project called *Journeys of Discovery*. I comment on this in the section below and have chosen to discuss it in more length elsewhere (Morse et al., 2013; Morse, 2013a).

6.4.1. Valuing knowledge and expertise.

I have spoken earlier about the structural barriers that constrain community involvement in exhibitions. Tangled up in these barriers are what I will here term 'knowledge hierarchies'.

"A few years ago I worked on the world cultures gallery, whereby a gallery was already set up and the text was more or less done and I was asked to bring communities in to provide an interpretation for those objects in the gallery but as a result, from that we ended up looking at poetic form as a way of expressing what we felt about the objects in the gallery, because they didn't have all the knowledge about it, neither did the curator. So we looked at a more creative way of people expressing themselves which didn't have to be based on facts but it was based on people's experiences in terms of interfacing with those objects: where do they fit in? Why are they here? Is it world cultures or world history [or] local history? (...) That was an example of how I would use something creative to have a free narrative, a lay person's narrative, but equally important.

But that wasn't used in the gallery interpretation. (...) Because it's not always at the level at which the museum asks for that interpretation. It was used I think in some postcards we made for the project." (Outreach, 2011)

Once again we see the 'black lines' that appear when CE challenges conventional norms and practice. In this account, we can see the hierarchies of knowledge as they play out in the museum: object knowledge vs. experiential and emotional knowledges; expertise vs. experience (see Mason et al., 2013). Curatorial staff were here interested in the kinds of community expertise (based here on group identity) that could complement the museum interpretation; fundamentally the museum was looking for factual information, for example, about how a specific pot was used. The poetry was classed as a creative response, an opinion or narrative, as opposed to knowledge *per se*: it is not seen as relevant in the context of the museum display.

6.4.2. Frames of settlement: quality and public interest

Through my ethnography of TWAM I came to see how knowledge and expertise were settled through the twin arguments of *quality* and *public interest*. The narrative for Outreach is that community work is not valued in the museum, because it is felt to be of lesser quality than museum production

“The *People’s Gallery* was the community space, with the paper maché heads and a kind of narrow idea of a community exhibition and nobody cared about the space in the museum⁶¹” (Outreach, 2011)

From the perspectives of organisational actors, including community voices calls into question the museum’s responsibility to maintain professional standards, and problematizes what can be accepted as quality:

“The idea was that [the community] would produce things that would go into the exhibition and there was a bit of a wobble from [the venue] where they have a certain standard of things on display – and if the community produced something that wasn’t up to their standard they would then say it couldn’t be included” (Outreach, 2011)

While the Outreach team accepted that “it’s one of those things that not all groups produce something that’s really amazing or really pretty⁶²”, a key feature of CE in the team’s way of working is to provide opportunities to celebrate participant’s work through public display. However, most TWAM venues do not have dedicated community exhibition space (let us remember the *People’s Gallery* has now been taken over by History), and instead, work was often confined to the stairwell or the corridors: “we were going to be in the exhibition space, but we were moved into the corridor so I had to say to my group ‘oh it’s better in the corridor, more people walk there and will see it, and it’s our little space’. I had to make it sound fabulous rather than ‘you’ve been chucked out of the main exhibition and you’re in the corridor ...” (Outreach, 2012). More than symbolically then, CE is maintained at the periphery, “in the special area over there” (Learning, 2012)⁶³. In these examples we can see how quality standards were invoked to block CE.

A second and related argument that was to invoke ‘public interest’ (or, put another way, the accountability of the museum voice), which I described in Chapter 5. For several members of curatorial staff, the role of the curator was itself constructed entirely through public interest: “you have a duty to a wider historical narrative”. Time and again, Outreach staff faced the ‘black lines’ when it came to including community produced work in

⁶¹ There were also stark differences in resourcing: curatorial-led projects would range from £30,000 to a quarter of a million pounds; in contrast, the PG budget was around £6, 000 for the year to cover several exhibitions.

⁶² One staff member who previously worked principally in the PG spoke of their role as ‘making things look good’ for display. In this way, issues of quality were dealt with in practice, in flexible ways that were inclusive of participants, and where staff expertise of production and display was a part of that which is co-produced. I return to these ideas in Chapter 8.

⁶³ A similar point could be made for school children’s work.

temporary or permanent galleries. However, at TWAM there is no clear definition of quality or public interest and what it means in terms of display. Instead, it would often feel to Outreach that arbitration through quality standards was in fact an argument in support of conservative aesthetic taste and personal judgement. For Outreach, the tensions around quality and public interest were that these were rarely part of a wider discussion that might be influenced by their participants. They could also have more damaging effects when invoked last minute, as they often were, leading to censorship or cancellation and the disappointment of participants.

6.4.3. Expert reluctance

In relation to this tangled site, another barrier was described by Outreach as ‘curator/professional’s reluctance’ to share or relinquish authority to communities. For Outreach, this reluctance was linked to ‘professional pride’, and the ‘arrogance and authority of professional credentials’ (such as Masters degrees and PhDs). It was felt that curatorial staff still held a very singular view of expertise derived from the scholarly study of collections, which sometimes transpired in my interviews, although in a more nuanced way. In the Outreach team’s opinion, this reluctance was linked to fear – a fear of the unknown or a fear of professional standards (i.e. quality) being dropped. This attitude could block the inclusion (and even the discussion of inclusion) of community work and community voices in exhibitions. As I observed in my interviews with staff, these anxieties were themselves compounded by a fear of redundancy, in both senses of the word. The challenge to expertise inferred in CE can be very threatening, and it was also often felt as a threat to staff’s employment: the worry often heard across the ethnography was that if community and volunteers can do it, are museum professionals needed at all?

“Resistance? Yes and it will come from curators as they say 'if you want me to release all my knowledge whether it is in my head or in my history files beside my desk, you are undermining my value to the organisation’” (Collections Team, 2012)

“And there is a lot of paperwork involved and fear in different team about what [CE] means. We don’t have time to get things out and send it to communities and then if Outreach have access and does that mean the History team aren’t needed anymore or?” (History, 2012)

“I think possibly people felt threatened because if 16 and 17 year olds can do it, you know, why have specialists?” (Collections Team, 2012)

Another manifestation of this fear, highlighted in the last quote, were marked issues around collection access, both physical access to the store and online access to the

collections catalogue⁶⁴. Outreach reported many instances of being faced with ‘a flat out no’ when attempting to use accessioned collections with their groups – something they felt was central to their practice (“at the end of the day our job is to engage people with the collections” – Outreach, 2011). At the time of the research, there was an internal research project aimed at examining current guidelines and procedures for collections access. It found that there was no coherent store access or off-site access policy, and variations across the different venues. Collections access was bound up with layers of bureaucracy but equally managed through unwritten rules and routine. Holding onto these unwritten rules is one way through which staff could remain ‘specialists’. One Outreach staff commented:

“It’s all privy knowledge – but it’s not, it’s stuff you can learn really easily – it’s just you do this, this and this; but [the curators] would only answer questions but they wouldn’t give suggestions – can we select these things, what do we do now? Do I book transport? Do you book transport? And they don’t get back.” (Outreach, 2012)

Again, this is not a straightforward reluctance as it is bound up with the cultures of organisation I have described above, particularly the deep organisational silos.

On another level, Outreach felt as though they were not trusted by collections-based team. When I put this to a curator they reflect this:

“I don’t think it’s our head on the line, or issues of trust really I think it’s a curator is trained to be absolutely, anally care about every little bit of care of that object and giving it over to somebody else who is not a curator is like giving up responsible care for that object which is how we have been trained really. But I think that mind-set means that objects aren’t easily given to the community because they wouldn’t be given to outreach I think that is a bit of stumbling block (History, 2012)

In fact, the idea of ‘care’ is one that is central to this thesis, and which I engage with and reframe in Chapters 7 and 8 to propose a much wider ethic of care in all aspects of museum work. In doing so, I wish to address this reluctance and fear and the assumptions underlying them, as they are surely the most troubling misconception and challenging barrier to further embedding CE in museums.

⁶⁴At the time of the research the museum was migrating to a different collection management software. In the original software, Outreach was not able to use the search option of the catalogue, or to upload any community interpretation (these options being reserved to collections team staff). In the new system all staff can search the catalogue and input ‘additional information’ to the object records.

6.5. Site 2: The discourse of ‘choiceandcontrol’

In most all the interviews I did with staff other than Outreach the initial response to our discussions of CE (and even sometimes, it seemed, as a definition for it) was: ‘community engagement, it is about managing people’s expectations’⁶⁵. Here I explore what I observed as the effects of this phrase.

6.5.1. Managing expectations

Time and again, working with communities was described as the task of ‘managing people’s expectations’. To me there was a troubling cynicism in this phrase, its recurrence and the length for which staff would talk about it. These views were shared across curatorial, collection and senior management teams. In these conversations, CE was reconfigured as a problem; there was certain pessimism about what it could achieve, either for participants or for the institution, since the institutional procedures were felt so inflexible and what communities would surely demand would be too difficult to deliver (or plainly, it would be more trouble than it was worth). Communities were cast as confrontational and unwilling to compromise. Museum staff were very aware of the critique of tokenistic participation and ‘false consensus’ (Lynch, 2011b), and conscious not to be complicit or mislead participants. However, there were never conversations about raising people’s expectations, only about managing their disappointment. Within this rhetoric the risk of disappointing participants outweighed the benefits of participation.

The key effect of this recurrent phrase, ‘managing expectations’, was to paralyse staff:

“[Staff] have an idea of what it means to be working with communities in their heads and it scares the bejeezers out of them because they think 'oh god it's an extra piece of work' and 'if I don't agree with them, if they want to put something on a label and I don't want to put it on a label, do I have to put it on a label?' and I think there are a lot of misconceptions or worries about what it might mean.” (Venue Manager, 2012).

Staff became too anxious to even attempt engagement work as a result:

“When they are managing expectations that people feel if they get asked something by the community or suggested to them they feel like they have to do it, and so they would rather just not go there at all rather than having to say no” (Art Team, 2012)

⁶⁵ Interestingly, this came out much more frequently in conversation than during the more ‘formal’ interviews.

What I found throughout the museum was that CE was discussed and operationalised through the bureaucratic structures of *risk management*. The issue of risk management is primarily one of managing certainty⁶⁶. Collaboration is inherently an uncertain process, especially when working with groups or communities outside of the museum and its norms. Attempting to embrace uncertainty is in direct conflict with the need for certainty built into the operating values of museums. For example, in order to produce an exhibition, fixed points of certainty must be established: flow charts, Gantt charts with planning and procedures, from object conversation, design and technical construction, to interpretation, mount and display. Staff who carry out these different functions typically do so across a number of programmes, and therefore require set allocated times to perform these functions on the project and manage their own workloads. This leaves little room for uncertainty – or the messiness of participation (c.f. Askins and Pain, 2011). Within this rhetoric, CE is constructed at a managerial, disembodied scale, as a variable to be managed alongside budgets and timetables (see Chapter 5).

Within the risk management model of participation, participants were often viewed as confrontational, or at least argumentative. Staff would anticipate conflict with communities and so planning for CE activities became as much about anticipating risk scenarios. To take one short example. Partway through my research, I attended the first meeting to develop a series of engagement activities around a portrait on loan from the National Portrait Gallery. The aim of the CE activities was to engage the Yemeni community around this particular painting. A small number of representatives from various groups and organisations attended this first meeting (although none directly from the Yemeni community). Almost immediately, the meeting became centred on how to manage the community's expectations, even though they were not in the room; there was a long discussion about the need to use the NPG branding and anticipating the conflicts that might arise from this. The absent community was entirely imagined through pre-emption and mitigation.

In other conversations about CE, the challenge of 'balance' was once again evoked (and its attendant tensions: questions of expertise and quality, and the responsibility of stewardship; see also Chapter 5). There was a need to manage the more 'vociferous voices': "my initial concern would be that you would have those vocal individuals [who] would drive their own agenda and the key is what controls you put on that" (History, 2012).

⁶⁶ The idea of 'managing certainty' came out of the collaborative paper around *Journeys of Discovery* and is an idea that should be first credited to Morag Macpherson.

Control here is exerted through recourse to professional expertise via evocations of public interest, as I described above. However, here 'public interest' is not framed in terms of ethics but rather in terms of risk management – so precautions are taken to avoid complaints from other visitors. This common feeling was often related by staff: “before you start any CE I think you have to be clear about what it is you want to achieve and what you are prepared to accept and not to accept” (SMT, 2011). In this sense, CE was nearly exclusively framed in a conflict model of CE which views communities as antagonistic (even belligerent) and engagement as necessarily confrontational (see Chapter 2).

While Lynch (2011a) has argued for conflict as the site of museum interaction, my research highlights some unintended consequences of this framing, in particular, the operationalisation of CE through a discourse of risk management. In the next chapters I will show how a positivist view of communities (which Lynch writes against) is not necessarily patronising or exploitative when the purpose and practice of CE are viewed in different terms.

6.5.2. The discourse of 'choiceandcontrol'

I want to argue here that the response of 'managing expectations' is linked to the prevalence of a certain discourse of participation within the sector, including the recent turn towards 'co-production', which I call the discourse of choiceandcontrol – a conscious portmanteau to signify how closely these are linked in how they are imagined and discussed in the museum.

As I described in Chapter 5, the idea(l) of community engagement was strongly associated in the minds of staff with notions of participant choice and decision-making. Such ideas of participation are linked to a ladder of participation model, a rhetoric that is reflected in the literature (see Chapter 2). Implicit in the ladder model – and in its reception across many teams at TWAM – is a hierarchy of participation which equates the greatest level of relinquishing of power with the most valuable forms of participation work, for both individual participants and the institution. The top of the ladder is understood as focusing on decisions, and participation is understood as the ability to exercise choice and control in decision-making processes. These become the primary markers of a successful CE project.

A first effect of the discourse of choiceandcontrol was to perpetuate the culture of anxiety:

“And we worry about are we doing it right? And can we do more? And how should we be doing it and are we getting the right people?” (History, 2012)

“I think some of the officers felt that there would be pressure on them all the time to keep having to go higher and higher (...) but there is always that concern with some people that it becomes a stick to beat them” (Management, 2012)

A second effect of the discourse of choiceandcontrol was to position the role of museum professional as facilitator as one that is neutral, as one that does not intervene:

“There seem to be a subconscious hierarchy that says - people expressing themselves = good; mediation = bad, or steering people = bad; and that somehow it's wrong to steer projects.”(History, 2011)

A short example is revealing of this effect. As part of the 2012 Cultural Olympiad, there was a youth-led exhibition project with world cultures collections, where the intention was for the young people to have (total) control: they were presented with a ‘blank canvas’ and the opportunity to direct every aspect of the project. For the museum, this project was the most democratic (in their terms) form of co-production they had ever attempted⁶⁷. Over the course of the project, however, staff often spoke amongst themselves and in back offices about their concerns over some of the young people’s choices, for example in terms of design and interpretation, and certain prejudices and assumptions they displayed. However, staff did not always feel able to challenge the young people at the time as they worried that intervening would diminish the young people’s experience of participation and their ability to exercise choice. In this project, the role of facilitator was imagined as enabling the young people to achieve their decisions, whatever they chose. However, this particular co-production was replete with ethical considerations linked to the use of world cultures collections: by not taking an ethical stand or encouraging debate, the museum was effectively divesting itself of its responsibilities (see Morse et al., 2013). The wider question that emerges from this example is on what basis participation is imagined – are participants involved because they have experiential knowledge, because they are able to communicate best to the audience, or because they can affect institutional change – in each case the museum ‘intervening’ may be more or less appropriate. Here instead, the focus on choiceandcontrol in this top-down form of ‘democratic’ project (for a group of

⁶⁷ I have spoken in Chapter 5 about how the word ‘co-production’ could enable more in terms of the organisation relinquishing control.

young people, who in fact, had no stake in these particular collections) led to misrecognition of the terms of participation and of the role of the museum as facilitator. Another feature of CE projects at TWAM was that they tended to involve participants as individuals rather than collectives, a view which itself can be linked to the individualistic model of consumer choice (Mcdowell, 2004). This could also create unintended gaps between intentions and outcomes.

Across TWAM, as I observed it, the discourse of choice and control had the particular effect of actually closing down opportunities for other ways of thinking about CE. By focusing narrowly on choice and control, decision-making had become an end in itself. But satisfying participants with 'choice' may not be the same thing as providing opportunities for fulfilling engagement. Overall these were often narrow procedural conceptions of decisions (for example, choice of objects and their place in a display) firmly set within institutional frameworks; since the system want products, the key for engagement is the decision that gets to it. While they are presented as open choices (often with the best intentions of being open), in effect the choice becomes about deciding between A and B (and one rare occasions, C and D). In this sense decisions are not open, since the institution does not want to change (see Chapter 1). Other critical scholars have discussed this in terms of the 'inequality of choice' since institutions rarely provide participants with the resources to make informed decision (Vidler and Clarke, 2005). Such models of engagement also assume a knowledgeable and self-directing subject, capable of easily identifying and articulating wants as choices that can be translated into the language of the institution (see also Clarke et al., 2007; Clarke, 2007). The whole focus is on the act of decision-making as an act of closure, and little attention is paid to the wider processes that support engagement. I wish to suggest instead that in community engagement, the means (including the encounter between the museum and participants) are in fact much more important than the ends (the decision). So it is about *how* decisions are made, not only *who* makes them. This has implications for how we think about CE, co-production and collaboration, and draws our attention to relationships and atmospheres, as well as calling for approaches where decision-making is not the single, totemic goal but is part of co-creating knowledges in the museum. The act of decision-making suggests a frame that emphasises closure that is counter-intuitive to CE and this is part of what I am challenging.

By suggesting that decision-making should not be the main or only focus of participation I am cautious of how my argument may be interpreted. There is a certain difficulty in

critiquing ideas that are embedded in positive discourse as well as linked to activism and empowerment. I am *not* arguing here that participants making decisions and having control is unimportant. It does still matter, significantly. However, the clear point I made upfront in the introduction to the thesis, was that participation (as it is mainly understood and how it is managed at TWAM) is inherently limited as it operates within the boundaries of the museum. Far from saying there is no politics to be done in CE, I am suggesting that a focus on the *how* of decision-making can tell us more about community engagement. This brings our attention to the intimate scale of museum encounters, and to a close consideration of the various practices community engagement workers employ when 'doing' CE, as an emergent and contingent practice. In next chapters I discuss this proposition through empirical analysis of CE in practice.

6.5.3. Outreach's perspectives

To present the critique of the discourse of choice and control, I am inspired by the practice (and pragmatism) of the Outreach Team. While Outreach would also sometimes talk about 'managing expectations', in their practice this was not thought of in terms of risk or certainty, but rather as part of a practice of exchange. Central to their practice was to raise people's expectations since one of the aims of outreach work is to encourage those excluded to think of museums as places where they belong and that they can make demands of. Projects then develop through dialogue, which may include having to say 'no' to certain ideas, but this is all part of the process of co-production rather than a sign a closure: "I'm not saying that everything goes, because we have our own restrictions and boundaries of things that we can do. But certainly we work together on that" (Outreach, 2013). The key issue for Outreach was their past experiences of project where choice and control was promised but later rescinded:

"You can't promise to a group that they are going to have their art displayed and then it's not displayed. That's a very good example of not being clear at the beginning – saying they could have a space and then they couldn't, or [curators] changing their mind. You never promise anything you can't deliver. Sometimes it's not promises, it's the wording that they use, it's not clear enough or it's not repeated" (Outreach, 2013).

Most importantly, this clear and honest dialogue takes place on the much more intimate scale of the encounter and the conversation where nuance becomes not just rhetorical but part of a collaborative and dynamic way of working.

For Outreach, it was clear that community decision-making also mattered, and needed to be supported. As one staff explained:

“A blank canvas is the cruellest thing. If you go to communities with a blank page they won’t trust you because they will see it as if the museum is hiding its agenda – they need something for communities to hammer down and rebuild together” (Outreach, 2012)

This notion of hammering down and rebuilding is a more equalising and productive form of collaboration through a series of joint decisions, rather than a single, totemic one. Hammering down and rebuilding also helps to move beyond the contributory form of the museum – where decisions are in fact all about contribution within the museum’s norms and agendas –and towards a community-focused form of CE. In the following half of this thesis I will discuss Outreach’s practice of CE in much fuller detail; the point here is to frame my critique of the discourse of choiceandcontrol in museums.

6.6. Site 3: Skills for Community engagement

The two first sites of tensions I have presented here – the different views of knowledge and a risk management approach to CE – are entangled with a third: across the museum there are different understandings of the skills required to ‘do’ community engagement.

6.6.1. Skill or disposition?

I have described how the Outreach Team felt the organisation did not understand or recognise their practice, and as such it was undervalued. During the ethnography, I observed two equally problematic tendencies that either marginalise or denigrate the skills of CE. One tendency has been to assert that only certain people within the organisation can work with communities. Here CE practice is an abstract set of ‘specific skills’ that only the select few possess: “let’s face it some people are people people, and some people aren’t”; “it’s about having that expertise in talking to people which you build up and some people will never ever be very good at it”. Both these quotes are by managers, but these views were also echoed in the curatorial/collection teams. Here CE practice is framed as a personal disposition which limits the possibilities for mainstreaming engagement and training other parts of the organisation. A second tendency counters this by arguing that it is a straightforward task that anyone in the organisation can do, which belies some of the subtlety of high quality engagement practice, and underplays the knowledge required to do

so in a meaningful way. Both tendencies have for effect the devaluing of CE through its attribution as unskilled work.

These two tendencies derive from a number of misunderstandings of CE practice (some of which I have described above), and more precisely, a lack of recognition of the diversity of practices that *sustain* community engagement encounters and relationships. In particular, Outreach spoke of the lack of understanding of the attitudes and approaches required to develop meaningful relationships with communities. “It’s like with the Yemeni community⁶⁸” became shorthand to describe this misapprehension, declaimed through exasperated laughter in back offices, and through accounts that would go something like this:

There is a meeting about a touring exhibition from one of the Nationals, and some of the budget is allocated to outreach work. In the meeting a manager exclaims “how can we get the Yemeni community involved with this?” and turns expectantly to the Assistant Outreach Officer:

“Just run off some digital stories with the Yemeni community” and I remember saying to my line manager, I don’t understand what they want us to do? There isn’t a Yemeni community sitting in a room waiting for me to say ‘let’s do some digital stories!’” (Outreach, 2012)

‘Proggy mats⁶⁹’ provides another such shorthand, this time to do with the implied (low) quality and expectation for CE projects:

“The curatorial staff here don’t understand what my job is and they expect me to be going out and doing stuff with the communities that they want to work with. There was an exhibition meeting and they asked us: ‘Would one of your groups fancy doing a proggy mat?’ and I was thinking I can’t just magic up a group that wants to do a proggy mat, and then sit and do a proggy mat – that takes ages! But the curatorial team just sit there and say ‘we’ll just get outreach to do that – there’s communities just waiting to sit and do a proggy mat!’ It’s not really helping the community, it’s helping the museum.” (Outreach, 2012)

This (mis)perception of communities ‘waiting in a room to be engaged’ was felt as a significant barrier for Outreach as it negates the practices required to build up relationships and bespoke projects with communities, especially the requirements of time. However for Outreach, a key element of their practice was the slow and careful work of building up and sustaining relationships with groups (see Chapters 7 and 8). Again, this quote reveals a

⁶⁸ South Shields has been home to a large Yemeni British community since the 1890s, however it remains under-represented in the museum audience and collection.

⁶⁹ ‘Proggy’ is a North East of England term to describe rag rugs.

contributory approach to CE, 'helping the museum'. Furthermore, the only professional skill recognised here is the skill of productivity, of producing an output, the proggy mat, which is seen as straightforward, easy even. As one staff member commented, Outreach 'have a reputation for doing craft projects', but implied in this short phrase is a form of creative labour that is of lesser value than, for instance, the creative work of curating an exhibition.

There were other misconceptions of CE work that would create more immediate, practical barriers. During the time of the research, there were changes to the internal travel expenses policy, and Outreach stood to lose their monthly travel passes, the argument was that it was unfair that only one small group of staff should have their travel paid for, and the implication being that this was also subsidising their personal travel outside of work. For months the team kept records of their journeys to show how essential these travel passes were for them to do their job (and also proving how a system of reimbursing single journeys could never be cost-effective). While this is a very specific example of bureaucracy, it does reveal something more of the lack of understanding of the work of CE, and lower value that is afforded to work outside of the institution.

Another misunderstanding, and an area of significant debate, was a view of CE work as 'social work'. This would be framed with concern or reproach, that this practice was moving away from the core principles of museum work, for example, work with collections. In the next chapters I will be 'getting under the skin' of CE practice by examining the work of the Outreach team and return to challenge these misapprehensions.

6.6.2. Barriers to other staff involvement

Through my own research I was also interested in finding out what prevented other staff from 'doing' CE as part of their own work. Of course there were the issues of time and capacity within already heavy workloads, but what also became clear was that many staff did not feel confident that they had the skills to do CE work, or the confidence to work with communities. At one level, this lack of confidence can be related to the fear of redundancy that I have described above, as well as the anxiety that comes with having to deal with uncertainty, and the 'informality' of engagement work:

"I was just talking to someone in Learning and they said 'I could never do outreach'. I guess it's a way of working that is completely different whereas Learning is very structured [and] the informality of outreach is likely to put them off. You don't

know what's going to happen, whether it could just kick off or whatever".
(Outreach, 2012)

On another level, as revealed in this quote, there is also a lack of confidence in dealing with people, especially 'hard to reach' groups. Again, we are returned to a framing of CE as 'managing expectations' and managing risk.

During a participatory workshop with the Outreach Team we discussed these findings, and the need to break down and articulate the skills for CE was clear. In response to the two tendencies observed in the museum, for Outreach their practice was in fact situated somewhere in between: it was set of skills *and* also an attitude and approach. It was recognised that overall, they had not communicated the work of outreach and there was a pressing need to give a language to these skill sets, and identify an approach to organisational 'training'.

In the next two chapters 7 and 8, I critically reflect on the work of the Outreach Team to generate a deep and nuanced understanding of CE practice and the *abilities* for CE work – thus addressing the third dimension of my framework of account-abilities (see Chapter 1)

PART 3: REVISITING THE CONDITIONS OF POSSIBILITY

6.7. Passage points, tactics and adjustments

Throughout this chapter, I have explored the structures and cultures of organisation and three particular sites of tension that are all experienced as solid barriers by staff attempting CE work. And yet, as I observed through my ethnography, these barriers are continuously negotiated, accommodated and resisted by Outreach staff. This purposeful work is important to highlight as it enables me to present the politics of practice that I claim as the site for change in museums. In this final section I consider a few examples, reflecting the barriers presented previously.

There were daily examples of Outreach negotiating the 'bolt-on' forms of engagement attached to exhibitions by introducing creative approaches. This creative negotiation was essential to shift curatorial-led projects towards more bespoke projects. These projects would use the collections and exhibitions as inspiration, but allow for greater exploration of different ways of knowing, such as in the example of the poetry work around the world cultures galleries earlier. This would include negotiating narrow approaches to CE – for

example projects based on specific cultural or ethnic identity, and instead allowing participants to define the terms of their own involvement based on how their experiences and/or interests resonated with the objects.

Outreach would also consistently resist a deficit (or disciplinary) model of engagement by focusing on participant's capacities:

“We are building on people's skills that they already have. We aren't looking at the deficiencies, their needs, or what they don't know - we are looking at things that they do know. (...) They have a lot of that already in them, they have it in their head, their emotions. They don't need to feel intimidated. We want to meet people in a place where we are not educating them. We're doing something together where we are learning together.” (Outreach, 2013).

For Outreach, a central element of practice was to enable responsive projects: “That is the nature of the work we do – it is about negotiation, it's about being positive, is about being flexible.” (Outreach, 2012). Indeed, this work of negotiation was both external with communities and internal within their institutions.

For example, the team would always seek out opportunities to include participants' work in the main displays of exhibitions. This would involve convincing curators, negotiating their presumptions of risk and quality control, and navigating the internal politics of the institution. I witnessed this strategic labour of internal advocacy most every day. One member of staff described how their work was about a form of internal translation, attending to curators' or management's concerns and priorities first in how they presented their arguments for CE.

To take another example: during the time of the research, there was an Outreach project working with a photography group from a mental health service. Inspired by an exhibition about local theatres, the group visited and photographed five of these theatres. Such was the quality of the work, and the group's engagement, that Outreach felt that it should be framed and displayed, and its value as a social record should be recognised. However, convincing the curator to include the photographs in the exhibition was not straightforward; the compromise was for the group to select a few photographs for digital display on a screen in the exhibition. The Outreach worker would push this further. After weeks of conversations, the curator would be convinced to accession the photographs, for which the group also became involved in the process. It should be reminded that community work is only rarely displayed, and is nearly never accessioned. While these acts

of negotiation may seem mundane or anodyne, the shifts they can achieve, through setting precedent or through changing staff attitudes, are significant. Talking about CE and its challenges within the institution and for individuals, for example to expertise or notions of quality, was in fact part of 'doing' CE.

From my own observations and conversations with staff, I could see Outreach staff having an ambivalent relationship to institution – they find themselves working 'for' and 'against' their institution (see Kirton et al., 2007; Ahmed, 2012). They refer to the museum mission statement while at the same time upholding it for different aims (see Chapter 5). They navigate and negotiate institutional norms and values, seeking opportunities to quietly disrupt them: "It's been about thinking about how things are working, and how I can do things, and then how the system here works" (Outreach, 2012). One staff described their role to me as 'being a bit sneaky', as this quote hints at:

"You've just got to keep asking the question until the point where you're irritating them. Because you're calling them everyday day, 'what's happened with this? (...) What can I do to help? What is the next procedure?' You've got to keep reminding them and it's like you're the bottom of the pile because you've got no money behind you and you're the outreach community thing" (Outreach, 2012)

Here the Outreach worker is operating within the organisational (procedural) rules, whilst also acting as an irritant, coaxing internal collaboration towards CE work. There were also 'technical' ways to accommodate bureaucratic cultures: for example, alongside 'tick boxes' and spreadsheets of numbers, Outreach would also collect more creative evaluation, in the form of qualitative feedback or even poetry.

This purposeful work can be seen as the work of searching for and creating 'passage points' within solidified institutional structures: creating opportunities for participants to express themselves creatively by tapping into their capabilities and creating opportunities for community work to be seen and heard in the public spaces of the museum. Here I draw on the work of Michel de Certeau, specifically his account of tactics and strategy, which theorizes the relationships between the structural elements of cultures and the practices that enact and modify them (de Certeau, 1984; for a discussion see also Ahearne, 1995; Buchanan, 2000; Highmore, 2002). One example discussed by de Certeau, and well-rehearsed for geographers, is walking the city. The city's layout, official maps, 'no entry' signs and driving rules are strategies created by government and institutions. The ways in which an individual walks through the city – taking shortcuts, jumping fences, aimlessly wandering – are tactics. While an individual can't physically reorganise the city, she can

adapt it to her needs by choosing how to move through it. There is a certain vividness that pertains to these ideas of ‘strategies’ and ‘tactics’ when thinking about TWAM, and the world of museums more generally. We can see the work of the Outreach team in terms of tactics in a field of practical operations, alongside the stubborn and purposeful work of internal advocacy towards changing individual and institutional attitudes, fear and reluctance.

Observing this daily work from the Outreach team, I began to think of their tactical practice in terms of ‘adjustments’; Outreach workers adjust their institutional arrangements to enable them to work for their objectives and those of communities.

Here, the politics of practice works from within the logics of the museum, and change (political, institutional, social) comes through the work of ‘adjustments’ (Bennett, 1992, 2007; Graham, 2012). I suggest that this purposeful practice of making ‘adjustments’ draws on *and* alters existing structures. Staff align with the institution so as to enable their practice to work more effectively within and against institutional norms and values. As such the politics of such a practice cannot be understood as simply oppositional to present conditions. While it works within the logics of institution, it also opens up a space for political possibilities by modifying its conditions, and the conditions of possibility for community engagement. By suggesting the idea of adjustments, my aim is a pragmatic one rather than a utopian proposal for participatory practice. At the same time my aim is to give these adjustments strength as changes, and focus the role of individual agency and creativity in driving change. Much of the literature on organisational change focuses on whole-systems change and the role of leadership (Nadler and Tushman, 1994). Returning to these ideas in the conclusion to this thesis, I want to consider how incremental, small-steps approaches can provide new models for thinking about change in museums.

6.8. Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the structural and cultural barriers to CE. While the research refers specifically to TWAM, it is very likely that these barriers will also affect other museum institutions – indeed, over the period of my research I often heard these discussed at museum conferences and events. Additionally, several of the findings here echo the *Whose Cake?* report (see Chapter 3). These areas will need to be addressed as part of the ‘Our Museum’ programme and in Chapter 10 I outline some recommendations for TWAM. .

The second part of this chapter presented three sites of tension where CE practice is negotiated: around issues of knowledge, expertise and authority; around the discourse of choice and control; and around the abilities required to do CE work. I suggest that these are the three key areas for developing and reframing CE practice in museums which I address in the rest of this thesis.

In the third part of this chapter, I suggested that these negotiations work through adjustments, through the purposive work of looking for and creating 'passage points' through institutional barriers. Faced with black lines and brick walls, staff use a variety of tactics to influence institutional arrangements and staff attitudes and in order to pursue their objectives and those of communities. These adjustments occur in the everyday and in the micro-level of staff decisions and acts in order to subvert, even if only for a brief moment, the authoritative powers of the museum institution. This is where I situate the politics of practice for CE.

In the next two chapters I identify how Outreach have developed their practice over the last few years: how they have resisted the 'conveyor belt' of projects, the 'scatter gun approach' to CE, and the contributory model of the museum. By focusing on the micro-politics of practice, I will show how these adjustments have accumulated into new practices of CE, both in the museum and in local communities. In particular, I will outline the infrastructures that Outreach staff create to support and sustain community engagement within their resistant institutions. Chapter 7 describes the work of the team with health and social care service users, and Chapter 8 describes the processes that took place around a community exhibition in the West End of Newcastle. These two areas represent what Outreach term their 'new ways of working' and outline their ambitions for CE.

Chapter 7. Community Engagement as Care

7.1. Introduction

In the next two chapters I want to draw a closer focus on the work of the Outreach Team. One member of the Outreach Team commented early on during my research: “why do community engagement? There are reasons at the organisational level, the team level ... sometimes it is the personal level that is the most interesting and important, but there is no room for that”. The next two chapters (7 and 8) make room to talk about how Outreach negotiate and renew their professional roles. While in previous chapters I have discussed drivers, definitions, structures and cultures of organisation that affect CE, my focus in these next chapters is on *what happens* in CE practice. This enables me to examine the skills and knowledge – the *abilities* – for CE.

As I highlighted in Chapter 6, a key site of tension is the misconception of the abilities for CE. Two equally problematic tendencies were noted: CE is possible because of either a natural *disposition* that only certain people have, and therefore only certain people can do, or it is a series of straightforward *tasks* that anyone can learn and undertake. Both have for effect the devaluing of CE through its attribution as unskilled work. How, then, might we write about CE as a practice?

In this chapter and the following on I examine the two new models of working of the Outreach team: in this chapter, the partnership work of the team with health and social care services; and in Chapter 8, the work of the team with the local communities of the West End. I want to extend the notion of abilities to write about CE practice through two new lenses: community engagement as a practice of *care* (this chapter) and community engagement as *craft* (chapter 8). My interest in drawing out first care, then craft, is linked to my concern for a politics of practice. My intention is to acknowledge the often overlooked and unspoken yet rich empirics of CE workers, their relationships, their routines, and the quirks and sensitivities of their practice. While TWA staff did not always use the language commonly associated with care, the principles of their existing practice and the everyday relations of support they develop are unmistakable.

The analysis of CE as care is in two parts. I begin by introducing the geographical literature on care to situate my discussion. I then briefly summarise the current literature on museums and wellbeing. Indeed, the Outreach projects described in this chapter were framed in terms of wellbeing, and the museum professionals' practices of care I describe here are aimed at enhancing the general sense of wellbeing of participants.

I then explore 'what happens' in CE by offering a set of thickly descriptive ethnographic vignettes of different outreach sessions I attended as a participant observer. The second vignette is based on a participatory workshop with Outreach staff where we discussed their practice. Through these vignettes I explore the *affective, relational, material* and *experiential* aspects of engagement work and how they create the conditions for creative and positive experiences for participants. As a caring practice, CE work must therefore be understood as *both* a skill and a disposition. Referring back to the literature, I will show how CE activities can be seen as creating spaces of care in the museum, and how CE work can be re-articulated as care work. An argument I wish to put forward in this chapter is to present practices of care as fundamental to participatory museum projects. As such, care provides an avenue forward to the problematic discourse of choice and control explored in Chapter 6.

In the second part of the chapter, I consider the *practical* dimensions of caring work by describing how the Outreach Team has re-orientated its work towards building long-term partnerships with health and social care services. I argue that this organisational-practical dimension is important to consider as part of the infrastructures that staff create to enable their care-full practice within museum institutions.

Finally, in the conclusion of this chapter, I suggest why it is important to recognise CE as care work, with the explicit aim of giving it value within the structures and cultures of the museum.

PART I: THE RELATIONAL, AFFECTIVE, MATERIAL AND EXPERIENTIAL DIMENSIONS OF CE AS CARE WORK

As Hooper-Greenhill stated in the early 1990s, echoing Weil's (1999) famous statement, "the balance of power in shifting in museums from those who care for objects to include, and often prioritise, those who care for people" (1994, p.1; see also Munro, 2013).

Museums have long been seen as places that care for collections, an idea of care which is enshrined in the duties of custodianship and stewardship⁷⁰. And yet, discussions of how *people* are cared for in museums has largely been absent from museological theory. In this section I outline the literature on care, drawing on the discipline of geography (see Chapter 1). My discussion focuses on the practices of ‘doing’ care, in order to explore how the framework of care can help us to talk about CE and articulate the abilities (skills and dispositions) required for this work of caring for people in museums.

7.2. Geographies of care

There is a rich body of literature that has grown up around care and caring in geography. Early work in this vein can be found within medical and health geographies, which have tended to examine these ideas through the frame of ‘therapeutic landscapes’ (after Gesler, 1992). As a method, the therapeutic landscape approach calls for close attention to the healing qualities of space, and how they relate to the groups and individuals using them. Quite quickly, this work moved out of ‘traditional’ healthcare settings to focus its attention on the everyday spaces which facilitate care – spaces which are unusual yet ordinary – for example, cafés (Warner et al., 2013), public parks (Laws, 2009), allotments and community gardens (Milligan et al., 2004; Parr, 2007), homeless shelters (Johnsen et al., 2005, 2006), community drop-in centres (Conradson, 2003b) and artistic projects (Parr, 2008). This focus on the everydayness of spaces of care opens up the possibility to consider museums as part of these ‘landscapes of care’⁷¹.

A key feature of my own research has been the multiplicity of sites of engagement (see Chapter 3). Outreach activities take places in different museum venues, in community spaces, and even across the city. As such, my focus is less about understanding the specific, variant spatial characteristics that create spaces of care (for example, the layout of a room, see Parr, 2000; or Conradson, 2003b); however, I will highlight the importance of

⁷⁰ Indeed the word ‘curator’ comes from the Latin ‘curare’, meaning to care for. Here the idea of care is linked to professional competences of conservation and preservation, within notions of ‘public interest’ and holding objects in trust for future generations. I return to these ideas in Chapter 8.

⁷¹ While ‘therapeutic landscape’ has held stronger connections to natural environment, ‘landscapes of care’ encompasses “the institutional, the domestic, the familial, the community, the public, the voluntary and the private as well as transitions within and between them” (Milligan and Wiles, 2010, p.738)

materialities in a more generalised way. My main focus is on the 'micro-landscapes of care' (Milligan and Wiles, 2010) and the work practices within: in short, how care is facilitated within engagement sessions.

7.2.1. Caring institutions

A second trend in research has been an interest in the caring that is done within institutions, in particular, state institutions, such as institutions of healthcare. Care is here understood within a model of the democratic welfare state and as the care that is provided by the state for its citizens, in particular, the provision for marginalized citizens. In much of this research, state institutions are seen as faceless, hierarchical, bureaucratic and prone to failures of care. Yet authors such as Conradson (2003a; b) and Askew (2009) have refuted this, and have argued for further empirical investigation of the formations that care takes within a range of institutions (see also Darling, 2011). In particular, Askew (2009, p.655) calls for research to investigate care as part of the ordinary and everyday performances as part of "peopled and practised state institutions", for example, in her own research on the mundane acts of human service providers. Tronto (2010) has argued that such investigation can lead to the formation of 'ethical' institutions, and that individuals may use the principles of caring as a means of resisting a wider, 'uncaring' institutional culture.

Ealasaid Munro has developed on these geographical perspectives to argue for a reconsideration of the museum as a space of care (Munro, 2013). Specifically, she does so by foregrounding the relationships that are forged within CE sessions. Working through the example of an intercultural museum project, Munro examines the extent to which these relationships can be considered caring relationships. Drawing on (and quoting) Conradson's work, Munro frames care in museums more broadly as "an *ethics of encounter*, or a *set of practices* which shape human geographies beyond the familiar sites of care provision" (Conradson, 2003a, p.451, my emphasis). In a similar manner, but from a sociological/social work perspective, Lois H. Silverman (2010) suggests that the whole museum experience can be examined through a relationship-centred approach.

My discussion of the Outreach work at TWAM is animated by a similar set of concerns: I am interested in how spaces of care emerge and proceed from the relationships developed within engagement sessions. Furthermore, I am interested in how the Outreach Team is supporting other caring institutions through its partnerships with health and social care

organisations. In the final part of this thesis (Chapters 9 and 10) I will return to the broader implications and potential of viewing museums as caring institutions.

7.2.2. Care and caring work

Care is usually seen as it applies to children receiving parental care, and also applies to the elderly and disabled in the context of professional (health)care. This view of care is about direct forms of care involved in supporting another person who is no longer able to manage alone (including, for example, physical tasks such as bathing, feeding, or shopping). Outside of the institutional healthcare context, the literature focuses on the private realm of the homespace and women's work. Many scholars have discussed the strong traditional links between femininity and care, whereby the responsibility for care falls disproportionately on women, especially mothers (see Sevenhuijsen, 1998). Many theorists, including feminist geographers, have highlighted how women's care work is essentialized through assumptions of women's natural ability to care (Rose, 1993). The normalisation of the gendering of care has for effect the obscuring women's caring work, whether in the homespace or within institutional settings, where it is frequently undervalued and underpaid (Halford and Leonard, 2006). Munro's (2013, 2014) research on museums alerts us to these concerns by highlighting the feminization of CE work and, more broadly, the gendered nature of the museum workforce (see also Schwarzer, 2010). She is clear on this point: "ideas about women's innate ability to care can serve to devalue the hard work that goes into cultivating and maintaining relationships within community engagement settings" (Munro, 2013, p.56)⁷². Re-valuing CE work is my key concern, which I address in the conclusion to this chapter.

The question of what is meant by 'care' has led to much debate. I am very sensitive to the cautionary critiques that argue that the language of care is paternalistic as it tends to place the 'care-receivers' in an alleged passive role (see Oliver and Barnes, 1998 on disability studies, which has called for a shift from care to ideas of independence and personal support). As I discussed in Chapter 6, the Outreach team has resisted such forms of paternalism in terms of the deficit model of CE, and their practice has focused instead on activating and nurturing the capabilities of individuals and communities. As such, my understanding of care supports this critique and takes a *relational* view of care. The

⁷² While issues of gender are salient at TWAM, these were not a focus of the research.

relational view of care includes care that is performed not just in pairs or dyads, but also care that is performed within groups (Laws, 2009) and in networks (Milligan and Wiles, 2010). It shifts the understanding of care from one that is uni-directional (e.g. a carer caring for a patient) to a notion of care that is co-produced through relational actors and actions (Fine and Glendinning, 2005; Milligan et al., 2007; Milligan and Wiles, 2010)⁷³. Work in this view addresses the ‘psycho-social relationships’ that constitute care, alongside the material dimensions of the spaces in which these relations take place (Conradson, 2003b).

Another feature of debate, as pointed out by Milligan and Wiles (2010, p.737) surrounds the nature of ‘care work’ and a concern with the physical and affective labours that are constitutive of care (Conradson, 2011). Some carers consider all caring as ‘work’ (whether paid for or not), while others strongly resist such a view, seeing care more as ‘something you just do’ – care as something done out of love, friendship or altruism. Linked to this debate has been the discussion in the geographical literature of the ‘ethics of care’ or ‘care ethics’ (following the works of Noddings, 1984, amongst others). Here, care is not just an activity but is a way of being together and relating to each other (Popke, 2006; Lawson, 2007; McEwan and Goodman, 2010). Feminist geographers and many other scholars have explored how such an ethics can connect morality, responsibility and social justice based on collective/public rather than strictly individual and privatised forms of caring (see Staeheli and Brown, 2003; Lawson, 2007). In this relational view, care involves caring about, caring for, care giving and care receiving; it takes into account the full context of caring. Joan C. Tronto (1993, 1995) describes an ethics of care as attentiveness (being attentive to the needs of others), responsibility (arising from the recognition of meeting these needs), competence (carrying through the intention to provide care), responsiveness (recognising the experience of the care receiver in order to know that care has taken place) and a fifth aspect – solidarity and trust (Tronto, 2013). A care ethics perspective provides a useful guide for developing new forms of museum practices *and* institutions.

Another key contribution of the literature in the geographies of care has been thinking through proximity and distance, both spatially but also in social terms, which Milligan and Wiles (2010) frame as ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about’. Caring *for* is characterised by the performance of caring activities; while the caring *about* is a broader emotional ontology, an investment in another person’s concerns or interests. While in practice caring *for* and *about*

⁷³ As with museum co-production, the extent to which care is co-produced depends on many factors.

are invariably entangled, they are not necessarily co-incident, and do not rely directly on proximity⁷⁴. For example, social proximity is not a necessary condition for caring *about* someone. This consideration is relevant to CE work in museums, where professional relationships are built with numerous ‘unknown’ participants with which staff have no previous personal relations. Caring *about* also links to a wider set of values informed by an ethics of care.

In light of the literature, what I mean when I am talking about care in a museum setting is the following. My understanding of care begins with Conradson’s (2003b, p.508, my emphases) conception of care as “the *proactive interest* of one person in the well-being of another and as the articulation of that interest (or affective stance) in *practical ways*”. In this sense, care is understood as both a disposition *and* a practice; as an empathetic orientation and a material social practice. This dual view of care provides a starting point to investigate the principles of care in CE practice. My understanding of care in museums also re-joins Milligan and Wiles’ (2010, p.737) more succinct definition of care as “the provision of practical and emotional support”. My concern is with the physical and affective labour of care in the labour of CE. Finally, my understanding of care is also informed by an ethics of care, as a broader framework for social interaction, that takes the needs and concerns of others as a basis for decision-making and action (Tronto, 1993). I will use these interlinked ideas to examine the practice of care of the Outreach team at TWAM. In this chapter, my broader aim is to contribute to the geographical literature on care, as well further introduce these concepts into the museum studies literature.

7.3. Museums, health and wellbeing

As was noted in Chapter 4, various social policies have positioned the museum as having the potential to combat social exclusion and improve health and wellbeing. It is important to outline the literature on museums, health and wellbeing as it links to the work of the

⁷⁴ These issues of distance and proximity are particularly pertinent to another piece of research which came out of this thesis which concerned a youth-led exhibition of world cultures collections (Morse et al., 2013). The co-production process was designed to include the voices of (distant) originating communities but this objective was side-lined in favour of the participation of the (proximate) youth. While our paper (co-written with two members of staff) framed this critique in terms of legitimacy it could also have been investigated through the lens of caring relationships and responsibilities of proximity/distance.

TWAM Outreach Team which positions their projects as having a broad aim of focusing on participant's wellbeing.

Numerous practice-based case studies have demonstrated how engagement with museums and art galleries can address health and wellbeing issues, for example, mental health problems, dementia, cancer, and adult learning (see Camic and Chatterjee, 2013 for a recent review). Evidence suggests that such activities can affect ideas of self-worth and identity, and thus a more general sense of wellbeing. There is also a growing body of research that explores the therapeutic benefits of object handling (Chatterjee, 2008; Chatterjee et al., 2009; Ander et al., 2011; Lanceley et al., 2012; Thomson et al., 2012; Chatterjee and Noble, 2013; Paddon et al., 2014). Research in this area has recently developed a conceptual framework for generic wellbeing outcomes for museums (Ander et al., 2011). Most recently, there has been evidence on the impact of general cultural attendance on health and life satisfaction (Clare & O'Connor, 2013; O'Neill, 2010). The research draws on a longer tradition of arts in health research, which includes a growing body of scientific evidence that shows how taking active part in activities like music making, creative writing and visual arts can have a measurable impact on physical and mental wellbeing (for reviews, see Saricoff, 2004; Stuckey and Nobel, 2010; RSPH, 2013). This research in the arts is now well recognised in the literature on cultural impact, and the role of museums in health and wellbeing is emerging in this context. Since 2012, this proposition has been assertively re-instated through the MA's 'Museums Change Lives' manifesto (Museums Association, 2013).

Alongside this have been a small number of influential reports and evaluations that have pointed to the potential of the cultural heritage sector (including museums and art galleries) as partners in public health interventions (Camic and Chatterjee, 2013). New guidance has been published in England to help culture and leisure services (including museums) engage effectively and collaboratively in the health and wellbeing agenda and commissioning (Chief Cultural & Leisure Officers Association, 2014; see also Chapter 4). As I will show in the second part of this chapter, this policy and funding context is influencing the future direction of the Outreach team.

Within this burgeoning literature, there is a limited engagement with the implications in terms of professionalism; in fact, there is no discussion of the skills required for museum professionals to support and undertake this work (Chief Cultural & Leisure Officers

Association, 2014 is one exception which refers to the need for further training). The concern with ‘abilities’ is key to this thesis: in this chapter I want to suggest that the notion of care offers a useful framework to reflect the broad experiences, practices and ambitions of museum staff in relation to CE work and its links to participants’ health and wellbeing.

7.4. Ethnographic poetics

A key claim of the methodology used in this chapter is that ethnographic research which focuses upon micro-details can be useful for exploring the ‘hidden’ or unspoken practices of institutional actors. Instead of discussing the full chronology of a given outreach project, I experiment with an ethnographic poetics inspired by a provocation on museums and access by Helen Graham (2013). In the first vignette, I am mixing registers: my own ethnographic notes are combined with excerpts from case studies written by outreach staff⁷⁵. I suggest these case studies are also *practice* – they evoke ways of knowing through which staff come to understand their work.

The second ethnographic poetics draws on a workshop with the Outreach Team, the third in a series of participatory workshops developed as part of this research⁷⁶. The workshop used storytelling (‘what happens’) to explore with staff their approaches and ways of working with groups, focusing on ‘first steps’ and ‘starting points’. Staff were given time to reflect on a personal story to tell and were encouraged to do some descriptive writing. Staff then shared their story with the rest of the group, which was followed by a phase of collective critical reflection, drawing out certain know-how, skills and approaches behind the stories. The whole workshop was recorded with permission. Here again I experiment

⁷⁵ In the session I presented myself as a researcher but stressed that my research was focused on observing the work of the museum staff, and not the service users. As such, and because of wider ethical concerns linked to research involving vulnerable adults, these accounts do not include the direct voices of participants, nor any details that might otherwise identify participants. Although I draw inferences around the general care experienced by participants, I am careful to avoid extrapolating. Instead, the experiences of care of participants are mediated through the accounts of outreach staff members who have got to know them.

⁷⁶ The focus of this workshop developed out of a previous participatory workshop where we identified the need to breakdown the practice of engagement in museums (see Chapter 6). It was also part of ‘Our Museum’ for which it had two aims: to identify an approach to training (see Chapter 10) and, more specifically, to develop a series of training resources (which so far have included a series of ‘how to’ guides and a film). The workshop was developed and delivered with Helen Graham (Leeds University), and I am grateful to for her permission to use this material here.

with mixing registers by merging ethnographic notes with details from our flipcharts, and recording of our group conversations.

The use of thickly descriptive vignettes aims to allow the caring work of CE workers to come through the details. They open up a conceptual space to examine the care that is located in museums, and more importantly, an opportunity to examine the practices through which care is performed in museums. As such, two lengthy vignettes are presented here in full; rather than interrupting them, the analysis is presented at the end.

7.4.1. Outreach sessions: vignette 1

The first vignettes relate to two projects with Moving Forward, a mental health charity, and a NECA (North East Council on Addictions) project, a drug and alcohol addictions service. Each project had around 8 adult participants, men and women⁷⁷. Each individual was at a different stage of recovery⁷⁸; some individuals have been accessing services for many years, continuously or on and off, while others are recent newcomers. The Moving Forward projects were part the organisation's 'community activities' that service users can join at any time. The NECA project was part of the structured day programmes that participants must attend as part of their court order. All the projects aimed to develop bespoke activities that fitted with the interests and aspirations of participants.

Crossing the Tyne (Moving Forward)

We are visiting the 'Crossing the Tyne' at the museum, an exhibition of the bridges and tunnels that enable passage across the Tyne River. The Outreach Officer is showing us round, but it's not like the usual museum tours, information overload, facts, figures and dates. It is very informal, warm: like she is inviting the group into her home. A place that belongs to them as well. She points out things she finds strange, or amusing, and tells an anecdote about how difficult it was for the curator to fit one of the bridge models into the case.

[...]

Project overview

The participants were interested in the history of the bridges across the Tyne and the old pedestrian Tyne Tunnel in Jarrow/Howdon. They talked about what they would like to visit.

⁷⁷ TWAM does not collect data on ages and the sessions represented a wide age span.

⁷⁸ By recovery, I am referring to individuals' independence and resilience, and their ability to build better lives on their own terms.

Some members of the group did not know each other very well, but were happy to come along and take part in the group activities. They all had a digital camera and took their own photos on the trips. Everyone was really proud of the finished photography display in the museum.

[...]

There is a sense of closeness between some members of this group, but it isn't obvious. Some people are really chatty, but a couple of individuals tend to keep to themselves to themselves. One of them rarely talks to anyone else. Another one of the men often sits a bit further away from everyone when we are at a table, with his head down. But the Assistant Outreach Officer, who knows the participants well now, tells me 'they might not look interested, but actually most of the time they are, I can really tell: acting quite distant is just how they cope'. Maybe this unobvious closeness is more about it being a 'safe' space to be together, whether people are having a good day or a bad day.

[...]

Even though I was there as a researcher (an 'outsider') I was quickly asked to join in, 'Would I be coming to the next outing to the Tyne Tunnel?' I was asked by several participants. Later when I reflected with the Outreach staff about this she explained: "they are treating you in the same way that they themselves want to be treated. It's about making you welcome."

Portraiture (Moving Forward)

Project Overview:

The group were interested in creating their own portraits – looking at their own identity and painting styles. A freelance artist [was hired] to show the group different portrait styles and help them create their own.

[...]

It's clear from this group, there is a sense of camaraderie between them. Something about this project has brought them closer together for a time. The Assistant Outreach Officer tells me: 'Now, they stomp into the museum learning room like they own the place – it's great!'

[...]

"I've enjoyed laughing and joking with the group" (participant feedback)

Jewellery (NECA)

We are meeting at the NECA centre, the Outreach worker, the NECA worker and me. It's not a very 'easy' space: we have to be buzzed in, first at the front door, and then again at the top of the stairs. Obviously there are a lot of safety/confidential measures.

We set up the activity, including MacBooks and other craft materials – this the fifth week of the project. The group are creating jewellery, bags and tee-shirts, using photos they have taken around the city as the design (hence the MacBooks – to alter/manipulate the images).

We have been here for about half an hour now, and still none of the participants have arrived. I'm told it's sometimes difficult, sometimes no one comes. Because the participants

are on project as part of their court order, they haven't chosen to be here, they have to come. Although they decided what activities to do, it is hard to sustain the enthusiasm. Also there is little consistency in the group, as some people join at different times, and others leave half way through.

Eventually two people turn up. They are reluctant and dismissive at first. They don't take off their coats. I also feel like the three of us are crowding them a bit. Eventually though they begin to get back into the project. The Assistant Outreach Officer is encouraging, she reminds each individual what they have been working on; she asks them to tell me more about the pictures they have taken. Slowly the atmosphere relaxes, tentatively. One participant starts to open up as he talks about the photos of graffiti he took around the city. By the end of session we haven't 'produced' anything, or made much 'progress' on the project – but I'm not sure this really matters.

7.4.2. Outreach workshop: vignette 2

The second ethnographic intervention draws on the participatory workshop which aimed to explore with staff the 'know how' of CE – the 'nitty-gritty' as one staff put it. The narratives of staff here are not focused on specific projects, but rather on the things that cut through all their work. The researcher's voice is indicated by the use of italics.

*

You can't just pick up the work of outreach

*

If we want to find a way to help people use these techniques, then we need to find a way to talk about it. I want you to take one thing that you do, and think about how you do it – and try to write it down.

I wrote about when I would go meet a group for the first time. I wouldn't meet people for the first time in the museum, I would go out to them. Showing that you are interested in what they do, where they are, and where they work.

A lot of it is about appearance and body language, and the hidden things I guess. For example in terms of body language: you deliver the greeting and the hand shake that's culturally acceptable. Eye contact ... but it's also in terms of dress: you go to a lot of place where if you wear a suit it's ridiculous. But you have to appear someone who is amenable and accessible and ... somebody who's approachable really, and somebody who can get trusted, all these things.

Sometimes if I'm with somebody who has a Geordie accent,, my Geordie accent tends to come out, I get more twanged...It's not even like a put on thing, it's a kind of instinctual.

If people were to hear that would they say you are being a bit fake? What's the quality that makes it not fake?

You have to be genuine When we start doing outreach work, people can actually see through that, whether you believe in what you are saying or not. To me, if somebody feels comfortable with you, you're not changing who you are, your personality or your beliefs, all you're doing is making that person more comfortable.

*

That sense of: do you get us?

*

I've got subtle things like that. So for example in my first meeting, I would always accept a drink - tea, coffee, especially the first meeting. I guess it's something that they are offering you - and that is one stabilizer isn't it? Something that says you aren't just going to be in and out.

I always like making tea with people - or to go with them where they are making tea because that way you're not waiting in the room like it's formal you get to do all the weather stuff over the tea and the kettle boiling.

Also helping people clean the tea cups

I always acknowledge the existence of the building or the venue... saying 'oh so this is where you are?' or 'have you got another centre somewhere else?' or even just notice something. Or I will say 'it feels warm in here ' or just something like that

*

It's about courtesy, manners and a sensitivity towards how to treat human beings.

*

I personally feel like there is a bit more time now because there is less 'oh you have to do this many projects in a year' and you can spend some more time on doing what I call intro/taster sessions where you just go in, just meet the group, (...), in terms of getting to know people and their interests, and about who they are. And then you come up with ideas and it's their ideas, rather than it's always about an exhibition.

You can prepare something, and you might not use it, but so what? If people end up talking - then they didn't need it, it's just a plan b.

Sometimes ice breaking for two hours, getting to know people and talking about what the museum does

And the banter as well - you always have a bit of banter

*

I think we do an amazing job - we are constantly looking for signs and signifiers and getting a general idea for what the feel is when you get in a room all those things come together in your behaviour responds to that in the way that you think is the best way. You make decisions and you don't even think about it.

*

How to ... meet people for the first time

Meet people in **their own places** and spaces

Accept people's welcome. For example, always accept welcome drinks (teas, coffee).

Take part in the social activities that are taking place in the community centre

This is about meeting people half-way, in their spaces and places, on their terms of welcome.

How to... talk to people

Use tailored language

A bit of banter is important...

Get to know people

Talking *with people*, not at people.

Did you listen until the end of what someone was saying?

How to... dress:

Appearance is important (at first meeting and all sessions)

Don't wear a suit or expensive looking clothes, as this might make people feel uncomfortable.

Informal dress is more appropriate, but avoid short skirts...

Dress up for celebrations!

[our flipcharts]

*

The purpose of presenting these thickly descriptive ethnographic poetics is to provide accounts in which the different components of practice of museum professionals come to the fore. The vignettes deliberately provide little information about the creative activities or museum collections themselves; rather they highlight all the other activities that make up the sessions. The first set of vignettes brings us to consider the environments and atmospheres that are created in engagement projects and their effects on participants; while the staff reflections encourage us to focus on the smaller details of practice: things said, clothes worn, cups of tea shared, ways of listening and hearing. Taken side by side, these vignettes focus our attention on tracing connections: what relations, materialities

and practices are required to enable and sustain the emergence of such spaces of engagement?

I suggest that these connections can be made through the idea of care. The Outreach team define the purpose of their work as ‘setting the condition for creative ways of working with people who may have never thought about museums as places they belong in, or could contribute to, or could offer them anything that could benefit their lives’ (see Chapter 5). In the next sections I analyse the vignettes to examine how staff create these ‘conditions of possibility’ for CE, which, I argue, proceed from a set of caring practices that are relational, affective, material and experiential. Returning to the framework of care outlined above, I consider what care looks like in terms of museum professionals’ practice.

7.5. Inclusive, welcoming and safe spaces

Many of the participants across the Outreach projects are often socially isolated and have very low self-esteem. This can leave people feeling very apprehensive about entering new environments and trying new experiences. Often, participants have not set foot in a museum since a (usually unhappy) school fieldtrip. The first concern of staff is to provide a welcoming, inclusive and safe environment for participants, based on the principles of ‘access’ (see Chapter 4). For Outreach, access goes beyond access as statutory requirements; it extends from a general to a specific sense by mobilizing tailored practices to create inclusive, welcoming and safe environments to different groups (see also Munro, 2013). While all three dimensions are deeply connected (although not necessarily coincident), undoing each enables us to explore the meaning of access as a practice of care.

Creating inclusive spaces is about developing museum programmes that are appropriate and support participation. Outreach frequently work with vulnerable groups who have complex access needs, and must therefore develop environments that are accessible and adaptable to various social, psychological, physical and intellectual needs. This is done through ‘technical’ arrangements (for example, holding the session at the same time every week to establish a routine) but also through a multitude of ordinary caring acts. One way in which the Outreach staff can be seen to create inclusive spaces is by consciously breaking down possible hierarchies, for example, as highlighted in the second vignette, by attending to the ways they dress and the language they use when meeting groups, including ‘banter’. Indeed, as Conradson (2003b) reminds, care can emerge through

humour and play as much as through serious discussion. These can be seen as attempt at blurring roles between ‘facilitator’ and ‘participant’. These attentions are also part staff becoming ‘accessible’ themselves, a term that was used in the workshop conversations (vignette 2): appearing ‘amenable’, ‘approachable’, and as ‘somebody who can get trusted’. In part, this is about developing a sense of familiarity between staff and participants, through small acts such as remembering people’s names, as well as engaging in the activities on a level with participants.

Welcoming spaces is another dimension of CE programmes. In the first vignette with the Moving Forward group, we see one member of the museum staff acting as a welcoming host and attempting to make people feel ‘at home’ in the museum through her very personal tour, her use of humour and anecdotes. These small acts of hospitality are all part of creating spaces which feel friendly and comfortable. Starting sessions with cups of tea and coffee was seen as an important part of this welcome. This would often take up the first half hour of a two hour session, but this was seen as important for participants to settle, for everyone to have informal chats, ‘do all the weather stuff’, until people feel relaxed and comfortable. Staff described this time as an opportunity for them to sense the group dynamics, to pick up on people’s moods and to find out whether people were having a good or a bad day. This would enable staff to be responsive to individuals throughout the sessions; sometimes this could mean scrapping a whole activity plan for something else. As one staff member put it, ‘we are constantly looking for signs and signifiers’ (vignette 2). For Conradson (2003a), the attentiveness to emotional cues is fundamental to the practice of care. Taking and making time mattered to creating welcoming environments for often apprehensive participants.

Creating safe spaces is another concern of Outreach, and a key practice in participatory work (see Chapter 3). Safe spaces are often defined as spaces where people can be themselves, spaces which are free from judgement and prejudice, and where people can talk freely. As one staff member commented: “we create the right conditions (...) so that we are not in a situation where people are fearful or are made to feel stupid” (Outreach, 2013). Several commentators have noted how museums have the potential to act as safe spaces, as they are nearly always non-stigmatising environment; they are spaces where people can be ‘lifted’ out of their day to day lives (Camic and Chatterjee, 2013; Munro, 2013). At the same, as it has so often been noted, museums are produced through certain rules, codes of conduct and atmospheres (‘don’t touch’, ‘don’t run’) and they remain

intimidating spaces for many. As such, creating safe spaces is a form of work that should not be underestimated. As I previously mentioned, CE activities take place in multiple spaces – including the museum but also behind the scenes, in other venues across the city, in care homes, community centres, and in the partner organisation’s spaces. It becomes clear then that creating inclusive, welcoming and safe spaces is not a ‘one off’; it is a practice that needs to be repeated and re-created with the same amount of care every week. It is required to move across space and time, through its constant re-iteration⁷⁹.

As a continuous practice of care, staff highlighted the importance of ‘first meetings’ with staff and service users. Indeed, vignette 2 (the participatory workshop) recounts the importance of a care-full engagement from the very beginning, and the ordinary acts which express a ‘proactive interest’ (after Conradson, 2003b): telephoning the day before to remind people of meetings, sharing a drink, noticing and commenting on aspects of the building, and mentioning staff’s *own* feeling of comfort in such spaces (‘I will say ‘it feels warm in here⁸⁰’) are all active practices through which staff demonstrate their interest in getting to know these external organisations and their service users. I have previously highlighted the importance of maintaining relationships after projects are finished – for example, letting people know if their story is being used in an exhibition, and inviting them to the opening, as well as through more mundane acts of simply ‘keeping in touch’ (see chapter 5). All the different acts of care described here may seem simple and diffuse, and yet, like Parr et al. (2004, p.406), I argue that they “demonstrate the reality of inclusion”. At the same time, simply performing these actions does not ensure that welcome, inclusion or safety are felt by participants. These acts also need to be part of caring interactions with individuals.

7.6. Caring for individuals

One of the key critiques of the social inclusion agenda in museum has been its tendency to frame ‘community’ as homogenous and stable, where each participant is categorised as a target, or a problem, or an illness, views that are strongly resisted by Outreach (Chapter 6).

⁷⁹ As such these are momentary spaces of care.. However, it is hoped that through iteration, such projects can build up the confidence of service user groups to use museum spaces independently. This was hinted at in the Portraiture vignette with the group that ‘stomped’ into the museum space.

⁸⁰ Feeling warm has a useful double meaning here, which can refer to physical comfort as well as a feeling of social conviviality.

Outreach also recognised that vulnerable groups are not straightforwardly homogenous in terms of individuals' experience of exclusion from social processes and spaces (see Parr, 2000). Staff view participants as people who are experiencing 'some kind of crisis in their life' – they are individuals in different stages of recovery, with different needs, but also, and most importantly, with different interests and aspirations. As such, the aim of CE as a caring interactions is to find out and respond to the needs and interests of individuals.

In each outreach session I attended, staff were constantly demonstrating a caring demeanour, through acts and speech. For example, staff were always asking people 'how are you today?', 'how are you feeling?' In these ways, outreach sessions were as much about talking and listening as they were about the creative or heritage activities. The importance of listening, 'really listening', 'active listening' and 'listening until the end of what someone is saying', were constantly described as a key component of outreach practice. There were also many instances where staff displayed compassion and empathy; or when they rejoiced with an individual who was sharing good news. Staff occasionally referred to some participants as 'demanding', but would nevertheless spend as much time listening to them as others. This form of commitment is significant, especially in relation to the arguments put forwards in Chapter 5 around the notions of institutional commitment. These practices present all the elements of care described by Tronto (1993), namely, attentiveness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness, solidarity and trust.

Conradson (2003b, p.509), suggests that practices of care can be examined through a focus on the social relations within specific spaces and the subjectivities that emerge, or are made possible, within these relational environments. He argues: "we may observe significant changes in subjectivities – our sense of self, who we are and feel able to be – across different spatial settings". Following this lead, Munro (2013, p.56) suggests that the caring spaces in museums are best understood as "those spaces that support the emergence of more positive selves, and encourage the crystallization of these more positive selves". This sense of more positive self is arguably made possible through acceptance, emotional support and encouragement that are consistently displayed by museum staff towards participants. In feedback, several participants referred to their museum experiences as therapeutic, while other spoke of enjoyment, laughter, and having a 'nice time' – all indicating the emergence of more positive subjectivities through engagement with the museum activities. In the second part of the chapter, I will discuss

how Outreach has been evaluating the impact of their work in terms of people's confidence, peer socialising and wellbeing.

Going back to the definition of CE for Outreach (Chapter 5), empowerment is key but its semantics are important: "we don't empower people; people empower themselves to change their lives". An important component of this creative practice is to approach individuals not in terms of their social exclusion, or their deficits, but rather, starting from people's capabilities (Chapter 6). CE activities are about activating these abilities by supporting the development of new interests and the confidence to try creative activities. This is the starting point for care as a basis for action; it also shifts care away from patronising narratives of service users as passive recipients of care, and instead, frames care as supporting service users as active participants in their own wellbeing and personal development. Sometimes this is about recognising that remaining stable is part of someone's wellbeing, and sometimes it is about challenging people to take risks and 'move forward'. There is something else meaningful in the staff use of semantics: the relations of caring demonstrated by staff are not coming from a position of superiority (see Darling, 2011), but rather a more modest claim of enabling the conditions of possibility which support the emergence of more hopeful version of participants. In this way, the practices of staff are based not on a patronising form of helping, but are based in equality and solidarity. Staff framed this in terms of 'having people's best interest at heart' and often spoke of the sensitivities in negotiating this 'best interest'. These care-full reflections can be found in many of their case studies, for example, staff reflecting on whether they might have pushed participants further, and as in the vignette earlier, reflecting that although people may seem disengaged, most of the time they are and the way they are acting is how they cope. What becomes clear is that this practice of care – as the articulation of a proactive interest in someone's wellbeing (after Conradson, 2003b) – is also about a practice of *noticing*, of being attentive to people, and responding in appropriate ways. Here we see again the subtlety of high quality CE work.

7.7. Spaces of sociability

Being attentive to individuals is an affective stance through which staff can also come to understand the social dimensions of care. As one member of the team commented, "the people we are working with, they are disconnected a lot of the time with life, and the community they are living with" (Outreach, 2013). Part of the purpose of outreach as a

group activity is to facilitate spaces of sociability. Indeed, following Conradson (2011, p.454) again, “care holds the possibility [...] of facilitating new ways of being together”. As the first vignettes of the different group sessions show, CE projects facilitate different forms of being together: some projects create over time strong bonds between participants, while others present a sense of ‘closeness’, but not obviously. In projects such as the NECA one, where attendance is compulsory as part of court orders, sustaining enthusiasm and a sense of a cohesive group is particularly difficult.

Many outreach projects are tentative spaces of relatedness where participants’ levels of engagement may vary from session to session, and some days they may be more or less comfortable or isolated within the group. These affective shifts highlight the ways in which participants experience museum engagement in different ways, and the effects that group dynamics can have on an individual’s experience within a session (see Munro, 2013). These shifts in affective atmosphere are negotiated by staff ‘looking for signs and signifiers’ (vignette 2), and being attentive to participants’ changing moods and attitudes.

This also reminds us of the inevitable fragility of caring spaces. Many commentators have cautioned how quickly spaces of care can break down: a negative experience can mean a service user leaves and never returns (Conradson, 2003b). Munro (2013, p.59) has also described the often-hectic nature of museum CE: “disruption in the pattern of care could cause the relationships being cultivated to change course, to regress, or in extreme cases, to fail” (see also Askins and Pain, 2011 on the ‘messiness’ of participatory projects). It is thus important to also consider spaces of care critically, and indeed, critical reflection is part of the practice of Outreach staff. At the level of practice, the spaces of care created in museums engagement sessions do not ‘magically’ end distress or suffering, which are often very present for many participants. People in recovery have better and worse days, and these affect their experiences of CE. Just as staff do, it is important (as researchers) to be attentive to these more tentative spaces of relatedness, and the work and effort they require. Spaces of care in CE programmes are emergent, mobile, fragile yet hopeful. Showing such fragilities and fractures is to highlight the importance of care as a labour, and the continuous need to ‘work at’ these spaces and relations of care. They also require shifting romanticised ideas of ‘success’, and to recognise tentativeness as a positive, and as a place to start.

7.8. Co-producing care

A central and long-standing aspect of Outreach practice is co-design (or co-production): working *with* participants to create bespoke projects that are directed by the interests of the group. As I discussed in chapter 6, outreach staff are resisting tokenistic and extractive versions of CE; instead, their approach is focused on people's interests, and creating the conditions for creative exploration of those interests.

Significantly, projects are not problem or issue-based, for example, a mental health group doing a project about the stigmas associated with mental health, (unless the group decide this is what they want to do). Instead, staff encourage participants to experiment with new activities. However this does not mean that participants' needs or issues are side-lined or ignored. As I described above, emotional support is woven through the engagement programmes through the ordinary caring acts and attentions of staff.

As described in Chapter 5, CE projects use museum collections as inspiration for creative responses, from object photography to portraiture to proggy mat making. The early stages of a project often include using handling boxes, visiting exhibitions and going 'behind the scenes'; then follow taster sessions before deciding together on the creative activity – 'sometimes ice breaking for hours' (vignette 2). As one staff commented, taster sessions are important "because if you ask them what they wanted it would be so cruel, because they don't know what you've got to offer" (Outreach, 2013; see Chapter 6). Key to co-designing projects is an openness and flexibility on behalf of staff to the ideas of participants and making these possible. When this was not possible because of resources or safety issues (both relating to people and museum objects), Outreach would discuss this openly with participants and co-design alternatives. This form of 'managing expectations', anchored in a practice of care, is very different to the risk management described in Chapter 6. Within a framework of care, decision-making is situated in the relationships of care: it is not always central, but rather it is part of wider practices that support the emergence of more positive selves and facilitate more positive ways of being together. In this frame, decision-making is about self-actualisation within a group; as one staff member put it: "it is about people valuing themselves and knowing that they are valued by others" (Outreach, 2012).

The problems arise, however, when care gets dropped, as it was in the infamous brass plaques story (see Chapter 5). What became clear in my own engagement with Outreach's

work was that 'co-production' was in fact meaningless outside of caring relations. Sharing authority (which is often positioned as the central aim of co-production) needs to be accompanied by an emotional and affective stance for it to be truly shared. On its own it can actually end up being cold or cruel, and even disempowering.

In fact, a more pertinent analysis of these empirics is to consider the ways in which care itself is *co-produced*. The literature on care draws our attention this way. In this context, the significance of the staff's reflection to me in the first vignette, 'they are treating you in the same way that they themselves want to be treated' is powerfully revealed. This shows participants as active co-producers of their own care, showing us (myself and the museum) what is *actually* important by extending their own acceptance, generosity and support. Through the collection of ordinary, thoughtful and reciprocated acts, we had perhaps arrived at a sense of 'you get us' and 'we get you'. Recognising these correspondences I suggest is key to better understanding the different ways in which participants engage.

7.9. The materialities of care

Across the multiple spaces of engagement, another element that became apparent over the course of the research was the importance of the materialities supporting care; in particular, the materialities that make up the creative experience of participants. Askin and Pain (2011) have argued for the need to pay attention to the 'geographies of matter' within participatory projects. The 'specificity' of museum care is that it is done through creative engagement with collections and creative response. In CE programmes, museum objects are important but not intrinsically; rather they are important in the ways which they enable connections between people, ideas, and identities. Projects encourage these connections through a focus on emotions, experiential knowledge and creative response (see Chapter 6). At the centre of CE projects there are museum objects but also digital cameras, pens and paints, Macbooks, ceramics, beads, photo albums, paintbrushes, canvases (and I have already mentioned the cups of tea). Across the different projects it became clear to me that all these mundane materials were important in the process of creation, and were also central for facilitating mobile spaces of care.

As I mentioned above, while projects are co-designed as a group, sessions take the shape of group activities but with individual creative endeavours: for example, each participant takes their own photographs to make their own photo albums. As I noticed time and again,

the productive acts of creating and making were important for participants to access their own sense of potential: 'I never knew I could do this' was a phrase often repeated in feedback. Doing, holding and making came together as the elements of participation which connected to people's care (see also Chatterjee, 2008). This practice shifts away from the distal forms of engagement in museums (Hetherington, 2003), or the focus on personal storytelling in curatorial projects, to more haptic, embodied and experimental engagements with museums.

The emergence of spaces of care are woven into the creative materialities of the projects – the photographs, the portraits, the jewellery – and their association with a personal sense of achievement and sense of pride. Their influence could, over time, become transformative, as many of the case studies reveal: for example, a participant creating a digital story about her personal journey of recovery; or a person gaining employment after a photography project helped him develop confidence to feel able to return to the workplace. For many others, the influence was more modest, for example creating momentary spaces that lift someone's mood (see Conradson, 2003b). This more modest capacity becomes significant when viewed in relation to the aims of becoming or remaining stable which are important to individuals in recovery. The routine creative engagements with the museum, once a week, are also significant in their function as a point of reference for participants, or as an incentive/opportunity to get out of the house.

The materialities of CE also support social interactions, in a way that extended relational forms of care. In many instances, 'making' enabled conversations, interaction and connections (see Askins and Pain, 2011) – for example, a participant offering advice or showing how it is done, and another participant accepting this help. Again, the process of noticing these tentative interactions is important, since for many participants in these vulnerable groups, feeling positive and comfortable in peer socialising or accepting help are key attitudes that demonstrate the emergence of more positive selves.

While in all these sections I have focused on the process as central element of CE as a practice of care, the sense of achievement and pride in creating something are also important – although arguably, these materialities can only *become important* if supported by a caring process (see section above). For staff, it was crucial that the pieces created were displayed, either in the museum or in the partner organisation spaces, and projects

always closed with a celebration event. Again, these are important elements of an affective stance of care, which is about celebrating achievements – and dressing up for the occasion.

7.10. Experiential dimensions of care

The previous analysis has shown how CE programmes proceed and emerge from a set of caring practices that are relational and affective. A final dimension to consider is the experiential dimension of care. By experiential I mean to refer to the ways in which practices are entangled with the personal identities, beliefs, values and life experiences of staff *as care-givers* (see Larner and Butler, 2007). The care expressed in the ethnographic accounts and actions is an already existing and common practice which is part of staff's wider 'ecologies of practice' (Chapter 3).

Within the team, the background of staff is mixed, including community arts, youth and community work; as such, their concerns with participation draws upon a longer tradition focused on empowerment (see Chapter 5). Staff also continuously pursue opportunities for a broad range of training opportunities (e.g. dementia training, emotional resilience training, dealing with challenging behaviour, and work shadowing care/social workers) which are often delivered by external organisations, rather than having solely a museum focus. These approaches all influence the way staff understand and develop their practice.

The experiential nature of CE also links to a wider ethics of care displayed by staff and described in the second ethnographic vignette. In the workshop, staff described their practice as 'coming from the heart', as an authentic disposition, as opposed to fake gesturing. But they hastened to add, 'it's not about laying it on thick' – it is a care-fully aware and sensitive practice. One member of staff described herself as a 'social chameleon': 'you don't change who you are, but you change your behaviour to fit the circumstances you are in'. As I have described above, the affective disposition of caring is attentive and responsive to people's needs, and is felt and enacted corporeally by staff, in their body language, facial expression, their accent and their dress. It also has to do with feelings such as empathy, sympathy and compassion: 'It's about courtesy, manners and a sensitivity towards how to treat human beings' (vignette 2).

However, it is clear that CE work is also felt as an emotional demand on staff, and they recounted many events when they had become upset in response to the suffering of

others, and angered in the face of the injustices experienced by many. The manager of the Outreach team was acutely sensitive to the potential personal dangers of emotional strain and stress of outreach work from her own experience. As such, the team are encouraged to discuss feelings and difficulties during individual monthly catch-up meetings and at any other time. This experiential team support system was vital in learning to manage the emotional demands of CE (see Munro, 2014).

The different sections have highlighted the relational, affective, material and experiential dimensions of care. In this second part I turn to the practical dimension of CE as care work in terms of the 'institutional work' of Outreach staff.

PART II: DEVELOPING CARING PARTNERSHIPS: THE PRACTICAL DIMENSION OF CE AS CARE WORK

In this second part of the chapter I describe the *practical* dimensions of Outreach's caring work by considering the long-term partnerships the team is developing with health and social care services. The first section in this part is perhaps the most directly co-produced⁸¹: other forms of this account have been co-written and co-presented by myself and the Outreach team manager at a conference and a seminar. In a second section, I consider how the Outreach Team's new model of working can be seen as a series of practical *adjustments* (see Chapter 6) which produce infrastructures within museum institutions to support the care-full practices of CE.

7.11. A new model for CE

The changes to outreach practice can be traced through a sequence of opportunities and 'tactical' planning. It begins with a series of wider events, which also coincided with the period of the research (see Chapter 4): the 2009-2010 'transition year' for *Renaissance* at the end of the programme funding, promptly followed by a government change, the abolition of MLA, and the move to the Arts Council. In this short time frame policy directives and requirements were momentarily suspended, providing the team with an

⁸¹ In many ways, this is the case with much of this thesis; 'knowledge' emerged from continuous conversations with staff, while the wider framings, including the ideas of *care* and *craft*, are my own reflections.

opportunity (a 'passage point') to reassess: "it enabled us to get off the conveyor belt of projects" (Outreach, 2013). As was discussed in Chapter 6, the key issues for the team were the lack of sustainability of CE linked to short term funding, a 'scatter gun' approach, and the 'tick box' and deficit models of CE. This was also leading to burnout within the team. The team used the 'transition year' to shift their practice from short term projects to sustainable CE programmes, working with fewer organisations but developing long-term partnerships.

Reflecting on the breadth of work under the social inclusion agenda, the team had over a decade's experience of working with care homes, the justice system, mental health charities, and a range of groups and individuals who could be considered marginalised, vulnerable or otherwise excluded. However, the team felt that the responsive model of working was 'short termist' and the positive impact on participants was limited. Anecdotally and in case studies, there were scores of examples of museum engagement contributing to people's wellbeing, developing their confidence and self-esteem; but crucially there lacked a mechanism to capture these changes, and measure the evidence this impact. This relates to the wider moral/ethical orientation of CE shared by the team members (see Chapter 5). Being able to demonstrate the impact of their work was also an area that staff identified as important to their own job satisfaction.

At the same time budget cuts and restructures were taking place across the museum service, and it was imperative to find alternative funding sources to sustain CE work. The recent policy changes around public health have opened up new opportunities for partnerships between museums and health and social care statutory services, in particular around commissioning and social prescribing (Chapter 4). Indeed, public spending cuts have also affect health and social care service and have pushed forward their interest in alternative sites of care across the community.

As this short account shows, the new model for CE emerged from a particular set of timings and circumstances: it was linked to the pragmatic work of seizing new funding opportunities, and, significantly, can also be seen as deriving from staff's purposeful work based on their values and aspirations. Once more, I want to draw attention to the politics of practice working within (and against) the boundaries of institutions and how small cohorts of staff can exercise a degree of agency in how they 'deal with' changed priorities at levels often far removed from their everyday museum practice.

7.11.1. Developing partnerships with health and social care services

The new model of CE has consolidated strategic partnerships with four organisations across the five districts – with a mental health organisation (Moving Forward), an addictions service (NECA), the justice system (Northumbria Probation Trust) and a partnership between care homes and NHS services working with older people with dementia⁸². Building these partnerships has revolved around a number of key considerations that frame the new model of CE: first, identifying ‘umbrella’ organisations working across the five local authorities to develop strategic partnerships. The key concern was to establish a shared sense of commitment towards long-term work to ensure that CE programmes become sustainable. The organisations were also selected with reference to local council Joint Needs Assessments (a document outlining the social and public health needs of a local population) to identify key issues in the museum’s local area – for example, substance abuse and addiction were identified as issues in the North East of England. As such, the rationale for addressing the health and wellbeing agenda was linked to the ‘social responsibility’ of working in a local authority museum (Chapter5).

A second consideration was to develop shared agendas based on mutually beneficial programmes. While each partner has different service user groups and different priorities (and it is therefore not possible to address all these variations here), they all promote a people-centred approach. It has different iterations according to the organisation: from recovery-oriented practice in mental health and addiction services (Davidson et al., 2009), personhood approach in dementia care (O’Connor et al., 2007), to change-focused practice in probation services (Brayford et al., 2010). A person-centred approach means providing support to enable people to achieve independence and control over their lives. For example, for the mental health services, interventions are not only in managing the illness and its effects, but also in promoting the person’s ability to engage in the kinds of activities that interest or appeal to him or her, making positive life changes they have identified for themselves. It is about moving forward towards feeling more positive in the present and more hopeful for the future. For other services, stability is key. For the probation service, offender rehabilitation programmes provide opportunities to explore interests through various projects and creative activities, with the aim of providing stability to offenders. For

⁸² The ‘TWAM Model’ (written as part of co-presented seminar) is available on the museum’s website (<http://www.twamuseums.org.uk/about-us/spotlight/a-new-vision-for-outreach.html>)

NECA, the aim is for people to abstain from harmful substances or to remain stable, and creative activities provide an opportunity for service users to discover new interests that focus their attention elsewhere. In the dementia care, the focus is less interventionist and more about living well with dementia in day-to-day.

Each of the key partners share a common aim: each organisation views their social role in increasing the resilience and independence of service users by focusing on three main areas – confidence, wellbeing and peer socialising (common areas identified by the Outreach team). The organisations are looking for a reduction in the ‘revolving door’ cycle which leads to strains on local agency support. Indeed, this is part of a national push to move people away from being in treatment, and to move beyond dependency on emergency services (*The Telegraph*, 2009). For these organisations, the practices of care centre on providing the right levels of intervention and support to enable people to achieve independence and resilience. Their approach is to use community programmes to enable service users to develop their own support systems and reintegrate the community. In this way, the strategy of the Outreach team was to position the museum as part of these community programmes, and use museum sessions to support service users through the development of new interests and the confidence to try creative activities. In this way, we can see staff aligning their practices of creative care with the wider caring practices of health and social care organisations.

The third consideration of these partnerships was therefore to develop a joint evaluation methodology to evidence the impact of this work on service users. Within the public health sector, there are already well established links that demonstrate how building up individuals’ resilience and independence can lead to changed behaviours which in turn go towards preventing the ‘revolving door’ of using services. The Outreach Team’s approach was to focus on the making a case for the links between the museum programmes and the progress of participants in terms of confidence, wellbeing and positive socialising – three areas that lead to independence and resilience. The evaluation focuses on a simple way of capturing a participant’s travel throughout an outreach project, using a number of established methodologies, including the ladder of change approach⁸³ (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1982). A key point to raise about the evaluation is that it was developed in

⁸³ At the time of writing, the evaluation was still in its early stages, and therefore cannot be reviewed here.

collaboration with social and healthcare workers to align with their organisational objectives.

Developing a shared commitment through shared agendas, shared values and shared evaluation was vital to developing trust towards sustainable partnerships with these service since “staff would never have let us near their clients unless they trusted us” (Outreach, 2013). This work also builds towards opportunities for shared funding by positioning the museum as a partner in public health commissioning tenders.

7.11.2. Partnership as a practice of care

As I argued in the first part of this chapter, at TWAM, care is an already existing and common practice in CE work; it is unmistakable in every outreach project. The discussion above, of the organisational work of creating sustainable and strategic partnerships, reveals the *practical* dimension of caring practices: the practice of care is extended to the practice of partnership. Indeed, practices of care of Outreach have developed as *collaborative* practices of care that align with the aims of health and social care organisations. Such an approach to partnership cares for the aims, objectives and priorities of external organisations and works to accommodate these in museum projects and museum agendas. It also is responsive to the organisational context of external partners, which, for many, were affected by the strains of austerity and welfare reform. Funding cuts have meant that these organisations have focused resources on ‘core’ activities, while other support programmes – such as creative and interest groups – have had to be cut back or have disappeared entirely. In the work of the Outreach Team, partnership as a practice of care can be seen as developing through solidarity commitments, practical adjustments and a wider ethic of care. It is a generous practice that moves away from a contributory model of the museum (see Chapter 2):

“We [ask partners] what they might need and what things need to happen to make the conditions right for a project to flourish and for people to flourish in that project but we might get really different answers. And that's fine because we have the flexibility where we can kind of move in the way they need it to move for them” (Outreach, 2013).

This responsiveness and flexibility (which is also about clothes, body language and accents) are central to how outreach perform collaborative forms of care.

Crucially however, within these partnerships, Outreach do not see themselves as social workers (see Chapter 5); rather they see their role as supporting wider processes of community care through heritage and creative programmes. Collaboration is based on shared values between museums and health and social care service providers:

“One of the ways is doing really positive activities and positive experiences like peer socialising, and it might be building up [participants’] skills, their confidence, their self-esteem: all of those things are part of a package that helps people to either be abstinent or to be more stable (...). We are part of that – we are not saying that we help people solely to do that, but we are part of chain, *we are like a link in that chain*. We want to build on people's skills ... there is a bigger agenda here and it has to do with society. [Our museum’s mission] it's all about people; it's about their self-worth; it's about their identity, it's about where their place is in the world. And that's the bigger thing that we are always aiming for. ” (Outreach, 2013, emphasis added)

For the Outreach team, there was a moral imperative to orient the museum’s collections, its buildings and staff time towards sustaining creative programmes of support that are part of wider practices of care and support in the community. There is a ‘bigger’ dimension also to this practice of care that positions the museum as a ‘link in a chain’ of caring institutions, highlighting new societal roles for cultural institutions at a very local level, directly supporting the activities of health and social care organisations and their service users. Through this practice, the museum is repositioned as a community-based support system. I discuss these implications further in Chapter 9.

7.12. Infrastructures of care

A particular concern of this thesis is to examine the infrastructures that sustain CE as part of the organisational perspective on CE in museums. In the introduction, I described my use of ‘infrastructures’ to denote both the relationships that are formed to sustain this work, as well as the more ‘formal’ structures that are put in place to support CE within the museum institution. Such infrastructures enable organisational actors to ‘adjust’ their institutional arrangements (see Chapter 6). The account presented above can be read as a strategic attempt by Outreach to organise their caring practices into the museum⁸⁴. Indeed, the practices of Outreach are often developed outside of the museum in community spaces

⁸⁴ Relating back to De Certeau in Chapter 6, my use of ‘strategies’ here denotes the team’s attempt to create sustainable infrastructures as opposed to the more responsive tactics previously described.

and settings, and the purpose of infrastructures is to bring this work back into the museum and to 'formalise' it within institutional structures – to stabilise the passage points.

Through the ethnographic poetics and their analysis I have discussed the abilities (skills and dispositions) for care, in particular, the caring practices toward service users. These are vital in shaping infrastructures – relational, affective and material – to support the emergences of spaces of care in the museum. These practices of care are themselves extended to the external workers and their organisations through the forms of collaboration and partnership.

There are also practical dimensions to infrastructures: two in particular have contributed to creating caring infrastructures. First, the Outreach Team developed memorandums of understandings that outlined the partnerships; these are developed with front line workers and are signed by senior staff in both organisations to ensure shared values and a shared commitment towards sustainable programmes. Such 'technocratic' acts (Riles, 2004) are framed in a bureaucratic language that enables them to 'make sense' within organisational practices. Similarly, the evaluation is a collaborative infrastructure through which care is rendered visible to senior managers and commissioners, with the aim of securing future funding. These practical ways of organising care within institution are significant as attempts to consolidate an ethics of care by drawing on *and* modifying existing practice. As such the politics of such a practice cannot be understood as simply oppositional to present conditions; rather it is about tinkering within the logics of the museum to produce the infrastructures to support this work. A second element which is written into these documents is the reciprocal placements that form the basis of the partnerships. These short placements, just for a day or an afternoon, enable both museum staff and social/healthcare/community workers to gain a greater insight into each other's roles, values, and organisational contexts. Placements are practical infrastructures that enable collaborative ways of 'knowing' care in different situations and for different groups of service users. All these interactions expand the ecologies of practice of Outreach workers that come to shape CE. The new model of CE as a practice of care is summarised in diagram form (itself an organisational infrastructure) in Appendix IX.

7.13. Conclusion

By way of ethnographic poetics, this chapter has examined care work within CE programmes. By describing ‘what happens’ in CE encounters, I have aimed to show how these can create spaces of care in the museums, with positive effects on participants. My particular intention has been to examine the specific practices that facilitate and sustain these spaces of care – spaces that are tentative yet hopeful. To this end, I highlighted the relational, affective, material, and experiential dimensions of care – each of which are an already existing and often ordinary practice of CE workers.

Through this articulation we come to recognise the abilities for CE. It is not simply a skill but it is also talent, intuition and insight: the ability to sense what is needed, when, and what form it should take. It is a quality acquired through experience and commitment. It is about creating spaces that feel warm, comfortable, and safe. It is about ‘courtesy⁸⁵ and manners’.

Recognising CE as care work is critical in order, which I describe here in four points. Firstly, to recognise how CE programmes function and some of the more ordinary ‘realities of inclusion’. Without care, programmes are likely to be unsuccessful in engaging people. This is not merely a sentimentalized notion, but a far more critical recognition that participatory projects, and their aim of sharing authority and decision making, will only be meaningful if they are supported by and facilitated through wider caring practices. This has particular significance for museums for it speaks of a relational practice that has the potential to transcend the critique-contest of the current literature and the stultifying grip of the discourse of choiceandcontrol. Recognising CE as proceeding from caring relations also demands that we recognise our responsibilities within such relationships (Tronto, 1993; Lawson, 2007). Viewing CE as care work can strengthen the arguments of relational accountability put forward in Chapter 5 towards facilitating more equal participation across different scales and registers.

Secondly, to give value to the practice of CE by recognising the vital importance of the care work involved in the support (and engagement) of communities, and acknowledging how this practice vitally strengthens the capabilities of both Outreach staff and the communities with which they work. Rather than disregarding these ethnographic poetics as ‘airy-fairy’

⁸⁵ Courtesy is a notion that has also been developed by Graham et al.(2013) in relation to museums and copyright.

(see Chapter 6) and insubstantial to the 'core' work of museums, it is critical to recognise the experiential accounts of staff as valid judgements of the significance and influence of caring work in museum projects (Tronto, 1993; Askew, 2009). In the opening of this chapter I discussed some of the ways in which CE work is 'hidden' or misrecognised and is therefore marginalized in museums. In particular, the intimate and relational dimensions of CE, while acknowledged in theory, do not easily fit within the managerial frameworks that measure performance, efficiency and success in museum organisations (see Chapter 5). Furthermore, within such frameworks, CE is subjected to rules and regulations whereby its relational dimension is reduced to 'ticking boxes' and its affective dimension is reduced to 'managing expectations'. Thinking through care challenges these limitations.

My concern in reconceptualising CE is linked to an explicit politics of practice: to reframe CE in order to give it value as care work and recognition as an essential professional criteria. My concern also links back through to the participatory commitment of my research, and the desire of the team to find ways to articulate and communicate their work. This is our shared concern: if care is not attended to, if it is not talked about, if it is not recognised as *work*, as a purposeful effort and a mindful stance, then the felt quality of community engagement risks being eroded – it risks taking the 'heart and creativity' out of engagement with museums (see Chapter 6). By recognising care in museums as a form of *work* – which is relational, affective, material, experiential *and* practical – it is possible to see its component parts as equally valuable and essential elements of professional practice. Such a reframing strengthens our understanding of the abilities CE workers to include affective (and often emotional) labour *alongside* organisational skills and professional knowledge. The key question then becomes how might we think about embedding this work, and training other parts of the museum to develop such abilities? I return to this challenge in the conclusion to my thesis.

Thirdly, the recognition of the accounts of staff returns us to one of the main research questions of this thesis: that is, a concern with the institutional work of CE staff, and the infrastructures they organise to support their practice and ambitions. The central point here is that care is not restricted to only intimate encounters and personal endeavours or affects, it also extends to the organising of infrastructures that support partnership working with external organisations, and adjusts the museum's institutional arrangements.

Finally, as researchers theorising museum participation, the recognition of CE as care demands that we pay attention to the relational and affective specificities and multiplicities of everyday museum work. It has been my early contention that within the museum studies literature there is a propensity to reductionist accounts of the museum as a rational, homogenous, functioning machine, destined to institutional failures, tokenism or co-option (and yet ultimately redeemable – see Chapter 2). Furthermore, such accounts are often based in theories that are disconnected from practice; they obscure everyday actions and interactions and take away the agency of staff to contest, adjust and ‘go around’ their institutions. Looking instead at museums as peopled and practised organisations (Askew, 2009) allows for an examination of participatory work which remains more open to possibility.

In the next chapter, I consider the second new model of CE developed by Outreach in the West End of Newcastle, as opening up further possibilities for CE through a focus on community exhibitions.

Chapter 8. Community Engagement as Craft

8.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the Outreach Team's second new approach to CE, working with communities in the West End of Newcastle. In this chapter I propose a second reconceptualization of CE practice: community engagement as *craft*. I draw on Richard Sennett's work to suggest that craft, like care, is best understood as a skill *and* a disposition; it expresses the second recent renewal and negotiation of Outreach's professional identities and ambitions. Here again, my concern is linked to a politics of practice aimed at articulating and valuing the subtlety and nuance of CE work, and recognising the experiential accounts of staff as valid judgements of the significance their changed practices (Askew, 2009). The chapter engages with a more specific facet of CE around exhibition making with communities – what is also referred to as co-production. The empirics presented here are drawn from ethnographic observations, interviews and the analysis of two exhibitions.

In the first part of this chapter, I present the theoretical approach which draws on actor-network and assemblage theories, so as to ask: what does it mean to think of CE as a process of assembling? I then relate this approach to my discussion of craft to reconsider the practices of CE workers in terms of assembly.

Throughout this chapter, an assemblage perspective will be employed as an analytical tool and narrative strategy to work through the empirics, which are divided into two parts. First, I consider the team's approach to working in the West End. The team described this new model as 'mapping the community': going out to find out about the organisations that are already active in the area. Using the assemblage perspective, I introduce the notion of *networks of engagement* to examine this approach. I focus on the first exhibition – which took place in the community – to highlight the connections as well as tensions in the networks of engagement. I suggest the ways in which Outreach staff negotiate these networks of engagement demonstrates the craft of CE.

In the second part, I consider the second exhibition – which took place in the museum – to examine how the networks of engagement are brought back into the museum institution. *West End Stories* was a collaborative community exhibition and while it was not ‘co-produced’ in the current sense of the term (that is, a focus on sharing control and decision-making, see Chapter 2), it cannot be straightforwardly interpreted as single-authored. By introducing the ideas of craft and assembly, I want to suggest alternatives to this reductive dichotomy and open up the possibilities for conceptualising co-production from a relational view. I argue that such alternative understandings of co-production and the practices that support these (practices which I view as craft) can help move beyond the critique-contest impasse of the current literature.

As has been a key concern in this thesis, in a final part I consider the infrastructures that are required to enable this work in the community and how it might be brought back into the museum institution. This chapter again focuses the institutional work of organisational actors, especially the more mundane and day-to-day adjustments of professionals as they create, maintain and disrupt institutional arrangements.

PART I: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

8.2. Assemblage

There is a range of ways of ‘thinking assemblage’, each with different emphases (see Robbins and Marks, 2010 for a typology). Assemblage theory and its close relations offer no agreed model of cultural analysis; instead, they offer a set of concepts and shared concerns that are relevant to this chapter. The discussion here draws principally on the work of Bruno Latour (1987, 2005) and from an ‘after’ actor-network theory literature (see Hetherington and Law, 2000; Law and Hassard, 1999).

For Latour, the social is not a specific domain distinguished from economics or politics, instead it should be defined “only as a very particular movement of re-association and reassembling” (Latour, 2005, p.7). A central feature of Latour’s work is foregrounding the network in the study of social relationships. The network approach focuses on understanding patterns of ‘ordering’ without presupposing that order through a priori categories or as a pre-existing structuring system, but as a consequence of a temporary stabilisation of a particular set of forces. As such, the network metaphor enables useful description of how elements normally thought of as distinct comes together, including

humans and non-humans. In this interpretation, the task of social analysis becomes the tracing of associations through which different kinds of social relations come to be assembled and made durable (i.e. they appear stable).

Assemblage can be thought of as a wider ontological framework and as a method of analysis for thinking about phenomena and processes of composition; assemblages are built of heterogeneous networks, spaces and practices⁸⁶. While assemblage is used in quite different ways across the literature, it provides an orientation to research through this focus on relational thought which frames the analysis in this chapter. There are five key features of the assemblage approach that I wish to draw on to consider how the term might enable us to rethink CE.

First is the notion of the network. While assemblage is often (although not always) used as an alternative to notions of network, I retain it purposefully in my own discussion as it provides a representational concept for examining museum-community relationships, and a more practicable concept to bridge theory and practice, which is a key concern of this thesis. I propose the concept of the 'networks of engagement' in the latter part of this chapter to describe an alternative view of CE. Networks are themselves formed as a grid of multiple connections. Elements of the network are actively articulated in relation to one another, and are also shaped through these interactions. Networks can be said to be composed of various nodes, where the links are most concentrated. A network has a number of characteristics (summarised for example by Loon, 2006, pp.307–08): it is non-linear; it does not have any direction; it is marked by multiplicity and diversity of connections; it is rarely coherent; it can have multiple central nodes (whose centrality is relative to the concentration of links, not their position, for example, in the centre); it evolves and transforms to emerging contingencies. It may have limits, but their status is unclear: it is only when we come across problems in the network (for example, a stall) that we discover the boundaries that mark inclusion and exclusion. Such inclusion and exclusion are said to work through processes of 'enrolment'. These different features enable the metaphor of the network to present more compelling descriptions of museum-community relationships that go beyond a focus on linear relationships (of contribution or reciprocity,

⁸⁶ Assemblage theory which is more closely linked to the work of authors such as Deleuze and Guattari or DeLanda, and the full complexity of their writings is not addressed here. I use the term assemblage more broadly to introduce a wider body of work that could usefully be imported into museum studies.

see Chapter 2) to develop new ways of understanding the social and material interactions that happen around museums and communities.

A second emphasis of the assembly approach is on the double process of assembling: it describes how things are assembled and held together, and it makes visible the various relations that have made them to assemble in this way. The work of Latour and others has found some very recent resonances in the museum studies literature, particularly in relation to the idea that objects can be said to have agency (Macdonald, 2009; Byrne et al., 2011; Olsen, 2010; Harrison et al., 2013). In this view museums are collectives, or *assemblages*, (or 'meshworks', Harrison et al., 2013) that are composed of humans and non-humans, including, for example, staff, artefacts, funding bids, display cases and collections management software (Macdonald and Basu, 2007). This disturbs the perception of the 'natural' and stable ordering of the museum. What I am interested in is taking the double process of assembling to both describe and question *how* all these things assemble. In this latter concern, assembling is not simply used as a descriptor, it is mostly concerned with assemblage as a verb (Anderson and McFarlane, 2011, p.124) and the *work* of assembling: how heterogeneous elements come together into provisional and contingent wholes. This draws attention to the work of a number of different people (and things) with different abilities, skills and dispositions, as they assemble and reassemble the museum.

The third feature of assemblage has methodological consequences. Looking at how things are held together in museums focuses our analytical attention on tracing actions, associations, and connections. As a narrative strategy it links to ethnographic methods of 'following the story' (Latour, 1987). In terms of researching CE, this means following a much longer story that is not simply about describing the decision-making processes involved in creating an output (for example, a community-led or co-produced display), or the impact of engagement on participants (for example, increased self-confidence). Instead, it requires research to take a more open view of how, where and when relations are created. In other accounts of museums, parts of the assemblage are often hidden (for example, projects abandoned, altered texts, and preparatory meetings) and others are given prominence (for example, the final interpretation plan, the joint decision and the final display). The notion of assemblage encourages us to consider relations and events that are not necessarily or obviously directed towards the functioning of museums, but that might still shape a network or even cause it to stall. Such a view also allows for the

work and interests of communities to shape, influence, and disrupt; it draws attention to how communities also assemble and reassemble the museum.

A fourth feature of assemblage theory is its emphasis on emergence, multiplicity and indeterminacy (Anderson and McFarlane, 2011, p.124). Instead of reading a finished museum product (for example a co-produced exhibition) as the results of policy decisions, funding requirements or individual (or collective) decision making, the emphasis is on the multiple, indeterminate and the “highly specific actions and techniques that are involved in achieving and maintaining heritage” (Macdonald, 2009, p.118). This emphasis aligns with the focus of previous chapters which discussed some of these specific actions and techniques as the tactics and adjustments made by the Outreach team (its institutional work). A consequence of assemblage highlighted by Macdonald is that “greater levels of indeterminacy as well as, sometimes, of unintended courses of action, are made visible. Outcomes typically become more fragile and less inevitable” (2009, p.118). In Chapter 6 I discussed tentativeness as a feature of spaces of care in CE sessions; such fragility is often in the very nature of engagement work, and not necessarily a weakness. It does however open up wider questions for understanding the infrastructures for community engagement (introduced in the previous chapter) and for embedding participation and CE in museums, which are further addressed in the conclusion of this thesis.

A consequence (and fifth feature) of taking an assembly perspective is that it requires reconfiguring notions of agency, politics and ethics (Anderson and McFarlane, 2011), which are all central in discussion of museum participation (see Chapter 2). Within an assemblage framework, agency (and by extension the capacity to act and make decisions) is understood as *distributed* between the multiple interests and circumstances of heterogeneous elements, both humans and non-humans; it is a multiplicity of connected forces. ‘Traditional’ museum accounts have tended to privilege the agency of powerful individuals (or institutions) as decision-makers, over the significant and varied roles of social and material collectives⁸⁷. Following Latour (2005, pp.52–53), agencies are described as “making some difference to a state of affairs”: to account for agency is to account for change in the field of relations. Agency is defined more simply as making a difference, and not solely in terms of intentional or strategic actions. Indeed, an assemblage framework

⁸⁷ Harrison et al. (2013) and Byrne et al. (2011) make a similar point to consider how the privileging of political intention as agency has overlooked the significant and varied roles that Indigenous people have played in the past in determining the nature of ethnographic museum collections.

allows a decoupling of the notion of agency from that of intentionality. As such, unintended consequences are just as important as intended actions. This differentiation of agency and intentionality enables the study of CE practice to acknowledge and take into account the many other forms of actions and interactions that make up the museum. Indeed, a key purpose of the assembling perspective is to acknowledge the complexity of community-museum relations, in a way that moves beyond a framing whereby decisions/intended agency is the condition of community and its operation. Re-qualifying agency as distributed also requires a more open definition of community which is performed and emergent. I elaborate on this point in reference to the empirics later in this chapter.

The account that follows of the outreach work in the West End aims to emphasize the variety of connections and how they can influence museum practice rather than to remain focused on the hierarchical character of relationships. This is not to say that issues of power are left unexamined. In this view of agency, power is understood as ‘the final result of a process and not as a reservoir, a stock, or a capital’ (Latour, 2005, p.64); this doesn’t mean that actors enter an assemblage without pre-existing power relations, but that these too are the results of assemblage. In this interpretation, power is to be analysed by following the processes through which it is constructed, and equally importantly, the processes through which it is performed and exercised. Thinking of agency as distributed also has implications for considering the concept of craft as a useful term to examine CE practice. In the next section, I explain my use of this term in relation to this assemblage perspective.

8.3. Craft

In Chapter 7, I sought to describe the everyday and ordinary yet proactively caring practices of Outreach staff during CE sessions, and how these were extended as organising practices of care through the work of partnerships. Here, I describe another repertoire of skills and dispositions that are required in CE practice. I propose the concept of *craft* to examine the work of developing relationships between people, between people and objects, and between people and the museum, in the process of CE. Or, put in another way, I want to examine craft as the work of assembling, drawing on the associated concepts and concerns outlined above.

The discussion draws on Richard Sennett's (2008) concept of craft, which he extends well beyond the work of traditional artisans to computer programmers and scientists; here I extend it into the museum and towards the museum professional. For Sennett, the definition of a craftsperson is someone who "is dedicated to good work for its own sake" (2008, p.9), not for profit or in yearning for personal praise. Significantly for Sennett, everyone has the ability to be a craftsman – it is about the 'good' work of many rather than the outstanding performance of a few. In this way, Sennett is writing to re-value an area of work that has consistently been demeaned – an endeavour that joins the concerns in this thesis and frames my interest in using the term. In relation to the museum, this notion of 'good work' offers an alternative to the focus on 'best practice' or 'excellence' in Chapter 6; it gives greater value to a full range of practices and their sometimes tentative and fragile outcomes.

Sennett's idea of craft relates to the sustained act of making things through practice and repetition, and has multiple dimensions: it is the embodied, material and sensory aspects of meaning-making ("the intimate connection between hand and head", p.9); it is quality-driven and has an emotional dimension – the 'pride' of 'doing things well' (p.21), as well as other emotional attributes such as perseverance, patience, honesty; it is an 'experimental' and 'playful' rather than a 'mechanical' practice. In all these dimensions, the focus is on a 'circular metamorphosis' (p.40) between thinking and doing. As such, craft is not linear; it is a continuous process of experimentation and improvement. While craft-work may result in making something, its process is never complete. Sennett's account provides a positive inflexion to routine, repetition and slow pace as necessary conditions for craft; it pays careful attention to details, and allows for errors and failures. In the discussion which follows below, I will show how all these different elements of craft are also central elements to the practices of CE in museums.

Although in Sennett's analysis craft is largely an individual pursuit, I wish to reconnect this individual ability to community and collaboration: to examine the craft of bringing people, ideas, and objects together. The links between craft and community are not well developed in Sennett's *The Craftsman*. However, the notion of cooperation is further addressed in his following book, *Together: The rituals, pleasures and politics of cooperation* (Sennett, 2012). Here his basic argument is that cooperation is also a matter of skill: it is an embodied craft. Sennett focuses on the importance of face-to-face interactions, and of dialogue and mutuality as the basis for cooperation. He emphasises that collaboration requires skills that

are (like craft) developed through practice, and that it is empathy, not sympathy, that is the foundation for collaborative work. Here again he emphasises time, and allowing things take time, as essential for cooperation.

McRobbie (2012) provides interesting reflections on craft in terms of the politics of 'creative labour'. McRobbie argues for perspectives which de-mystify creative work and which offer a stronger valuation to ordinary work ('a good job well done'), which require skill and craft (pace Sennett) but which also, in a feminist vein, elevate the importance of care work (a point discussed in Chapter 7). There are important links to be made between craft and care, which I will draw out in the following empirical analysis. The notion of creativity is also significant in the museum context (see Chapter 5), and is returned to in the second part of this chapter. Similarly, my own concern in this thesis is to offer a stronger valuation of the abilities of Outreach which are ordinary practices, but critically, their nuance and subtleties (as care and as craft) require further illumination.

Sennett's arguments are not framed within theories of assemblage and as such it may seem an odd endeavour to connect these, in particular since the figure of craftsperson is a central agent in these arguments. I use Sennett's idea of craft as a starting point to think through the connections between museums and community, and focusing on craft as the work of assembling. While this may seem like a partial use of theory, my aim here is to focus on a particular dimension of assembling and focus on the work of CE staff as one actor within complex, heterogeneous networks⁸⁸.

Empirically, I first draw out the notion of craft as assembling through the work of 'mapping the West End'. This focuses on assembling people, community organisations, local interests, and the museum. I then examine two exhibitions as the temporary outcome of this assembling.

PART II: TAKING THE MUSEUM OUT INTO THE COMMUNITY

8.4. A new approach to CE

The following account describes the work of the Outreach team in the West End of Newcastle, which was purposefully developed as a new approach to working with

⁸⁸ Indeed it could be argued that any account of assemblage is inevitably partial as it can never follow all the chains of connections.

communities. Much like the account presented in Chapter 7, this new approach came out of a collision of circumstances, opportunities and determined ambitions of the team. At one level, it was a resistance to previous ways of working – targets, short-termism, and the ‘bolt on’ nature of engagement – which were often dictated by the museum’s agendas (Chapter 6). Because of such former operational structures, the team had not previously been able to develop strong link within its own locality, instead having to ‘zip in and out’. As one member of staff put it:

“I felt the work I was doing was very much driven by what the museum wants and ok I work for the museums, but I felt there was a real tension with what the museum thinks and wants in terms of CE and what I think is important because I work on the ground, and it's about ... you hear things and see things and meet people and then you get ideas about things.” (Outreach, 2011)

The team was looking for ways for each museum venue to become more rooted within the local communities at their doorstep, and more responsive to their needs and interests; to respond to those things seen and heard on the ground. The team expressed a desire for a more ‘holistic’ model of CE based on the ideas of ‘communities of place’ or ‘communities of interest’, working with a whole community in all its complexity rather than a solely targeted approach. In early 2011, the turmoil of a changing government and the transition to a new funding body opened up an opportunity for the team to work in a different way as funding priorities and targets were temporarily suspended (see Chapter 7). The team identified the West End as the Discovery Museum’s ‘most immediately local community’, as well as an area from which people do not come to the museum, despite its proximity.

The West End is a distinctive area and it is important to note some of its features in order to examine the museum’s approach. The West End tells a particular story of urban change and community action over several decades. Once a prosperous area linked to heavy industry and ships building, it has since shifted dramatically into decline and unemployment. Today it contains some of the most deprived wards in the region. This decline is mapped onto the urban landscape and its absences, and in the area’s story of large-scale demolition, displacement, clearance and endless regeneration programmes which have so far largely failed to reach their aims (Robinson, 2005). Since the economic downturn these programme have mostly ground to a halt; whole areas which were once residential and are now left empty and desolate. At the same time, the West End has a parallel history of community action and activism, including neighbourhood-based organisations, pensioners' associations and women’s action group (Green and Chapman,

1992). Many of these smaller organisations are still active in the community today. In recent years the West End has also become the most diverse area of Newcastle, with many migrants coming into the area. The West End, then, is a complex area with multiple social problems, but it is also an area with a long tradition of collective action driven by people who believe in ‘community’ and value it.

The following sections trace the work of the Outreach team in the West End through a series of key moments in a yearlong process. These moments do not aim to tell a full, linear story; rather, they are ‘events’ written from the perspective of the ethnographer-researcher, with extracts from interviews. First, I describe the early work of two staff members, who will be referred to as Q and W⁸⁹, and their ‘mapping’ approach to CE. Next I focus on a particular community organisation, St James’ Heritage and Environment Group (hereafter St James’), which would become a key partner for the museum. I then turn to the first exhibition. I take these three ‘events’ to reflect on the notion of ‘networks of engagement’. In what follows, I trace various interactions and connections to consider how the team’s ‘ecologies of practices’ (see Chapter 3) have evolved through their engagement *with* the West End – as much as their engagement *of* the West End. As such, the metaphor of networks of engagement provides a more compelling concept to describe and analyse the relationships developed in the team’s new approach to CE.

8.5. ‘Mapping’ the West End: crafting networks of engagement

Over the course of 2011-2012, two Outreach Officers began a process that they described as ‘mapping communities’:

“It’s not a project, it’s an approach – it involves research and mapping of the area; finding out what resources exists there; what kinds of projects are live; what the capacity issues are there in terms of what people are working on. It’s about gaps which exist really as well. It’s about looking and supporting” (W, 2012)

Although not clearly identified as it first developed, the approach in the West End has much in common with many of the principles, values and ethics of community development (or community work), in particular, asset-based community development (Kretzmann and

⁸⁹ These initials are chosen to anonymise the staff involved, in line with the methodological choices outlined in Chapter 3. Like in previous chapter, all the quotes where the year is indicated are taken from interviews from early 2012 – as such they reflect staff’s ‘reflection in action’ in the middle of this process.

McKnight, 1993; Mathie and Cunningham, 2003). Such an approach moves away from a needs-based approach and recognises the capacities of local people and their associations as that which builds strong communities. The process of recognising these community capacities starts with a new approach through which communities can “begin to assemble their strengths into new combinations, new structures of opportunity, new sources of income and control, and new possibilities for production” (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993, p.6). It is this particular notion of assemblage that is the analytical focus on this chapter⁹⁰. I suggest that recognising community capacities can also be examined as recognising the different nodes that exist in community networks (after Latour), and rethinking how the museum can become a part of these ‘new combinations’, where the museum is one node in such a network.

Over a period of a year, the two Outreach staff members met groups, associations and organisations in the West End to find out about their work. These were not only heritage or cultural organisations, and included a good neighbourhood project, a radio, befriending projects, a community activist film archive group, a knitting club, and community organisations providing support for older people and their carers. The ‘mapping’ approach focused on researching the capacities of individuals, groups and organisations; their skills, talent and interests, as well as the current issues they faced (many linked to the local impact of austerity). This approach looked at how the community organised its own support through organisations and community spaces; identifying how the community links to these and how they link to each other; and identifying community representatives and leaders. This can be seen as the work of mapping the nodes and connections of the formal and informal networks of the West End.

The work of the team in the West End began with a new lens which was different to traditional outreach practice; as Q (2012) put it, “we were going out to communities without a set museum agenda” (see Chapter 6). However this was not a straightforward task, as Outreach’s approach was at times met with cynicism or suspicion from small local organisations. Indeed, as was described in the brief background of the West End, this is an area that has been overwhelmed by institutional (regeneration) interventions and consultations which have left communities disappointed and disillusioned: “people are

⁹⁰ There is a very large literature on community development, however it is beyond the scope of this thesis to address it here since the purpose of this chapter is to examine these changes through an assemblage perspective.

weary of big organisations coming into the area. They have no local knowledge, they parachute projects in (many of which are not welcome), they come and then go because agendas change, funding disappears” (Q, 2012). The West End community organisations have developed instead through small-scale, responsive initiatives, as well as local chains of support between organisations: “the people that stick around are your quirky volunteer groups that do projects for real love and genuine interest” (W, 2012). Outreach recognised these different groups and their associations, both formal and informal, as the key assets of the West End. Returning to the assemblage perspective, this recognition brings to the fore the assemblage of people, spaces and practices.

The first step for Outreach was to build trust with these organisations. W described her practice as getting to know the local community through the very mundane acts of being present in the community:

“In this new way of working I have been attending a lot of community events, being in their areas, in their territory, without actually selling any of the goods of the museum – for example, involvement in an exhibition. I am there as a presence, I'm introducing myself to people, I am taking part in their activity and it's that kind of developing trust and visibility even before you get into a discussion about what we do and what they do - in this kind of silent engagement way” (W, 2012).

In this initial phase, the aim was for the Outreach staff – and by extension, the museum – to participate in the lives of communities, “taking part in their activity”, as in the quote above. In fact, there is no set point when this ‘initial stage’ is over; rather it is the basis of the team’s new approach to CE, which begins with the slow pace work of building up trust and mutual understanding.

A following element of this approach is about conveying to communities a different impression of the museum and what they could (and should) expect from it. To this end, staff aimed to develop new kinds of relationships with individuals, groups and communities, on two levels: first, it was about showing how communities can see the museum as a resource for them to use; second, it was about providing in-kind support to local groups and activities. Both levels can be read as attempt to bring the museum *out* into the community. As W put it, “there are programmes already existing out there, local history groups, and there are resources that are in the museum that we can use, the archives, for example, and I just took those out and without much effort really you are supporting things that are happening out there and using your resources”. This included bringing out handling collections into community spaces, taking different groups into the museum for

behind the scenes tours, and organising heritage walks and talks, all developed in partnership with local organisations, as well as raising awareness of the museums' free events and activities.

Taking the museum out however was not simply about collections, but also about sharing the different skills and expertise of museum staff. A key element of this in-kind support was its responsiveness: "not to replicate what's out there but maybe to hone into more ways of supporting communities and community work" (W, 2012). For example, staff assisted groups such as the West End Picture Library, an entirely volunteer-led archive, with specialist advice on cataloguing and preserving their collections, and provided support for funding bids that other associations were putting together. At the same time however, Outreach was particularly aware of the sensitivities around partnership funding. Indeed, those groups that had previously partnered with larger institutions in the context of regeneration funding had nearly always been left disappointed, having either been side-lined during the projects or abandoned at their close. As such, the Outreach partnerships explicitly did not rely on a joint funding bid like much of previous engagement work had (Chapter 6). As 'in-kind' support, activities often ran on a shoestring, or did not cost more than the Outreach Officer's time⁹¹. This context of developing relationships outside of funding structures is noteworthy as it is unusual; it also focuses our attention on the relational dimensions of partnership, rather than simply the outputs (see Chapter 7). This way of working aimed to develop new kinds of relationships with individuals, groups and communities. Significantly, these relationships were based on generosity rather than reciprocity (see Chapter 2), or the expectation of a return. Or perhaps more precisely, it was about a more generous reciprocity that is less demanding of a certain form or amount of return that is easily turned into a museum product (for example, an oral history, or an object interpretation) and that values much more open forms of knowledge exchange. This kind of reciprocity is less a means to an end and rather a means in and of itself; it is a behaviour in-kind, and the basis for community engagement: "we've started to establish links with people and we don't actually know what's going to happen from those links" (W, 2012).

⁹¹ An interesting debate emerged in the Outreach offices around this work: about whether budgets/money could detract from 'good' community projects, as creativity was often more powerfully and productively ignited when working on a shoestring. There are issues however in how this romanticised argument can work against demands for greater investments in CE.

In these events and encounters, there is no singular moment that is clearly defined as ‘engagement’, but instead they are constituted and sustained as *networks of engagement* that temporarily assemble people, objects, interests and organisations. The notion of ‘networks of engagement’ builds upon the assemblage perspective described above. Networks of engagement are constituted through the relationships among their members. They can take any direction; they have no ‘centre’; they are constantly changing. Networks are made up of nodes, and in this view the museum is one such node that links and becomes linked to other nodes, which include the different community organisations in the West End. Taking this wider perspective of the networks of engagement offers a concept that enables description and analysis of the wider work of the team in the West End, and draws our attention to tracing the associations through which different kinds of social relations come to be assembled – for example, through repeated encounters and interactions, support and behaviour in-kind, and a variety of non-museum like activities.

The way I observed this practice of staff ‘mapping the West End’ was as the *labour* of assembling – a form of work that I want to describe as craft. This craft is the kind of creative labour that Mar and Anderson (2012, p.1) describe as “entangling people, places, material artefacts, and ways of working and thinking”. Q (2012) described it in this way: “I feel like I could turn this into a snazzy Guardian style info-graphic of how all these groups and individuals are interconnected”. For Outreach, crafting these connections was not just about linking groups up to the museum (in a unidirectional way), they also saw their role as ‘joining the dots⁹²’ and connecting different groups within the community. Like Sennett’s notion of craft, it is experimental, repeated and slow pace work of building links within the community. The quality of this craft-work lies in its responsiveness and flexibility: in listening to community interests, needs and concerns, and imagining creative ways in which the museum can be brought out in ways that are supportive and appropriate. This approach reverses the terms of museum engagement: going out without a museum agenda, meeting communities in their own spaces, creating associations for their own sake, and making connections around community interests, voices and knowledge. In this reversal, CE is less about communities contributing to the museum (objects, oral histories, etc. see Chapter 2), and rather more about the museum providing in-kind support to activities in the community, making its collections, staff and buildings available as resources

⁹² This notion of linking ‘dot-to-dot’ was the theme of conference paper I co-wrote and co-presented with a member of the Outreach Team.

for the community, and shifting the terms of engagement (and it is hoped, the relations of power) towards community agendas. The craft of creating connections can also be seen as part of the wider practices of *care* described in Chapter 7: extending support to different groups and organisations in a generous way, and based on the ‘proactive interest’ (after Conradson, 2003b) in people’s ideas, interests and issues.

What became clear for Outreach in the work of mapping was that in the West End there are dozens upon dozens of groups and organisations that are researching, collecting, archiving, and actively producing local history and heritage. Often they don’t engage with the museum, and arguably, they would continue their work even if the museum didn’t exist (“if we never knocked on their door, they’re still going to be there, doing their thing”, Q, 2013). Returning to Latour’s concept of the network it is possible to see how local groups organise their own networks of engagement. St James’ Heritage and Environment Group is one such community organisation nearly entirely led by volunteers and headed up by a long term resident, community activist and researcher, Judith⁹³. It provides an example to further examine the already existing community assemblages of the West End and the ways in which museums can become enrolled their networks of engagement.

8.6. St James’ Heritage Centre as a space of community engagement

St James’ Parish Church is one of the few remaining churches to have escaped the regeneration bulldozers. Built nearly two centuries ago, it comprises an active church and a large church annex hall, which in recent years have fallen into disrepair. After a community consultation, the St James’ Heritage and Environment Group was set up in 2010 as an independent voluntary organisation to restore the buildings and churchyard, quickly gathering over 200 volunteers. A cultural programme of activities (highlighted as an interest in the consultation) runs alongside the restoration, led by a part-time worker (Alex). Activities are open to all and run on a weekly basis in the church hall. The site has a volunteer-run kitchen and every Tuesday lunches, cakes, tea and biscuits are provided free of charge to visitors. The aim of the centre is to provide a multipurpose space for local residents to come together around certain activities based on local heritage and history, as well craft activities, knitting, dance, music, drama and film. The centre is organised around

⁹³ The community workers from St James’, Judith and Alex are not anonymised (since the issues highlighted in Chapter 3 do not apply) and their interviews are used here with permission.

informal events, sustained through word-of-mouth and local advertising, and operates outside of any profit-making or commercial intent. A participatory, experimental and community-led ethos is the central way of working for St James' Heritage Centre.

The front St James' hall is used as a display space for local history and local residents' memories. One of the first displays was a collection of photographs spanning 60 years of weddings in the church. The project was hugely successful: pictures from nearly 180 weddings, dating from the 1920s up to the present day, were loaned to the display, with some photographs sent from afar afield as Canada and New Zealand. Four hundred images fully covered the three walls of the buildings. There was a certain DIY aesthetic to the display: images were bluetac-ed or sellotaped to sheets on the wall, huddled together, jostling for attention, creating a large photo album documenting six decades of marriage custom, fashion, hairstyles and love stories. I return to these wedding tales in a moment.

Judith described the vision for the centre as a cultural hub for the area:

“There are lots of arts and cultural kinds of stuff going on, but it tends to happen in portakabins and backrooms – what the West End doesn't have is a high quality venue. (...) So that's the vision: this is something bigger that is part of an area and then at some point it comes together and you get a big community celebration.”
(Judith, 2012)

In Judith's visions St James' can be read as a space of 'community assembly', pulling together and supporting the work of different local organisations: “the whole point is that this area is full of amazing little organisations that do fantastic stuff. And the thing is to actually get something that they can contribute to and be part of as well while doing their own stuff, not about inventing a new big organisation”. In this way, St James' can be read as creating a network of engagement in the community, by assembling the interests, activities and celebrations of different groups and organisations, their Tuesday cakes and wedding photographs.

St James' has a number functions in this network. It provides a venue where people can learn about and celebrate their community and local history, and creates a sense of place in an area with complex social issues. At another level, it functions as a space where people (those that the museum would likely consider as 'hard to reach') come to socialise with one another. It is not necessarily an 'easy' or obvious space. The room is still damp with an occasionally leaky roof; but its warmth comes from its friendliness, its communal feel, its humour, and all the efforts to make it a physically comfortable space. In many ways, St

James' is a place of quiet community activism, organised around culture, creativity and celebration. The point is that it 'works' as a space of community engagement (and indeed, a space of care, see Chapter 7), and it 'works' as a network assembling different groups, interests, craft activities and local histories. How then might the museum engage with such a space and its ideas? How does the museum become enrolled into these community networks of engagement? And what can be learnt in terms of museum CE practice?

8.7. Linking the museum into the community networks of engagement

The partnership between St James' Heritage Centre and the museum perhaps begins with hearsay about the fate of display panels:

"I'm not sure how true this is but Judith was under the impression that when some exhibitions finish they are thrown away at the end rather than stored. But we were just thinking it would be so much better to have them here because people would be really interested in seeing them. And it's so easy for people just to pop in here" (Alex, 2012).

There was an interest then in bringing some of the museum *out* into St James' – not necessarily the actual artefacts and objects⁹⁴, but the narratives and stories of the museum. For St James', working with the museum would enable them, they felt, to lift the standards of their display: "it's a higher quality than what we would normally have. So for us it helps to give people the idea that this – what this could be, and the types of activities we could have here and the type of partners we could attract – and it just raises people's aspiration for what this could be." (Alex 2012). For Judith, the approach for working with the museum was modelled on the vision for St James' to act as a cultural hub for diverse local organisations, and bringing the museum into this network. Specifically she described her aspiration that St James' might act as an 'outreach venue' for the museum, on to levels: at the level of practice: "where [the museum has] got staff that are interested in working in different ways there's huge potential"; and as an 'outpost' for museum displays: "the idea that [the community] could have a mini museum right here on their doorstep would be fantastic" (Alex 2012).

⁹⁴ Staff at St James' had an approximate understanding and appreciation of the issues of insurance and security around loaning and displaying accessioned collections outside of the museum.

For St James', a partnership could help bring the museum out to the community. As Judith mentioned, "it's not a great distance but it's a big cultural gap between here and the Discovery Museum and the Archives". For the Outreach Team the interest in working with St James' aligned with their efforts to make the museum more responsive to its local communities. For the museum institution, there was also a particular interest here in collecting the stories of people and life in the West End (affording Outreach with senior management support). Here we can begin to re-imagine version of museum CE that exists outside of its institutional boundaries and which is assembled in a different community space. It emerges at the intersection of the interests, intentions, circumstances and non-humans such as exhibition boards, and in the networks of engagement between the community organisation, the Outreach Team and the museum institution. By taking an assemblage perspective (although necessarily brief), we come to recognise St James', its modes of working and its aspirations, as influential in these networks. This is what Latour is talking about when he notes that: "the word network indicates that resources are concentrated in a few places – the knots and nodes – which are connected with one another – the links and the mesh: these connections transform the scattered resources into a net that may seem to extend everywhere" (Latour, 1987, p.180). As one member of the Outreach team commented, different resources came together in these networks:

"We share our skills with people and at the same time we learn about the way they get their communities engaged and involved and that's where I see the future of some of this work." (Q, 2012)

Such an approach begins to assemble museums and communities into 'new combinations' and 'new structures of opportunity' (after Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993) – and even quite radical propositions, such as endorsing a community centre as a museum outpost.

What follows is a particular example that shows the assembling of ideas, peoples, materials and stories around a first exhibition, as a specific example of the sorts of in-kind support the museum can lend, and how the museum becomes enrolled into the already networks of engagement of the community.

8.7.1. *Benwell Wedding Tales*

The first expression of the museum and St James' partnership was an exhibition, *Benwell Wedding Tales*, which drew on the theme of the previous display.

Over the course of a several months in 2010, Q and Judith worked together to identify people who loaned photographs for the first display and who might be interested in telling their personal stories in more details and sharing them with the museum. Eight couples came forward and Q and Judith shared the task of doing half the oral history recordings each. Q later edited these into a series of ‘films’ – superimposing voices onto a slideshow of personal photographs. *Benwell Wedding Tales* opened in April-March 2012, as a much reduced, ‘glossy’ display. One of the church walls was painted grey, and two rows of four framed pictures of each couple on their wedding day were hung in perfect alignment – the DIY now replaced with a certain curated aesthetic. On a small TV in the corner of the room visitors could view and listen to the oral histories. In the opposite corner stood a wedding dress modelled on a museum stand. The centre of the room was dominated by a large museum bookcase cabinet and inside were keepsakes, wedding invitations, garlands and floral displays, all loaned by local residents. The museum provided the display case, picture frames, dress stand, and produced an introductory panel⁹⁵. An outreach budget of about £400 was used to cover any associated costs. This, alongside with the mounting of the display, was a form of in-kind support from the museum for this community exhibition and presents a practical example of the team’s new model of ‘doing’ CE⁹⁶.

The key argument here is that the model of CE and the exhibition came out of repeated encounter, work and engagement between organisations, spaces, practices and people, as part of a longer process of ‘joining dots’ between the museum and the West End. This is what I described earlier in this chapter as the craft of assembling: bringing the museum out, taking time to build relationships, starting from where people are, in their spaces, which intensify and thicken (to use assemblage speak) the networks of engagement by means of collaborative actions. Such connections mean new ways of linking up with the museum and collections are more likely to emerge. *Benwell Wedding Tales* emerged through partnership working, sharing resources and technical/curatorial expertise towards a joint project. The idea came from the community, and the role of the museum was to support the community by producing a ‘high quality’ display, which as was mentioned in the quotes above, was important to St James’.

⁹⁵ No accessioned museum objects were part of this display.

⁹⁶ Materials such as the leftover paint and the headphones (for the oral histories) were then given to St James’, a small gesture which was very welcome and noteworthy for its mundane generosity.

What was created in the community space was different to what would have happened in a gallery; something else was gained in this experience for the Outreach Officers, for St James' staff, and for the visitors. Significantly, it required that Outreach staff work outside of the 'invited space' of the museum (see Chapter 2), and instead work within the terms of St James' invitation. It also required enrolling other parts of the museum in providing in-kind support: for example, the Design Team to print the panels, and senior management to sign off on the loan of the display case⁹⁷. As such, *Benwell Wedding Tales* also reveals some of the networks of negotiations, the fissures, messiness, and adjustments when the museum is brought out into a community space.

8.7.2. Networks of tension

The complications and tensions that emerged in the assembling of *Benwell Wedding Tales* are necessarily specific to its set of circumstances. However, they also link to wider issues that are at the centre of this thesis' discussion: the different understandings of 'community engagement', institutional barriers, and the tension around embedding a common way of working with communities across the museum organisations (see Chapters 5 and 6).

A key issue that affected collaboration was time scales:

"In the museum there are lots of different processes that have to be gone through before things can be signed off or things can be put into people's workloads, whereas we quite often will be able to have an idea and then do something two weeks later (...) rather than it taking half a year to be able to do something after someone has suggested it." (Alex, 2012)

In the museum ideas must accrue their legitimacy through multiple forms of documentation and multiple levels of sign off (see Chapter 6). As previously discussed, testudineous procedures can have for consequences the disappointing of community partnerships and expectations and by dictating the time frame, such procedures in fact consolidate the museum's authority. As Judith (2012) bluntly put it "the problem working with big organisations is that they are powerful and you're always subject to their timetable".

⁹⁷ There is a whole other story that could be told just about the bureaucratic challenges of this move and the tactics employed by Outreach to make it happen.

A second issue in this *Wedding Tale* related again to events inside the museum, and most specifically, a series of typos (so in fact the panels did not go through the long sign off process):

“[We] wrote a description of the project for the panel and sent it over to [the museum] to have it printed - the only problem is that there are a few typos, and it was correct at first – and I think that was purely down to the fact that getting everything ready and together was very last minute and pretty rushed – perhaps someone copied it wrong... but that is quite important because some of the dates are wrong when people got married and for people coming in and seeing that their name is spelt wrong – that’s pretty bad! You know – when it’s written Richard and they go, ‘I’m not Richard my name’s Tom but that’s me in the picture!’” (Alex 2012)

This tension (as a genuine mistake) highlights some of the concerns when working with communities is not embedded across different parts of the organisation and other teams aren’t more directly invested in the relationships with the community, or more precisely, the proximate scale of accountability is eluded (see Chapter 5), and the care-full support somehow gets dropped (see Chapter 7). It is also symptomatic of community work being ‘at the bottom of the pile’ (a phrase often used by Outreach Officers) in terms of museum priorities. It reminds us of the brass plaques presented in Chapter 5.

Such incidents were distinct moments of awkwardness that affected relationships. Another such moment of awkwardness developed around a regeneration funding stream, ‘Make Your Mark’. It became contentious in the West End as it was felt that the funding was (once again) being accessed by large institutions with little long term investment or understanding of local issues, instead of going to smaller established voluntary organisations. St James’ was clear about its uneasiness around the museum going for this funding, a view that Outreach understood and appreciated. However, on the top floor of a museum office, without Outreach’s knowledge, an application was already being written. What followed officially was an awkward series of exchanges across different parts of organisation, and across hierarchies, and eventually the bid was re-written with advice and support from St James’.

These moments of awkwardness, stalls in the networks of engagement, appeared once this new practice of CE moved back into the museum. They also act as an important reminder (pace Latour) of the need to acknowledge the institutional power of the museum, whether performed or latent. Yet these stalls are not the most important part of this story, and it is not how Outreach or St James’ would want it told. Approaching collaborative practice in the networks of engagement means approaching it as it diverges as well as where it

converges, rather than focusing on failures as ending points. Instead, other elements are noteworthy: making power visible but also tending to the everyday efforts to make partnerships work, both outside and within institutions. Within this recognition, the questions become: how can Outreach staff connect, negotiate, or otherwise influence these diverging practices? How can the networks of engagement which emerge in community be brought back into the museum assemblage, its institutional practices, ways of working and thinking?

Critically, in Outreach's view, the *Wedding Tales* was never conceived as an end point, only as one element in time in a new long-term approach to CE. In next part of this chapter, I consider the second exhibition – which took place in the museum – to further examine how the networks of engagement are brought back into the museum institution.

PART III: BRINGING COMMUNITY BACK INTO THE MUSEUM

In the following section I consider the assembling of a second exhibition, *West End Stories*. The ambition for *West End Stories* was to 'scale up' the model of working initiated by *Wedding Tales*, by bringing elements of this community practice *back into* the museum. Empirically, it provides an opportunity to examine in more detail the process of exhibition making as a process of assembly.

My aim in doing so is to reconnect the practice of community engagement with the (perceived) traditional 'core' function of museums: the practice of curation. As was discussed in Chapter 6, these are typically separated in terms of how their labour is valued and CE is often 'bolted-on' at the end of a project. There is a critical need to reconnect different aspects of museum practice, from CE to exhibition making, to design, conservation and management, if the whole museum organisation is to move from a resource-led way of working to a community-focused model (cf. TWAM's 'Our Museum' proposal).

Taking a specific assemblage perspective should really direct our attention less to the finished exhibition and rather to the entanglements involved in their coming into being – multiple, disparate, and often highly specific actions that are involved in making heritage (Macdonald, 2009). Here however my description is non-linear: I start with the exhibition and trace back some of the associations through which it came together. My purpose is not to re-privilege the work of display; rather the aim is to reveal the exhibition as an event

which is part of a process that is far more collective and distributed. A close engagement with the process of curating requires that we reconsider co-production in museums as something more than concerns over choice and control; it draws our attention to collaboration, creativity and a multiplicity of entangled agencies. The empirics presented here are drawn from my own reading of the exhibition, accounts by staff, in particular Q, as well as various meetings, store visits, and outings to St James' I attended.

8.8. West End Stories

What's so special about the West End?

Newcastle West End has more than one story. These stories are important when you think about what has shaped the world we live in today: the industrial revolution, war, political change, the migration and movement of people and globalisation.

This text is the introductory panel to the *West End Stories* exhibition, which opened on the ground floor of the Discovery Museum (in the old *People's Gallery*) in February-June 2013. Beyond this panel, there is no other text in the exhibition, only object labels, which are often just descriptive text taken directly from the museum catalogue. The exhibition mixes photographs with museum objects and film. There is no timeline or set narrative: it does not follow conventional modes of display through chronology. Photographs from the 1950s are juxtaposed next to Roman spoons, next to a toilet roll box, and opposite, a scroll from a Japanese businessman to a now-closed military engineering group. In one case is a women's jacket, with a label that simply reads: 'This jacket belonged to Miss Elizabeth Robinson, a nurse from Benwell who died of malaria in a military hospital in Bazra, Mesopotamia (now Iraq) in 1919'. Next to it hangs a portrait of a man who owned a sanitary pottery ware manufacturing the West End. In the following case is a large box of unopened jam jars from the 1960s. All these objects link in different ways to the West End.

On several walls across the exhibition spaces are a number of flat screen TVs showing a series of films on a time-differed loop. Many of the films have been specially commissioned for the exhibition, including personal stories of residents living in the West End, as well as an interview with the Keeper of Archaeology where he interprets some of the Roman objects displayed in the gallery. At the other end of the exhibition are three screens with archival films from a community project called Archive For Change. The archival films replicate the exhibition's juxtapositions through a collision of images: from buildings

demolitions to interviews with community activists and women walking down a West End street in the 1950s.

Oblique narratives begin to emerge from the possibilities of multiple juxtapositions. The impact of this arrangement is more than aesthetic: visual analogies and collage are employed to assert the relationships across time and between material forms. The exhibition refuses to tell a single story from an authoritative viewpoint; it expresses narratives by drawing new kinds of connections which are non-linear. There is an overarching story about complexity, about change and permanence, about the connections between people and place. Narratives that are less about chronology or comprehensiveness, and instead that resonate within more social, emotional and humorous registers. The narratives are created through the different ways in which objects and images talk to each other; the assembled objects narrate a fragmented, open story of the West End. The space is also marked by representations of different landmarks which relocate place in the gallery, if only momentarily – for example a large model of the area; and in the centre of the room is a case filled with knitted and crocheted recreations of buildings from the West End on loan from local Knit and Natter groups.

Through its modes of display, *West End Stories* resists static essentialising views of place and community. “It’s not laid out like ‘this is the Asian corner’, ‘this is the gay corner’, ‘this is the new West End’, ‘this is the old West End’, but it’s just the interesting connections between things whether that’s through just aesthetics or what they mean – but then I’ve not said what things mean. It’s just lots of different things.” (Q, 2013). It does not present the West End as a bounded or stable entity based on a certain notion of community but rather it is presented as a space of multiple influence and flows through the multiple open associations between objects assembled in the space. Indeed the interpretation relates closely to Doreen Massey’s (1991) writings on globalisation and its reciprocal relation to the local. It also represents an ambition to disassemble the temporal frame of the museum by mixing up events so that there are no clear beginning or ends; place instead is represented as immanent and emerging (after Deleuze). Latour and Weibel (2005) describe such exhibitions as ‘assemblies of assemblies’, where the desired outcomes of these assemblages are not seeking neat convergence of purpose or meaning. From this perspective, the objects and photographs in the exhibition actively contribute to the processes that reflect and generate the changing qualities of the West End. ‘Community’ then, here is also emergent: it is created in the spaces of the museum, and in the relations

with visitors from the area and the links they make with objects. Following Latour and Weibel (2005), within the exhibition, objects become ‘things’ that people gather around and associate to one another through: they are meeting grounds for community.

8.8.1. Re-assembling and rethinking co-production

When I walked around the exhibition space with Q, he described *West End Stories* as ‘an exercise in surrealism’. As a surrealist project of sorts, the exhibition explicitly links with the idea of assemblage in terms of display⁹⁸. However I want to push further the idea of assemblage to look at the ways through which these juxtapositions and displays came together, and how, in order to unpick what CE means in this context.

On the surface, this exhibition can be read as a project solely curated by Q. He selected the final objects from the museum collections⁹⁹. He arranged the loans from other organisations and community groups, and decided on the final arrangements of objects in cases; he advised on lighting, framing and mounts. Yet to only consider intentionality or the act of decision-making eludes the other important ways in which the exhibition is held together. By tracing back through the associations that led to its assembly, and the relationships that continue to hold it together, it is possible to have a different reading of the exhibition, as an event assembled in a much longer process of working in the West End. Such a view requires that we reconsider what is meant by ‘co-production’.

Co-production is a term used to designate the practice of involving people in the making of something that the museum can produce: displays and exhibitions (sometimes called co-curation), object interpretation, learning resources, websites, tours, festivals, events, etc. As I described in Chapter 2, co-production has featured as both a problem and its own solution in the discourses of museum participation: issues of power can be resolved through sharing more authority (Lynch and Alberti, 2010). While the original ambition for *West End Stories* was for the exhibition to be co-produced with people from the West End, the Outreach Team recognised early on that the time frame (dictated by the exhibition slot, and level of staffing, with Q only part-time) would not allow for genuine co-production:

⁹⁸ Assemblage is also a form of surrealist art compositions of found objects. Artists known for assemblage art include André Breton, Joseph Cornell, and Raoul Hausmann, amongst many others (see Elderfield, 1992)

⁹⁹ This final list of objects was however shared with St James’ who agreed it.

“This I wouldn’t say per se that it is a co-produced exhibition. I think it has to a degree but it’s not the fact of people selecting objects, I mean people have produced work that we’ve included in here, and they’ve put it in the exhibition. (...) I got a chance to get the women in who’d done all [the knitting], and they came in like artists, just like you would if it was a contemporary art exhibition and they installed it. I was supportive, and we had Conservation in to pin stuff in as well, and it was given as much care as I don’t know, the reified object-special-museum-kind-of-thing. (...) And it’s not as token, it’s to help broaden what the content of it is; kind of really get a greater mix of content (...) We’d only gone out and started meeting people a year and a half ago and to rush through getting some kind of token idea of co-production, I would rather do it this way. I’d rather even not do it than do it in a token way.”

The particular context and diversity of the West End also complicated more straightforward ideas of co-production, both in terms of who would be involved in the process, and of what stories should be told. While St James’ were consulted throughout the development of the exhibition, as Judith commented:

“I think it’s a bit of a difference of perspective, [it] is probably hard for people to understand in a museum organisation just how many forums and strategies have been around here that people have been invited to be part of. So I said to [Q] – because he wanted a steering group for it – and I said people are sick of being on steering groups and advisory groups for other people’s projects, and kind of being used really. (...) I know everyone is quite genuine in wanting to involve local people and having them leading it. (...) I mean there isn’t one community with one view is there? (...) It’s also a bit of a minefield.”

The point here isn’t to say that since the community didn’t want involvement, this absolved the museum; rather, it is about recognising other ways of participating, participating on the community’s terms, and even participating in the ‘wrong’ way. It is not about seeing this as a risk to manage (Chapter 6), but rather it is about accepting this as part the process of collaboration. My fundamental point is that these circumstances do not change how the museum should aim to support these groups and their involvement. This calls for the museum to work harder at engagement, to find more creative ways of involving people in meaningful and appropriate ways. This opens up the possibilities for different forms of engagement which are more than deciding what objects should go where or the wording on a label, and a view of engagement as something which happens not solely around an exhibition, but through a range of encounters and interactions in a variety of spaces.

What became clear were the complex and rich stories that make up the West End, as well as a clear sense of a community fed up with external representations of the area through deprivation statistics or press reporting of crime; even the masculine bombastic nostalgia of industry was felt like a well-rehearsed tale.

“And all the people we’ve worked with – if you think of St James’ the community group heritage centre, and the people we’ve met a Pendow [a good neighbourhood project], and all the people from Archive for Change which is in this exhibition and other groups – from over the last year of *just being in the West End* and doing a temporary exhibition [*Benwell Wedding Tales*] with them and consulting with Judith in a very informal way about what would she wanted out of this. One of the main things she said was don’t tell a story about the West End. Don’t have this kind of paternal, big organisation museum voice telling ‘The’ story of the West End” (Q, 2013, my emphasis)

As I described in the first part of this chapter, the West End is a place of constant flux and it tells a particular story of urban change and community action. As an assemblage, the exhibition aimed not to tell ‘a’ or ‘the’ story of the West End, but to hold together all these different things, ideas, and people that make up this place, through time and through space. As a ‘performative’ exhibition (after Latour and Weibel, 2005), *West End Stories* sought to maintain the complexity, diversity and emergent nature of place and community through display. Mary Bouquet describes the process of moving from concepts to exhibition design as “a three dimensional, visual process of meaning making” (2001, p.195). In a similar way, Q clearly saw the making of *West End Stories* as a process of ‘translating’ ideas into a ‘composite artefact’ that would then take on certain representational powers (Bouquet, 2001, pp.195–96). Looking at the details of Q’s practice over that year – a practice which I described above as a craft, of repeated encounters with community, of ‘just being in the West End’ – we can begin to see the many people, conversations, cups of tea, sessions of pearling and stitching, as well as their progressive entanglement into networks of engagement. In this assemblage perspective, we come to see and value knowledge as co-produced through a multitude of interactions¹⁰⁰. In this way we can read Q’s act of curating as an attempt to translate or extend the networks of engagement into representations and modes of display¹⁰¹. This view highlights the very interdependence of this knowledge, and so the exhibition can no longer be seen as straightforwardly sole-authored. Indeed the very idea of authorship is opened up in this reading.

¹⁰⁰ This is also echoed in the PAR perspective that underpins this thesis, which recognised “the existence of a plurality of knowledges in a variety of institutions and locations” (Kindon et al., 2007, p.9).

¹⁰¹ This was also expressed in to the choice of the minimalist interpretive strategy, which enabled visitors to make their own interpretation rather than “laying it on heavy” (Q, 2013). No visitor evaluation was undertaken as part of the research, which limits to some extent the discussion here; however, this is justified in terms of the thesis’ focus on the practice of museum professionals, and less on audience meaning-making.

Here I find Yúdice's (2003, p.328) notion of 'collaboration' useful for rethinking co-production. *Collaboration* underscores labour to emphasise that there is always more than one party involved in contributing to an event (in his research, an art event). The concept acknowledges the many people who provide the stories and intensities (another assemblage term) that drive the content of the exhibition, but whose labour (and knowledge) is often invisible or ignored – they are considered neither authors nor co-authors. *Collaboration* recognises the multiple forms of labour entailed in a 'multipurposed, multiaudience, multilabored event' (see also Mar and Anderson, 2012, p.11). The network of engagement implies such connection and collaboration. However, as emphasised in many accounts of museum-community partnerships, collaboration ends up favouring the ones who are already on top (see Chapter 2). The relations between the museum and the community are often less than equitable, and in critical accounts of museum collaboration, issues of power are a key concern: the museum co-opts and exploits, and the community is disempowered. But by taking an assemblage perspective and considering the complex social and material interactions of things, people, and organisations that constitute spaces like St James', we come to acknowledge the multiplicities of entangled agencies within these *collaborations*:

“This is my work, this is me being involved in this, I am of this stuff as essentially some kind of curator, but I feel that the partnerships that we've had with people, with groups outside the museum, for me, have been genuine in putting these together. There's been genuine – informal conversations – but a genuine partnership where they've understood what I'm trying to do. And what *we're* trying to do. Because like St James' (...) they're focused on heritage and culture in the area, and they're just a gang that wants to do things just like [the museum] is a gang that wants to do something. And I just see it as two gangs working with a kind of common interest rather than us coming and using them to sort of justify us working with people. (...) I needed to meet people and I needed to understand the area a bit more and I needed to be talking with people.” (Q, 2013, emphasis added)

In this way, Q's practice of curating can be understood as bound up with his practice of community engagement: a practice that is a slow, attentive, repetitive craft (pace Sennett) of getting to know and understand the West End. As a craft, it is deliberate labour, which comes through the repetition of encounters, work and engagement with the communities, in shifting but acknowledged power relations. By viewing curating as a process of assembling, the act of curating can be understood as a distributed act of creativity. Creativity in this sense is about assembling and holding together a multiplicity of intentions, influences, and circumstances. Q's process was therefore based on a situated and embodied reasoning, his choices influenced by the process of *collaboration*, his creativity

affected by his connections with the West End, his objectives framed in a common interest. Through conversations, activities, visits between organisations, and the craft of 'just being in the West End', Q became to some extent (if momentarily) part of the West End as a complex, changing place, as well as being part of community as it emerged in these processes and assemblages. For Q, it was exactly this process of crafting informal, everyday relationships over a long period of time that felt different to the previous practices of the People's Gallery, which he had described as 'ad hoc' and rushed (see Chapter 6).

By taking an assemblage perspective, it is possible to read the exhibition as event in a longer process of working in the West End. This long term process of active listening embodied the values of co-production in particular, the values of working with people in a co-equal manner, and the importance of dialogue and reciprocity (Davies, 2010; Lynch and Alberti, 2010). The assembled view highlights the need to understand the practice of co-production a more than a discourse of choice and control. The process of exhibition was not one which would qualify as 'empowerment-lite', or one which was sustained only through 'false consensus' (Lynch, 2011c). Rather, I want to stress the *collaboration* which took place, to recognise community as influential and emergent in the process. Following Latour, communities can be seen to have made a difference, strategic or unintentional, which affect the field of relations. In this assemblage view, agency can be seen as collectively distributed, extending some legitimacy for museum staff to do the actual work of display, against some of the more negative narratives of co-option. This also foregrounds relational and proximate forms of accountability that need to be recognised and acted upon, since power relations are still an important element in the networks of engagement (see Chapter 5). Certainly, thinking through assemblage requires that we think differently about accountability in relation to the assembling of actors, flows and relations of authority (see Neyland and Woolgar, 2002). Within a relational view of accountability, I find it more useful to talk of courtesy and manners (echoing the words on Outreach in Chapter 7) rather than co-option and conflict, and I want to stress that in my mind there is nothing timid about this claim. Far from meaning that there is no politics to be done in museums, instead it can be located through a different lens. It signals the vital importance of the affective nature of museum-community encounters, however mundane, and points to some of the political possibilities that might be set in train by such an orientation (which joins the claim put forward in Chapter 7). I am aware however that my analysis risks its opposite reading, and that it will return us to viewing this kind of agency as a more traditional, single-

authored form of curatorial practice. On the other hand when this experience is attributed solely to the curator alone, as so often happens in the present day rhetoric of creativity, something is lost, the collective event is traduced. This chapter has pointed to the value of more nuanced readings particularly those that acknowledge a more distributed view of this agency and creativity, as co-existing with other dynamics which influence and are influenced through interactions. As this chapter is at pains to stress, the legitimacy of Q's creative work of curation is inseparably connected to a longer-term, creative and care-full engagement with West End.

When asked what his role had been and whether he had curated the exhibition, Q replied:

“Well what’s curating? It’s like to care for something. (...) Some people who see themselves as curators think you need some kind of privy knowledge to put objects next to each other, and I don’t think you do. This exhibition is about people, about an area, about the West End.”

This view of curating as taking care enables us to extend the labour of curating to the labour of taking care of people, of a community, of an area, which in turn, connects it with the craft of CE I have described in the first part of this Chapter. In this way, the act of curating can be understood as only a moment within a longer process of engaged museum practice. Such alternative understandings of curating and co-production can help move beyond the critique-contest impasse of the current literature by offering a new lens and advancing of practice-focus on other dimensions of CE.

This interpretation is useful for rethinking the role of the curator (or community curator) and the abilities (skills + dispositions) required. The ‘good work’¹⁰² and craft of curating is experimental and flexible; it is also honest, empathetic and mindful of its circumstances (pace Sennett). It extends the practice of taking care of objects to taking care of people, and the nature of such relationships as more-than gathering people’s knowledge or personal objects to a longer commitment based on an ethics of care (Chapter 7). The craft of curating combines the curator’s knowledge of collections with the knowledges and ways of knowing of communities (experiential, emotional and otherwise). Fundamentally, it recognises this knowledge as co-produced in the encounters and interactions with the communities. Such a relational view can help to dislocate the situated dimension of

¹⁰² Recently the [‘Manifesto for Good Curatorship’](#) was launched on the Collections Trust website, as a response to austerity and the loss of curatorial posts across the sector. However, this manifesto is still entirely about specialist knowledge; it makes no reference to co-producing knowledge or to community collaboration.

museum practice and open it up to community interests, knowledge and expertise. In this way, the practice of curating can be reconnected to the practice of community engagement, and the museum and its materially bounded work environment are extended beyond institutional boundaries.

8.8.2. Towards sustainable networks of engagement

For the Outreach Team, *Benwell Wedding Tales* and *West End Stories* were planned as events within a much longer term commitment to working in the area:

“[*West End Stories*] is going to be up for 6 months. We’ll do things around it; we’ll take elements to St James’. Across these six months we’re going to get conversations started, get a buzz started about the West End and the different histories that are there (...) it’s just like experimenting and I see it as let’s see what happens off the back of this” (Q, 2013)

The plan is for elements of the exhibition, including museum objects, to be later displayed in a variety of community spaces such as St James’ and the West End Library. These so-called ‘satellite exhibitions’ will have a stronger focus on people bringing objects in and recording oral histories (for the museum and the community archives). There will also be a wider programme of events, entitled ‘West End Stories in the community’, which includes talks, walks and activities that will take place across the neighbourhood, as well as a website. The aim of this continued work is about creating museum outposts in/for community at St James’, and further positioning the museums as a community resource (see Chapter 9). The future ambition for Outreach is to replicate this practice across the different TWAM venues in order to continue to take the museum *out* into the community. These activities consolidate the team’s second new model for CE, which aims to become sustainable exactly through its experimental nature and the practices of craft that enable the emergence of different museum-like activities.

While the exhibitions I have presented are empirically interesting to examine an event within the networks of engagement, these networks will continue to evolve, inside and outside of the museum institution. As Q put it, “with Judith we are now talking about West End just carrying on as a thing” (2013). As Sennett notes, while craft-work may result in making something, its process is never complete. Thinking through assemblage then, the next step for research would be to continue tracing the assemblage, the ‘thing’ as it carries on. In the final part of this chapter, however, I want to consider how the practice of CE might also be reconnected to other parts of the museum, by examining the infrastructures

that are required to support the craft I have described. As such, I continue to trace back the process through which *West End Stories* was assembled to examine how Outreach attempted to bring this experimental practice back into the more stable institution of museum, and some of the limits of this translation.

8.9. Infrastructures for craft

This final section echoes the final part of Chapter 7 to advance this thesis' concern with the infrastructures that sustain CE as part of an organisational research on museums. As was noted then, my use of infrastructures relates to practices *and* practical frameworks that extend the museum beyond its institutional boundaries, and temporarily hold together a shifting multiplicity of actors, intentions, influences, and circumstances.

In terms of the practices that are the first element of infrastructures, in this chapter I have described at length the craft-work of the Outreach Officers in engaging with and sustaining networks of engagement – assembling people, objects, ideas and community ways of working. As I noted very early on, an assemblage perspective may at first seem at odds with the focus on professional practice which guides this thesis. However, I suggest that the analytical approach of assemblage can reveal much about the nature and labour of CE. By using 'craft' to describe practice, I have shown the ways in which Q (in particular) operates within the assemblage that is created by the networks of engagement. 'Craft' becomes his practice of moulding the parts of the assemblage to which he has access to. As a craftsperson, the challenge of the Outreach worker is one of translation into organisational structures:

“There is an element of when you come back in the organisation you have to fight for those communities, you have to represent those communities. There is this niche where you are when you are an Outreach Officer when you go out, you come back in, and you're like a mediator” (Outreach, 2012).

A number of elements of this craft have already been highlighted: repetition, routine, patience, active listening, experimentation and being present in community places. Beyond the more solitary craftsmanship of Sennett, the craft presented here emerges from encounter and interactions, and is enacted through translation and mediation. .

Q often stated that there had been a lot of serendipity in how this work, and the exhibition, had come together. In its original meaning, serendipity is more than a happy coincidence, it

is a both luck and wisdom by which something is discovered not quite by accident: there is also a certain skill, knowledge and disposition by which discoveries are made (Merton and Barber, 2004). Serendipity requires a planned kind of vagueness, as well as a sensitivity for seeing and making fortuitous connections. It requires patience and attentiveness that are also part of craft-work. Indeed, serendipity is also an important manner through which networks of engagement emerge: where people, materials and ideas come together.

In terms of infrastructures then, how might the flexible, responsive and serendipitous craft influence organisational structures and cultures? As Q (2013) commented, there is a tension in this translation: “Working in the community, everything is opened and shared – and when it comes back into the museum, everything tends to be closed”. What parts of the museum assemblage can be moulded to work in different, more open ways, and to involve community needs and interests?

This is perhaps the second dimension of craft, which I have previously talked about in terms of Outreach ‘tactics’ and making ‘adjustments’ within museum institutions (Chapters 6 and 7). The work of craft is thus also required *inside* the museum, to assemble other staff, procedures, and organisational ways of working. Of course, many of these negotiations were highly specific to the circumstances of the project and the museum at the time; yet they also reveal broader themes. As Q commented:

“It’s been about thinking about how things are working, and how I can do things, and then how the system here works” (Q, 2013)

At the very beginning of the mapping exercise, the Outreach Team had booked up the exhibition space three years in advance (the first slot available), without knowing what the exhibition would be, or whether indeed there would be an exhibition in the traditional sense. Booking a gallery as a blank space was unprecedented and this did not sit comfortably with all staff or managers. Blank sheets, questions marks and uncertainty are difficult to resolve and accommodate within the certainty-driven world of museums where detailed exhibitions programmes are set up to five years in advance, and plans, procedures and Gantt charts are the certainty tools through which staff perform their work (see Chapter 6). Q described his work as operating ‘a little under the radar’ since the work in the West End was so open-ended. But in the efforts to render this work valuable within the managerial dimension of the museum (see Chapter 5), records were made of every meeting, who attended, and as many numbers as could be collected.

During the process of the exhibition, Q described the ways he had to work around other team's workloads and negotiate institutional templates in order to make possible different approaches¹⁰³. Such 'templates' are not necessarily only written procedures, but also the tacit habits and cultures of organisation which start to stick and become 'solid' barriers (after Ahmed, 2012, see Chapter 6). Q's practice can be seen as crafting temporary infrastructures that enabled his practice in the community to move into the museum by negotiating differing priorities of other staff and enrolling them in his process. There was a kind of craft-iness also in how Q described this enrolment. For example, during the early work of mapping communities, Q enrolled various staff and their skills through engaging curators in facilitating the store visits for the community groups. By enrolling other parts into the networks of engagement, the aim was to embed this work and make it more sustainable, and more prosaically, it was about sharing the excitement and enthusiasm the Outreach Team felt about their new ways of working (such an emotional dimension is itself a part of Sennett's view of craft).

As the work in the West End moved back into the museum institution with the second exhibition, Q re-aligned his practice with the structures of the organisation. In terms of the requirements of the museum, time tables and interpretation plans were produced. This work also served to raise awareness for community partners of the different procedures and time-frames of museum work (a tension that became visible in *Wedding Tales*). A memorandum of understanding was developed to outline the partnership between the museum and St James'. This co-written document outlined ways of working and made 'official' the future ambition for an 'outreach venue' at St James'. Such official documents are practical infrastructures that go some way in 'thickening' (to use assemblage speak) the relationships developed in the West End by enrolling the whole of the museum organisation (see Chapter 7).

Inside the museum, Q has also needed to negotiate a series of tensions, around the discourse of choice and control, interpretation 'templates' and perceptions of quality (Chapter 6). I include a long interview excerpt here:

“When I was talking [the venue manager] through what this was going to look like she was a bit shocked. One of the questions [she] asked me was ‘Are these things that participants have selected?’ And I went ‘no’. And she was like ‘What!?’ Because

¹⁰³ There were also many individuals who were helpful, in particular the line manager for Outreach, without whose support it is less likely that this work would have taken place.

[senior managers'] idea is that this is Outreach so they'll be some kind of token 'this has been selected by Joe Blogs for this reason'. (...)

And she said 'What about the themes of the exhibition?'

And I kind of said 'The themes are stated. This is the West End'.

'So you haven't divided it into themes? So we've just got the objects labels?'

And I think she was a bit shocked and she said 'Oh, alright this is just a traditional exhibition with lots of random things.'

And I thought, but I didn't say this to her, I mean, I've not picked them out of a tombola....

(...)

Or the jam. That box is full of jam that's never been open and you've got senior managers come in ... and they just don't get it. But there's nothing to get. It's just an object, it's just a thing. But what do they want us to do? Tell everybody what it's like?

(...)

When the managers come in here and they are introducing people they describe it as like a community exhibition and by then they've not really had a look at it. And when they are going through they realise it looks like quite a high end sort of thing – [and they are thinking] 'oh but I thought this is like a community exhibition'

These extracts reflect some of the different sites of tension I have explored in Chapter 6. Once again, they express the different meanings and purposes of CE – as either focused on outputs or a more embedded, long term and open view of engagement and its possible outcomes. The extracts also highlight some of the practical areas that need to be negotiated as CE is translated into the museum, in particular around interpretation and modes of display. Finally, the tension remains over the perceived quality – and value – of this work, and so the internal craft-work of enrolling staff and adjusting institutional arrangements becomes ever more important. As I discussed in Chapter 7, adjustments draw on and modify existing practice, and as such this craft is also part of the politics of practice that works from within the logics of the museum and advances a different model of CE. As Q (2013) commented, "there is me in this [exhibition], and community, but there's also the museum". By highlighting these different parts of the assemblage, and the work that can be done to influence and mould its shape, the aim of this chapter has been to further explore the nuance of high quality engagement work as well as its institutional work.

8.10. Conclusion

This chapter has sought to examine the second new model of CE of the TWAM Outreach Team through the work of ‘mapping’ a specific local community and the work of collaborative exhibitions making. Through an assemblage perspective, I proposed the concept of *networks of engagement* as the associations and concentrations that temporarily assemble people, objects, interests and organisations. My particular intention was to orient my analysis to examine the *work* of assembling, and in particular, the role and practice of museum staff. Through this orientation we can reconceptualise CE as a craft: first, to describe the practice of producing networks of engagement and of including the museum in already existing networks of engagement in the community. Second, to describe the work of curating as the creative work of translating and extending the networks of engagement into modes of display. And third, in relation to crafting infrastructures to support such approaches CE within museum institutions.

Much like I presented the conclusion to Chapter 7, here I want to draw out four critical points which proceed from recognising CE as a craft. A first point is to recognise the purposeful work of CE as part of everyday encounters and mundane interactions with community organisations and locations. While I am elevating this practice to craft, I want to stress that this is also an *ordinary* practice of CE workers (like care, in Chapter 7). It is because it is ordinary that its subtlety needs to be articulated to understand the qualities of community engagement. CE comes through the repetition of encounters, work and engagement with the communities, in shifting but acknowledged power relations. Like care, craft is a skill and disposition: it is experimental and open-ended; it emphasises time, patience and repetition; it requires attentiveness and intuition for seeing and making connections (a talent for a planned kind of serendipity). Critically, craft is itself underpinned by an ethics of care (see Chapter 7). By elevating ordinary practice as craft, my aim is explicitly linked to the politics of practice: to reframe CE in order to give it value and recognition as an essential professional criterion within the structures of museum organisations.

Secondly, craft brings relations into the centre of practice; it represents the work of developing relationships between people, between people and objects, and between people and the museum, in the process of CE. This work is about producing networks of engagement, and enrolling the museums into existing community networks. The

assemblage perspective in fact shifts the understanding of 'community' as emergent and as assembled in these interactions. As such, the idea of community-building can also be conceptualised as a craft¹⁰⁴. By using craft, I aim to describe how museum staff operate within the assemblage that is created by these encounters. In this sense, craft becomes the way of moulding the parts of the assemblage that are accessible. Specifically, I spoke of this work as providing in-kind support to community organisations and positioning the museum as a community resource. Such work is about collaboration towards connecting the museum with community interests, voices and knowledge.

Third, the recognition of CE as craft can help rework notions of co-production (as a specific element of CE) in ways that are more powerful than the discourse of choice and control only.

By taking an assemblage perspective, I showed how the exhibitions assembled a multiplicity of influences and agencies, and as the outcome of *collaboration*. In terms of the museum studies literature, so far not enough attention has been paid to creativity in co-production accounts: how it emerges; the role of staff as part of creative (rather than simply managerial) engagements with participants; the collaborative nature of these encounters and the kinds of knowledges and associations that are produced. By taking an assembly perspective and thinking through craft, this chapter has presented an alternative lens through which to view co-production as a distributed and collective act of creativity. Most significantly, this view highlights the importance of all the work that happens before and after exhibitions. In this way, the craft of CE is reconnected to the practice of curating. This, and a long term view of CE as a craft which proceed from repeated encounters and the work of 'bringing the museum out into the community', can also help move beyond the critique-contest impasse by drawing attention to how other forms of participation and influence that can reshape museum work.

Finally, CE as craft also draws our attention to the infrastructures that are organised within institutions to support community work. I view this craft as working through improvisation, tactics and adjustments within the logics of the museum and as opening up further possibilities for community needs and interests to influence museum work.

¹⁰⁴ That is not to say that museum staff are the makers of community. Community-building is a far more reciprocal process.

In the next chapter, I set the practice-based concepts of CE as craft and CE as a practice of care to frame the major theoretical contribution of this thesis, announced in the introduction: the theory of the distributed museum.

Chapter 9. The Distributed Museum

9.1. Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I described the purposeful work of small cohorts of staff as they navigate, resist, and adjust their institutional arrangements. In those chapters I made the museum small: I focused on the intimate scale of the museum encounter, and discussed the care-full craft that sustains CE practice. In this penultimate chapter, I wish to make the museum large again by explicitly locating it within wider societal processes to consider how the politics of practice developed by the Outreach team at TWAM can be seen opening up political opportunities for creating *new* museum institutions. I want to propose a new theoretical, epistemological and action-oriented perspective for museums by introducing the notion of the *distributed museum*. While this might strike of the ‘yet-to-be-realised’, ‘what should happen instead’ narrative I critiqued in Chapter 2, the aim of this chapter is to translate the *already happening* practices observed at TWAM as evidence for a distributed form of the museum. So far however these approaches have struggled through institutional interstices and fissures; creating distributed museum will require radical conceptual shifts across museums. In order to address this challenge, I discuss a museum theory of multiples (after Hinchliffe, 2010), whereby the distributed museum exists alongside other versions of the museum. Here I link back my discussion from Chapter 5 on the notion of relational accountability to connect community needs and interests with the other drivers and stakeholders of museum work, and propose a modified balance between the different multiple functions of museums.

In the second part of the chapter, I consider the future ambitions of the TWAM Outreach team as further insight into what form the distributed museum might take in a practical sense, as a community-based resource. Continuing in this practice-inspired position, I offer some reflections for positioning the museum as contributing to emergent forms of ‘progressive localism’ (after Featherstone et al., 2012). I wish to argue that in the context of budget cuts and welfare reforms – which have been a key context in which this research was situated and will certainly continue to affect the museum sector in years to come – a distributed view of the museum can provide alternative responses to austerity at a local level. Such reflections contribute to wider reflections on the potential role of museums for

social and political change, a topic of research that continues to be prominent in museum studies, cultural studies and cultural geography.

9.2. The Distributed Museum

This research has articulated and mapped the practices of CE museum workers as they seek to connect the museum with its locality and extends its presence through all sorts of community and public spaces. In Chapter 7, the museum extended towards the health and social care sector, and in Chapter 8, the museum extended into the community and heritage spaces of the West End. Through this work (which I have already described at length) a new formation of the museum is imagined, which I call the ‘distributed museum’, through which the museum is linked to community needs, interests and spaces.

The notion of the distributed museum proposes a view of the museum that can be conceptualized as comprising of a series of networks of interest that extend beyond the boundaries of a single institution (see Dewdney et al., 2012). The museum travels in and out of its institutional walls and community spaces. ‘Distributed’ is not an entirely new idea in museum studies, but the intellectual project I describe here is different from current conceptualisations in several ways. The idea of being distributed or networked is currently being explored by those interested in digital engagement, i.e. ‘distributed’ links to how the museum is made across virtual and physical spaces (e.g. Bautista and Balsamo, 2011). Similarly, I use notions of ‘flows’ and ‘networks’ but my discussion in this thesis does not engage directly with the digital realm. The concept as I employ it shares many sensibilities with the idea of the ecomuseum (Davis, 2008) and even André Malraux’s (1949) ‘museum without walls’; however my interest in the distributed museum is not only ontological but also action-oriented – that is, it demands new forms of practice that link to local practices and centres on museum-community relations. The way I develop the distributed view has a similar starting point to that described by Dewdney et al. (2012b) in their proposal for a post-critical museology, namely, a concern with positioning the museum as a space of circulation¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰⁵ Dewdney et al. (2012b) employ an ANT approach in their discussion of Tate Britain as a distributed museum, focusing primarily of the circulation of images and museum’s relation to culture.

I use the term distributed museum to describe the form that the museum takes as it is made through the practices of CE as a practice of care and as craft. My discussion draws from the assemblage approach described in Chapter 8. The distributed museum depicts an understanding of the museum which accommodates a multiplicity of actors, intentions, influences, and circumstances, of the museum and of the community. In these terms, the museum is continually made and re-made through *networks of engagement*. Fundamentally, the distributed view of the museum disrupts the traditional, contributory model of the museum which dominates museum theory and practice (see Chapter 2).

9.2.1. From the contributory museum to the distributed museum

The established model of the contributory museum is a model that defines the museum as a place that individuals and groups can input into through donations, bequests, telling their stories, by simply visiting or by taking part in a museum project: the museum is “a place to which tribute must be paid” (Dewdney et al., 2012b, p.156). Certain codes, languages and knowledges are expected as valid and valuable forms of contribution – for example the form of an interpretation for an artefact, or the way to behave in an exhibition space. However, by focusing on contribution, the museum misrecognises entire sets of networks through which culture is being made, and where culture could connect. The distributed museum acts like a connector, linking people, ideas, and projects back into its collections and buildings, and connecting up its collections, ideas, and staff by moving out towards different community nodes, such as community centres or healthcare providers. The museum is not at the centre as in the contributory model – indeed, there is no centre, rather there are multiple nodes, and the museum is just one such node that can connect to others.

There are a number of other limitations to the contributory view. First, the contributory museum is based on a static view of community. A fixed view of community as stable and coherent has been widely critiqued elsewhere (see Chapter 2). In Chapter 8, I presented a view of community as emergent and created through networks of engagement. The distributed model of the museum holds onto this emergence, multiplicity and polyvocality. It moves away from a view of the community as something that is ‘out there’ and waiting to be engaged; rather it views the community as something that is created by the museum, and that can also help create the museum.

Second, as I described above, the contributory museum is based within a core/periphery model where “tribute goes to the centre, while an established set of values is disseminated to the margins” (Dewdney et al., 2012b, p.157). The emphasis at the core is on the cultural values of the museum. The distributed view works against established hierarchies of cultural value (and knowledge and expertise) as it takes the view that cultural value (and knowledge and expertise) is never fixed, rather it is co-produced through engagement. For example, for the communities in the West End, the history and culture of the area is not fixed in a way that fits a single coherent story. Instead, the communities of the West End experience culture as the area changes. *West End Stories* presented one form of experimentation in displaying a more distributed view. There is a need for further research and experiment in how some of these elements are interpreted by collections; how they might translate into display; and how things can be made public (see Latour and Weibel, 2005).

Thirdly, the contributory model is based on a deficit model of engagement (see Chapter 6), where it is assumed that participation in museums can improve individuals and this improvement will ‘ripple out’ to communities. Instead, the distributed museum focuses on community capabilities and assets and supporting community development.

So far, debates around participation have been about the need to reform different areas of museum practice and management (especially curatorial practice) in relation to communities and with their help. In the contributory model, the function of CE is for people to participate in museums; however, it is mostly always driven by the museum’s agenda. As I discussed in Chapter 2, the very call for greater participation in the museum is itself already part of the political rationality of the museum. Participation happens within institutional boundaries, and often its principle function is that of legitimation: it is ultimately redemptive (Dibley, 2005). In the contributory model – which I argued also frames the critical literature – ‘change’ is about embedding or mainstreaming participation; it is not about changing the institution.

The distributed model reverses the contributory model and turns it on its head: the question is no longer ‘what can the community do for the museum?’ rather it becomes ‘what can the museum do for the community?’(Dewdney et al., 2012b, p.156). The distributed model shifts from a logic of tribute to a logic of solidarity. It asks: how can museums become included in community lives? This simple question provides a framework

to facilitate reflection on current institutionalised practices and even a radical call to reshape the spaces of community engagement to enable more meaningful collaborative work.

Next, the distributed museum requires a different conception of engagement theory in order to reflect more of the complex realities of engagement in practice.

9.2.2. From ladders of participation to networks of engagement

As I described in Chapter 2, participation (and engagement) in museums has been most often examined through a ladder of participation model. The ladder is a feature of the contributory museum which positions the museum as a stable place where (mostly stable, mostly coherent) communities come to participate in. It presents a linear view of engagement work moving up (or down) the rungs from manipulation, to tokenistic involvement, to more co-equal partnership; and focuses on a discourse of choice and control. In Chapter 6 I discussed the limitations of the critical purchase of the ladder for discussions of community engagement, in particular as it quickly becomes a discussion of risk management. A key aim of this thesis has been to move beyond what we might call 'managerial/procedural' accounts of CE; in turn, I have focused on the notions of care and craft as alternative analyses of practice.

Within the distributed view of the museum, it fits to discuss networks over ladders – while there can be different levels, or ways in through which communities engage with museums, the network metaphor best describes the much broader practice of CE. Networks of engagement consist of the relationships among their members. They temporarily assemble people, objects, interests and organisations. The key element for research is not the 'level' of participation, or how much control has been shared (although attention to issues of co-optation and manipulation are still and always important); rather these questions are part of a broader focus on the practices and moods that enable or constrain engagement and exchange. It is not just about who made the decision, but also about the atmospheres in which the decision was taken. This allows for a different starting point that isn't about 'managing community expectations' but rather it develops an analysis of the practices that support museum encounters and thicken the associations that sustain these networks – what I describe as the craft of community engagement practice.

The distributed model views the museum as a particular set of alignments that can be moulded, shifted and broken to enable new sets of alignment that combine community values, knowledges and interests. The key advantage of such a model for developing museum practice is the ways in which assemblage enables the combining of differences: simply put, it allows for all manner of things to become combined in the museum. The distributed museum is thus made, or assembled, by combining both museum and community needs and interests. Notions of hierarchy are not useful in describing the connections that form networks. The network perspective re-centres the sharing of authority around knowledge production, expertise and cultural value. Value, along with knowledge and ways of knowing, is not disseminated from the centre; it is discovered, created and distributed in the intersections and connections of the network, it is assembled along its many nodes. The distributed museum is relational: it is characterised by the different points of connection, which are themselves points of mediation of different interests and forms of agency. It is in these points of mediation that objects, meaning, interpretations, exhibitions, etc, are created. By describing a distributed model of the museum, I have aimed to show how staff agency is connected with other forms of agency and creativity in community – indeed creativity is also distributed in this view.

Networks of engagement are, by their relational nature, fragile (see Macdonald, 2009). This brings me back to practice, and more precisely, to the infrastructures that can be made to support this form of the museum. In following this practice at TWAM, I observed the new roles for staff that are required for a distributed version of the museum. These new roles focus on the abilities of staff in crafting and sustaining networks of engagement: working outside of their institutional boundaries and facilitating connections with community (for example cultural centres or public health services). Within these different points of connection, the new roles of staff are as spokespersons and negotiators for both the museums *and* the community. This work is aimed towards more caring partnerships that assemble the objectives and priorities of different organisations and locations. Engagement practitioners act as an intermediary. Crucially however, this role is not about ‘managing expectations’ but about bolstering what communities can and should expect from cultural institutions. These new roles are about in-kind support to communities (and not just for ‘museum-like’ activities) and positioning the museum as a community resource, as ‘a link in a chain’ of community organisations.

Another aspect of these new roles is as technicians of their own institutions, creating infrastructures and making practical adjustments to support the interest and needs of communities. The distributed view also announces a new role for (community) curators as creative intermediaries. This focuses on the creative act of collaborative curating, which extends the practice of taking care of objects to taking care of people.

Thinking through networks of engagement brings us to a relational view of the museum: the relations between actors (including non-human actors) are the central focus and the micro-scale is the unit of analysis. Fundamentally, there is a need to think about how community engagement practice can find ways for the museum to participate in the lives of communities. Table 3 summarises the theoretical, methodological and 'action research' shift I am presenting here.

Table 3: Summary of the different museum models (contributory and distributed) and the different theories of engagement (ladders of participation and networks of engagement)

Contributory Museum	Distributed Museum
<p>Linear, unidirectional view</p> <p>Core/Periphery perspective</p> <p>Museum is the centre</p> <p>Stable</p> <p>'What can the community do for the museum?'</p> <p>Tribute logic</p> <p>Community as fixed</p> <p>CE is 'tacked on'; mainstreaming is the aim, not institutional change</p> <p>Deficit model of participation</p> <p>Based on reciprocity</p> <p>Based on representative political accountability and audit</p> <p>Museums as independent space of display</p>	<p>Networked, relational view</p> <p>Assemblage perspective</p> <p>There is no centre, only nodes and connections</p> <p>Fragile</p> <p>'What can the museum do for the community?'</p> <p>Solidarity logic</p> <p>Community as emergent</p> <p>CE <i>makes</i> the museum</p> <p>Focus on assets and capabilities</p> <p>Based on generosity</p> <p>Based on relational accountability and an ethics of care</p> <p>Museum as a community-based resource and support-system</p>
Ladders of participation	Networks of engagement
<p>Focus on choice and control</p> <p>Knowledge and value as fixed</p> <p>Individual agency</p> <p>Staff as (neutral) facilitators</p>	<p>Focus on care and craft</p> <p>Knowledge and value as co-produced</p> <p>Distributed and collective agency</p> <p>Staff as (active) creative intermediaries</p>

9.3. Multiple Museums

In making the museum large again, we are confronted once more with the challenge of balance (Chapter 5). In order to adjust this balance towards communities, I suggest we view *multiple museums*. Each museum is made from different priorities, they co-exist with different rationalities.

By working with multiples, I wish to separate these rationalities but I do so in order that they may be reconnected in different ways. My discussion draws inspiration from Steve Hinchliffe's work on multiples (2002)¹⁰⁶, and uses some of the language of assemblage presented in Chapter 8.

First is the Public Museum, the museum as a public institution. It is the custodian and steward of collections and the narratives and memories of our collective pasts. Its legitimacy is assembled through a 'public interest' settlement and through written statements of the social 'good' done by museums. It is made in response to the (imagined) public need. It is shaped by objects, display cases, stores; as well as vision, organisational beliefs and corporate plans.

Next is the Audit Museum, the museum as organisation. It is assembled through procedures, paperwork, Gantt charts, quarterly reports and account spreadsheets. It is shaped by funding applications, summary of target groups and numbers of people to engage, impact and evaluation reports written in the instrumental language of social and personal development. It is made through a wider 'value-for-money' logic and audit need, and increasingly, an orientation towards income generation.

And third is the possibility for a Distributed Museum formed in the networks of engagement with the community. It collectively assembles interests, intentions, circumstances and actors. It is shaped by and emerges from new museum-community

¹⁰⁶ I draw from Hinchliffe's discussion of the assembly of three urban gardens. He speaks of multiple gardens: the woman's garden (part of a Muslim women's group project); the urban garden (part of the council's sustainable open space activities), and the charity garden (the NGO's management of the garden's instrumental social purpose). As he writes: "These are not three *views* of the same garden, but three ways in which the garden is being made. (...) Rather than *a* garden that is represented in a numerous ways, it may be more interesting to note that the garden is made up of a number of realities. The garden that takes shape will be something of a mixture of the three garden realities, and will depend to a large extent on how these realities relate together" (Hinchliffe, 2010, pp.304–306).

relations. It extends beyond the boundaries of the museum buildings and out into community locations. It shaped by a variety of community and museum interests, and assembled through solidarity statements, but without preconceived plans. It is made through the twin practices of craft and care. It is inherently more fragile, unstable and unpredictable than the other museums. Distributed means the museum cannot stay fixed; it implies that it needs to continuously change, to be made and remade through encounters and interactions.

Following Hinchliffe (2010, p.304), these three museums are not three views of the same museum; rather they are three ways in which the museum is made. Each is made up of a number of different realities. The shape of the museum at any given time is a mixture of these three realities. Simply put, museums have different functions and priorities, as well as intrinsic paradoxes (c.f Bennett's insatiable museum 1995), that generate different demands that cannot easily be resolved. In this thesis I have been interested in how these functions come together, in harmony or in conflict. I argued that there are different discourses of participation in museums because people are located in the different museums and at different times. By taking a view of multiple museums, I want to provide an alternative account of democratising and co-producing museums that moves beyond critical discourses of participation which "produce redemptive narratives that mimic the reformist logic of the museum's own political rationality" (Dibley, 2005, p.6). A view of multiples enables the distributed museum to exist, to be made, alongside the other multiples of the museum. Critically, it enables it to be made from other logics that are external to the museum's own political rationality by recognising how it assembles museum *and* community knowledges and practices.

However, the distributed museum is not about a simple or chronological shift over time to transforming (and redeeming) the museum. By taking a view of multiple museums, I want to acknowledge something the power of 'other' museums – the Public and Audit Museum. Both museums are assembled in much wider sets of connections and priorities (governmental, societal, etc.), and longer histories, and as such appear as more stable institutions/organisations. They appear more 'solid' and difficult to change; they are made of brick walls that cut across them. We need to recognise their weighty reality. The distributed museum must thus be approached as a museum that is made alongside these multiples. To do so requires research to pay close attention to the practices that make this museum – in this thesis I have done so by getting 'under the skin' of the practice of CE and

writing about some of the realities that make up the work of the TWAM Outreach Team¹⁰⁷. These practices reveal that a distributed form of the museum already exists in part of the organisation, where it is being made through ‘adjustments’ of the other forms of the museum.

The theoretical aim here is to reconnect these multiple museums, but to bring them back together differently (or partially connect them, see Chapter 8) so that the distributed museum is connected – rather than subsumed – in different ways to the Public and Audit museum. This brings me back to the concept of *relational accountability* which I proposed in Chapter 5. Relational accountability challenges those parts of the museum that approach communities at a removed distance (for example via appeals to representative democracy), and instead, demands a focus on the in-practice relations of accountability of museum engagement projects. As I argued in Chapter 5, relational accountability has the ability to reconnect the different scales of the museum to provide a framework where community accountability is articulated ‘on a level’ with other forms of public and managerial accountability. Accountability (rather than reciprocity) ‘works’ in this context because it has a critical purchase across the different scales of the museum. I suggest that it can also reconnect multiple museums.

As such, to borrow from Hinchliffe: “the question shifts from being ‘which is the true [museum]’, or ‘which [museum] should we prefer’, to how do these [museums] work or not work together to make a [museum], and, can we make a better [museum]?” (2010, p.307). This is the politics of CE practice: a focus on investing in and crafting networks of engagement; of creating infrastructures through adjustments inside institutions; and the possibilities for a better museum based on forms of relational accountability, founded on an ethics of care, and based in a logic of solidarity.

Although my discussion here is specifically based on TWAM, it is also representative of a wider part of the UK museum sector – museums that are committed to participation but that are also entangled in complex demands. As such the theory of multiples and the possibility for the distributed museum has much wider application to museum theory, policy and practice.

¹⁰⁷ It is worth noting that Hinchliffe’s account of multiples pays much more attention to the ‘things’ that also assemble the gardens. Mine differs in attention here to focus on staff (human) practices, as I have throughout this thesis.

9.4. The distributed museum: a practice view

In the final part of this chapter I continue to hold the lens of analysis at a 'larger' scale to reflect on some of the wider implications at a societal level of the discussion of CE practice so far. In this thesis, I have examined the work of small cohorts of museum engagement practitioners as they are shaping new spaces of engagement. In particular, I have argued that this work should be understood as creating spaces of care in the museum (Chapter 7), as well as creating museum outposts in and for the community (Chapter 8). I argue that the two new ways of working developed by the TWAM Outreach team can be seen as interrelated ways in which the distributed museum is being made. I am asking, 'can we make a better museum?' by considering what the distributed museum can look like in practice and in terms of the future ambitions of the team.

In this second part of this section I want to position these developments as resistance to the local impacts of austerity. I argue it is important to recognise these as such as they point to new societal roles for museums, and I follow Featherstone et al.'s (2012) call to investigate such activities as contributing to emergent forms of progressive localism.

9.4.1. Future ambitions for the distributed museum

Fundamentally, the 'new' practices of Outreach are about making the museum a community-based resource and community-support system. The team's approach develops through crafting common interests between museums and communities (locations and organisations); and through a practice and ethics of care aimed at sustaining these connections. This work positions the museum as a 'link in a chain', for example, directly supporting the activities of social and healthcare organisations and their service users, and the local heritage activities of community centres:

"It links us up, it makes it bigger. It's a much more generous ways of working. It distributes the power as well I think" (Outreach, 2012).

This short quote actually goes a long way in summarising how the distributed museum is made in practice. First, it is about actively searching for links and opportunities to include the museum in the lives of communities. Second it makes the museum 'bigger' by locating it in community, as a link in a chain of community organisations that are both enjoyed and are useful to communities in all their diversity. Third, it is a more 'generous' way of

working, which pays more willing and genuine attention to the aims and agendas of communities and that is more open and transparent about the museum's own objectives. Fourth, it addresses issues of power by focusing more co-equal forms of collaboration and bespoke programmes based on person-centred approaches. A wider aim of this approach is about conveying to communities a different impression of the museum and what they can (and should) expect from it.

The ambition of the team for the future is to embed and scale up the approaches I have summarised here (and discussed at length in Chapters 7 and 8). The aim for 2015 is to deliver four community engagement 'Culture and Heritage' programmes:

- **The Wellbeing Culture and Heritage Programme** – for people with mental health issues
- **The RICH Culture and Heritage Programme (Recovering Identities through Rediscovering Culture and Heritage)** – for people in recovery (including substance use/misuse and people in the justice system)
- **The Platinum Culture and Heritage Programme** – for older people, including older people with dementia and their carers (but not exclusively)
- A fourth programme focused on **satellite exhibition programmes 'in the community'**

The ambition is effectively a whole culture shift in the way CE (and also outreach) is understood and operationalised at TWAM. The first three approaches can be seen as presenting a framework for museum and wellbeing, which I present in summary form in Appendix X (see O'Neill, 2010; Camic and Chatterjee, 2013); while the fourth programme links to community development and capacity-building through culture and heritage activities in localities. As focused programmes, they signal a strong departure from a 'scattergun approach' to CE and other limitations of previous ways of working (Chapter 6). While they remain targeted in a sense, they focus on under-served groups rather than singular identity characteristics or 'tick boxes'.

Alongside the outreach work, the ambition for the first three Culture and Heritage programmes is to offer 'in-house' daily activities in each of the venues. Each themed programme will be co-designed by an advisory board made up of service users and professionals from regional networks. One Outreach staff member will become responsible for the delivery of one 'stream' across the whole museum service. Each themed programme will be multi-disciplinary, drawing inspiration from the whole museum collection. With daily sessions in place, healthcare, social services and voluntary

organisations can then refer service users/clients/members to the different Culture and Heritage programmes. This model follows O'Neill's (2010) proposal for a 'referral-ready' museum, as well as having the potential to develop a social prescribing system similar to 'arts on prescription' (Stickley and Hui, 2012). It is these types of 'packages' that are likely to be considered for public health commissioning, opening up new funding sources to sustain these ambitions (see Chapter 7).

The idea of 'programmes' is an important move away from short term projects and towards more sustainable, long term work. The aim is to 'scale up' the work of outreach, from intensive group work with on average 5 participants, to programmes that have the capacity to engage 15 participants every morning and every afternoon, every day of the week¹⁰⁸. The aim is also to 'scale out' the work of outreach by offering programmes across venues and collections, and activities that can be accessed from service-users through regional networks rather than the restricted venue-district model that is currently in place. A third aim is to 'scale in', as it were, by involving other members of staff (Front of House, curatorial, conservation, etc.) in the design and delivery of parts of the programme –this is also part of about the continuous work of influencing and enrolling staff within institutions to support the infrastructures for CE.

Another ambition of the Outreach team is to re-centre the philosophy of 'lifelong learning' across the museum organisation. This is described in the proposed person-centred 'Progression Pathways'. The pathways provide opportunities for participants in outreach projects to access the museum at the end of a project through other appropriate routes: through adult learning programmes, through individually-tailored volunteering, or through self-directed interest groups¹⁰⁹. These pathways across (and not necessarily 'up') the museum resonate with Nina Simon's (2010) advice to 'scaffold' participation, and are a response to the feeling that participants were often 'dropped' at the end of the 'conveyor belt' model of engagement (see Chapter 6).

The fourth Culture and Heritage programme is slightly different in its focus on co-producing exhibitions and supporting heritage and cultural activities in the community. The ambition is to replicate the model developed in the West End in other venues and their local areas,

¹⁰⁸ O'Neill (2010) is clear about the importance of all these shifts in terms of equality and provision.

¹⁰⁹ The financial incentive here lies in 'personal budgets' being used for self or collective commissioning of museum activities and interest groups (see Chapter 7)

focusing on community development and asset-based approaches to building museum-community relations. The aim is to take all of the museum venues 'out' into the community, and continue the programme of satellite exhibitions, of talks, walks and activities in the community.

These two future plans present the action-oriented perspective of the distributed museum. They also provide examples and inspiration for alternative forms of place-based politics and for enacting cultural policy in more progressive ways, and in a particular time of austerity – themes which I turn to in this final section.

9.5. Community engagement as a site of resistance: towards 'progressive forms of localism'

As I have described throughout this thesis, CE programmes operate in complex social policy formations, with multiple demands, as well as growing pressures around income generation. At present this work is taking place at a time of deep public cuts and welfare reform, while austerity politics in the cultural sector has arguably been 'normalised' (Peck, 2012, p.627; see Chapter 4). The impact of austerity has to be recognised in order to understand how museums are renegotiating their relations with communities, and how engagement work is being re-configured at a time when 'public participation' is central to much government reform. In this section I suggest that Outreach's approaches are taking on a further politicised complexion as they produce alternative responses to austerity reforms at a local level (see Morse and Munro, forthcoming)¹¹⁰.

The two approaches of the team can be seen to be strategies of local resistance to 'austerity localism'. This term is used by Featherstone et al. (2012, p.178) to describe the political mobilisation of the localism discourse by the current government "as part of an attack on the very notion of public/public sector", deployed to instigate further retrenchment of the welfare state through 'roll-back neoliberalism' (Peck and Tickell, 2002). Key elements of an alternative progressive localism are a responsiveness to local needs and aspirations; the harnessing of local capabilities and skills; attention to the connections

¹¹⁰ This paper, in review for a special issue of *Social and Cultural Geography* on 'Placing care in a time of austerity', brings my work on CE at TWAM in conversation with Munro's doctoral ethnographic work on CE at Glasgow Museums, which took place over a similar period (2008-2012).

between local places and global processes; and the possibilities for local initiatives to feed into broader social and political movements (MacKinnon et al., 2011). This lens of analysis is important in contributing to our understanding of the links between policy and research in the cultural sector. While this has not been a key research objective for this thesis, it has in fact always been in the background. What the TWAM research shows is that staff are engaging in these issues and in particular in the debates through which place, community and public provision are being articulated.

In Chapter 7, I discussed the collaborative approach to care developed at TWAM, which focuses on developing shared sets of values with health and social care service providers, within the context of changing public health commissioning frameworks. I described this first approach as deriving from staff's purposeful work based on their beliefs (framed in terms of the 'social responsibility' of the museum in Chapter 5) and recognition of the strains of austerity experienced by these services – for many, the cuts have meant that many of their programmes have been cut or severely reduced, while some support services have closed down entirely. The work of Outreach is creating alternative spaces of care in the museum; it re-frames the museums as a community-based support system that acts as a link in a chain of caring organisations in the community. This work is particularly pertinent and increasingly urgent given the challenges that face the health and social care sector; including growing public health needs linked to an ageing population and the shortage of people to undertake care. For museums with social mission like TWAM, there is essentially a moral/ethical argument to be made for engaging with these wider social issues, which at TWAM was framed specifically in terms of addressing health inequalities in the North East

The work of the team in the West End, discussed in Chapter 8, can also be read as a response to the experiences of austerity across a community, and the controversial issue of place-making through regeneration schemes. One member of the Team described this work in the terms of community support:

“Because of the impact of the recession really (...) I feel now that it's going back to basics in a way – not to sound too Tory-esque – instead of delving into things, being more considered about things and resources as well. Not to replicate what's out there but maybe to hone into more ways of supporting things, supporting communities and community work” (Outreach, 2012).

This work can be seen as contributing to alternative place-based politics in contested and progressive ways. It positions the museum as a community-based resource for identity and

belonging work; as well as sharing museum resources in more generous ways to support community development on community terms. The exhibitions, such as *West End Stories* and its follow-on programmes of satellite displays in the community, link these local place-based politics with global processes, using museum objects as catalysts for dialogue and debate.

In their four forms, the Culture and Heritage programmes aim to further concretise the role of the museum as a community-based support system and resource. In their paper, Featherstone et al. (2012) call for researchers to pay closer attention to local responses to austerity as possible sites of resistance as they contribute to building political practice through which localism is generated on different terms. The research with TWAM shows how small cohorts of museum professionals are redefining the social purpose of museums by looking to how museum objects, collections, buildings and their own professional skills can be oriented towards the practical and emotional support of communities in times of austerity. This is a politics of practice linked to shaping alternative localisms in contested and solidaristic ways, and as practical-political form of the distributed museum.

9.6. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the work of the Outreach team can be seen as creating new museum institutions with progressive social roles. It draws together the discussion from Chapter 7 and 8 to show how the practices of CE as practices of care and craft – practices that already exist in organisations – are opening up new possibilities for the museum. By presenting the concept of the distributed museum I have presented a framework for describing these new museum institutions, and a theory that moves beyond the prevalent contributory model and the ladder of participation approach. The distributed museum focuses the question: how can museum become included in the lives of community? My conception of the distributed museum has four main elements, emphasising: attentiveness to creating connections between community and the museum in the networks of engagement; the need for new roles for engagement staff as creative intermediaries; the importance of harnessing the practices of care and the practices of craft; and a commitment to relational perspective, especially relational forms of accountability. The theory of the distributed museum enables to move beyond the redemption narratives of the current literature by acknowledging the different demands placed on museums

through a perspective of multiples. The theory of the distributed museum is a significant contribution to the field which offers new possibilities for democratising museums.

Through the study of Outreach work at TWAM, I have described a version of the distributed museum in (future) practice directed at changing the museum into a community-based support system and resource. Conceptually then, this chapter moves from an internal politics of practice and adjustments to present the implications of a distributed view for policy that focus the societal role of the museum in terms of community care and asset-based community building. More specifically, this links to the sector-wide ambition movement for positive social change (Museums Association, 2013) and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation aim to transform museums by making them 'more rooted in their local communities'.

Additionally, I have argued that this work is a resistance to local expressions of austerity and can be seen as contributing to alternative localisms. Once more, analytically, I am arguing for recognition of the ways in which staff are influential in how they 'deal with' current policy contexts and contribute to shaping place-based politics on different terms. Such practice opens up new possibilities for investigating the social role of museums and has direct implications for reshaping the policy terms of museums such as 'stronger and safer communities', 'health and well-being' and 'strengthening public life'¹¹¹.

Arising from the close examination of the politics of CE practice at TWAM, the study has found evidence for the distributed museum in practice and in future ambitions, but it is yet to be realised across the whole museum institution. In the final chapter of this thesis, I reflect on the research as a whole and consider the distributed form can be extended to the rest of the museum organisation.

¹¹¹ These terms and variations regularly appear in museum policy statements

Chapter 10. Conclusion

10.1. Introduction

In the introduction to this thesis, I began with what appeared as a paradox between, on the one hand, the prevalence of participation in the official rhetoric of museum institutions, and on the other, how CE workers experience those institutions as resistant to their work. I have addressed this across several chapters by analysing the organising of CE in the museum, and by examining the practice of CE professionals, focusing on how they describe their own work, the tactics they use to make it happen, and the infrastructures they create to maintain it, in spite of institutional barriers. This close attention to the politics of practice has brought me to reconsider CE work through the lens of accountability, and as a practice of care and as a craft. In this conclusion, I present the implication of these three key concepts and offer some reflections on how the knowing-in-practice that has been (co-) articulated through this study can be harnessed for wider organisational learning. While this research has focused on TWAM, the findings and implications of this study are transferable to other museums, and therefore provide useful insights towards developing museum theory and practice.

First, however, I describe the research interventions of this thesis, summarise key findings and outline contributions to knowledge; and finally, conclude with areas for future research.

10.2. Research interventions

The aim of this thesis has been to investigate the role, meanings and practices of community engagement in the museum from organisational and staff perspectives, and through this investigation to reframe the concept of community engagement. In order to address this broad aim, in the introduction I proposed a framework of account-abilities to reflect an intervention in the methodologies, axiology and critical focus of museum participation studies.

Chapter 3 is the first intervention, on methodologies. This research differs from current studies of participation as it offers a close engagement with CE professionals, to present a

unique contribution to the field that unsettles current readings of museums as bounded, rational institutions. My intention was to present a collaborative-ethnographic approach based in participatory commitments to investigate the detailed *accounts* of organisational life by museum workers alongside institutional contexts. Viewing institutions as ‘peopled and practised’ (after Askew, 2009) allows for more nuanced readings of museums: it shows the ‘institutional work’ (after Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006) of professionals; how staff working in institutions also work *on* institutions (Ahmed, 2012, p.22); and how understanding of professional work, values and beliefs develop through ‘ecologies of practice’ (Stronach et al., 2002), which are also influenced by collaboration. Analytically, this draws our attention to the daily bureaucratic struggles, creative negotiations, and the individual and collective commitments of a range of different staff. Methodologically, I argued the need for flexible approaches that move between researching ‘on’ and researching ‘with’ organisations, and critically, that create ‘safe spaces’ for participation in research. The organisational perspective employed in this thesis therefore brings a closer correspondence between practice and theory, which takes account of the constraints of organisational work-worlds *and* allows for an examination of museum work that is more open to possibility. Such approaches to researching practice in organisations contribute to methodological reflections within the wider field of participatory research, as well as having broader application for research on cultural organisations.

My second intervention focused on the ‘full’ term: *accountability*. Chapter 5 proposed a thesis of accountability to examine the multiple logics of participation in museums, highlighting their distinct value spheres. Accountability was a strong theme to emerge through the empirics, and I suggest museums require an additional consideration that is currently missing from present frameworks, which I refer to as ‘relational accountability’ (after Moncrieffe, 2011). Thinking through accountability has implications for all members of the museum, in particular management. Relational accountability requires museum managers to clarify the values, interests and power relations that constitute decision-making frameworks; critically, it requires a much more purposeful awareness of the needs, interests and rights of communities. I suggested that relational accountability can do more in museums than the abstracted notion of reciprocity by holding together a multiplicity of stakeholder perspectives ‘on a level’ – this is where I situate an axiological shift. Relational accountability requires purposeful reflective practice by *all* staff, aiming for what Marstine (2012) calls ‘radical transparency’; it also requires management to enable safe reflective

spaces (and times) where staff can debate and untangle these different pulls of accountability. It will be more or less appropriate to involve communities in these debates, depending on what is at stake. It will require preparedness to struggle with contradictions – between individual, collective and institutional positions for example – and to accept these as inevitable yet productive. Mapping the patterns of accountability in the museum is a continuous ethical practice that is a necessary starting point towards more participatory museums. The framework of accountability represents another unique contribution of this thesis to studies of museum participation.

My third intervention was to re-focus studies of participation towards the *abilities* of CE practitioners in order re-value this work. As I described above, the purpose of this conclusion is to outline how the knowing-in-practice that has been presented through this thesis can be harnessed to enact a collective capability in museums. I return to this main purpose in the next section on ‘recommendations’ below.

A final and broader intervention has been to indicate the values of a geographical perspective by introducing new theories and methodologies to museum practice and museological thought.

10.3. Key Findings

The key findings are here related to the research questions.

1. How is community engagement constructed, mediated and managed across different museum departments?

The analysis found that CE is refracted and redefined through the internal dynamics of organisational rationality and external policy (described as evolving discourses in Chapter 4) as well as through politics, especially at a local level. This question was primarily addressed in Chapter 5, which described the different patterns of accountability and their effects on how staff construct and utilise CE – the implications of which have been discussed above. Through re-contextualisation and conflation with other terms such as ‘audience development’ and ‘visitors engagement’, CE loses its critical potential. The indiscriminate naming of all museum activities as CE can in fact act against recognition and valuing of CE practitioners’ work, as well as against commitment to the more ethical core of CE on the part of other organisational actors. I turned specifically to the question of

institutional commitment by drawing on Ahmed's thesis of statements of commitment as non-performative: "they do no bring about the effects they name" (Ahmed, 2012, p.17).

The research found two distinctive conceptualisations of CE that co-exist in the museum: it is a set of *specialised practices*, i.e. it is the work of Outreach, and it is an *overarching philosophy*, i.e. it is everything the museum does. The key question that disrupted this ambivalence was: whose role is it to 'do' community engagement? (which links commitment to action). Encouraging staff across the museum to reflect on how they can do CE and link with others to do CE, and having senior management encourage and support this reflection-for-action, is a vital starting point to developing the collective capability for more participatory institutions. My aim in this thesis has not been to define a strict model for CE, and in this conclusion I maintain that the term should continue to describe the myriad of ways in which communities (rather than the public, audiences or visitors) are involved with the activities of the museum. A more useful engagement with the term is for museums to approach 'community' in a broader sense, and to continually unpack the particular configurations of power from which CE derives its legitimacy and its purpose.

2. What are the organisational and cultural barriers to community engagement, and what are the effects of these on staff?

In Chapter 6, I described the barriers to CE identified in museum professionals' accounts across two main areas: operational structures and cultures of organisation. I suggested that these barriers describe some of the 'conditions of possibility' for CE, which is further conditioned by a non-performative commitment to participation. First, in terms of the operational structures, the study showed that these barriers are formed from the complex amalgamation of past and current policy, as well as from funding requirements. These have certain effects on the development of more narrow approaches to CE practice, which I described in turn as 'scatter-gun' engagement, 'bolt-on' engagement and 'self-referential' engagement, which emerge within a stifling system of bureaucracy.

Second, the cultures of organisation are the more complex and unpredictable ways in which such operational structures create habits, attitudes and norms. The museum presented in this case study was formed through particular cultures of hierarchy with deeply problematic effects namely, top-down decision-making, team silos and professional stereotypes. The most damaging effects were the pervasive cultures of non-permission and non-recognition. These cultures have an emotional effect on staff who feel their

professional creativity and autonomy as constrained, and their work – indeed their professional identities – as undervalued. These effects were further exacerbated by the (mis)management of austerity in the organisation.

The findings of the study of TWAM resonate with Lynch's provocations and her *Whose Cake?* report, and as such are very likely to be relevant for other large local authority museum services. Certain aspects of these structures and cultures can and should be addressed: I turn to some practical recommendations in the final section below.

In Chapter 6 I described another set of barriers as three sites of tension. First, around the issues of knowledge, expertise and authority in museums, which I contended are settled through notions of quality and public interest. These terms need to be further discussed and debated in museum practice and theory, and are an important area for future research. The second site of tension focused around the operational management of CE. The study found that CE was predominantly framed through the language of risk management – 'managing people's expectations'. This framing in fact replicates a conflict model of community engagement that is prevalent in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, which views communities as antagonistic and engagement as necessarily confrontational. However, in what I observed at TWAM, this was overwhelmingly not the case; while collaborations were certainly framed by asymmetrical power relations, communities were often willing, enthusiastic, and often much more aware of the practical challenges that museums face than they were ever given credit for. Rather, there was a widespread *apprehension* of conflict on the part of museum staff and therefore a perceived need to manage community expectations. This had the effect of paralysing staff and greatly limiting the possibilities for creative engagement work. Another effect that similarly limits CE is what I termed the 'discourse of choiceandcontrol', whereby community control is seen as the main goal of CE; again, this reflects a discourse that is pervasive in the current literature. I wish to suggest instead that in CE, the means – the encounter between the museum and participants, and all those activities and materialities that go on *beforehand* and *afterwards* – are in fact more important than the ends – the decision. The means are in fact *really* important. This is an important shift in the focus of participation studies that is another significant contribution of this study to the critical literature, as it opens up another ground for research that moves beyond the contest-critique impasses discussed in Chapter 2.

The third site of tension I described in this chapter focused on how the skills for CE are currently understood in museums. I observed two equally problematic tendencies: one tendency has been to assert that CE is an abstracted disposition that only few possess, and only certain people can 'do'; a second tendency is to view CE as a straightforward set of tasks that can be compiled into a checklist that anyone can perform. This second framing was linked to an oddly persistent view of homogenous communities as 'out there' waiting to be engaged, despite a wider awareness of theories of community as fluid and contingent. These findings, which first began to emerge through participatory workshops with Outreach staff, have directed the focus of this thesis towards articulating the *abilities* of community engagement practice. I discuss these reflections in terms organisational learning in the following part of this conclusion.

3. How do Outreach workers navigate and influence institutions? What infrastructures do they create to support their work?

The final part of Chapter 6 began to address this question in terms of how CE practitioners negotiate, accommodate and resist organisational barriers – to pass through the 'black lines' and the 'brick walls'. My key aim here was to draw attention to the everyday tactics – the micro-decision and actions of staff – as well as the individual/collectivist values and beliefs that drive the purposeful institutional work of CE practitioners. This would involve finding and creating passage points within current institutional arrangements, as well as influencing other professionals and negotiating their anxieties or reluctance. Staff realigned with the institution, but only at the level of appearance, so as to enable their practice to work more effectively against institutional norms and values. I described this institutional work as working through 'adjustments': this is a politics of practice that operates within the logics of the museum institution, and opens up the conditions of possibility, and therefore the possibility for change – institutional, political and social – from within. In Chapters 7 and 8 I worked through two empirical examples of outreach practice to examine how CE practitioners create 'adjusting' infrastructures to support and sustain CE within institutions.

The contribution of this study in terms of wider knowledge is to draw our attention towards staff agency at a micro-scale, in terms of how staff contest, adjust and 'go around' their institutions. While critical intellectual work has tended to focus on where the museum institution fails, this is significant in terms of advancing more hopeful, creative and resistant

narratives (but not necessarily redeeming ones), as well as pointing towards practical steps that can/should be taken to support this institutional work.

4. What are the skills and knowledge of community engagement work? How can community engagement be reconfigured in light of these?

Chapter 7 and 8 investigated 'what happens' in CE sessions to engage with the 'means' of CE which I suggested are too often absent from museum studies. In Chapter 7 I reframed CE as a *practice of care*, drawing on the geographies of care literatures. I described the affective, relational, material and experiential aspects CE as care work, and how staff bring about the conditions for positive and creative experiences for participants; as well as the practical dimensions of care for establishing infrastructures and sustainable partnerships with social and health care service providers. I suggested that care is fundamental to (museum) participatory practice. This is a key contribution to current critical literature, as it opens epistemic possibilities beyond the critique-contest cycle and the stultifying grip of the discourse of choice and control. As stated in Ealasaid Munro's work (2013, 2014), positioning museums as spaces of care points to an important area for further academic research and innovative professional practice.

Chapter 8 proposed a second conceptualisation of CE as a *craft*, to examine specific aspects of practice: collaborative exhibitions and community development approaches. In this chapter I developed an 'assemblage perspective' to propose the notion of 'networks of engagement', which I developed in Chapter 9 as a new theory of engagement, presented as an alternative to the prevalent ladder of participation and as a concept with wider considerations than those provided by the contact zone. Networks of engagement temporarily assemble people, objects, interests and organisations. Issues of power are still a significant; but fundamentally, this draws analytical attention to *how* things come together, and to the detailed practices that enable and constrain the assemblage.

The notion of craft was used in two related ways in this chapter. First, to describe the practice of producing 'networks of engagement' and of including the museum in already existing networks of engagement. Second, to describe the act of curating as a collaborative endeavour with distributed agency, and as the creative work of translating and extending the networks of engagement into representations and modes of display. Linking back to care which is also a dimension of craft, I suggested a craft perspective presents an

alternative view of co-production as a relational work, and allows for a different politics of practice that focuses on the role of the curator/CE practitioner as an active enabler of communities.

Both these re-conceptualisation of CE as a caring practice and as craft are explicitly aimed at elevating the work-value of this practice as a professional museum ability.

5. What are the implications for future museum policy and practice?

Recognising CE as care work and a craft links to what Gibson-Graham (2006) have referred to as a 'politics of possibility': a politics in which thinking, talking and writing about institutions in these other ways can strengthen their potential as participatory and socially engaged institutions. This also enables to shift this thesis' initial concern with the *conditions* of possibility to opening up their radical potential as politics. This was the intention of Chapter 9, which acted as a reflection on the politics of possibility offered up by Outreach's new orientations and practice.

By framing CE as care and as craft, we begin to discern the contours of a new form of the museum which I called the distributed museum (Chapter 9). A key aspect of this alternative view is to reverse the terms of engagement and the contributory form of the museum.

The distributed model presents a number of interrelated implications for future museum policy, practice and research. In terms of policy, it extends and reshapes current museum policy terms in relation to community, including terms such as 'community resilience', 'community health and wellbeing', and the more generic MA (2013, p.3) statement, 'more relevant to their audiences and communities'. The practices of care and of craft link to practical frameworks such as community care and asset-based community development that can translate into and 'adjust' policy and reposition the museum as a community-based support system and resource. In terms of practice, there is an immediate implication in relation to the need for wider training and discussion within the sector about the abilities required for this work with communities. In terms of research, the theory of the distributed museum opens up a whole new set of approaches and orientations that start with the question: how can museums be included in the lives of communities? I describe some specific future avenues in the final part of this chapter.

This research shows that here is evidence of a distributed form of the museum, however currently this work is driven by only a small part of the institution, and by a small cohort of

dedicated staff. As such this work remains very fragile and it has not yet extended to the whole organisation. However, a key point I want to make in this conclusion is that this study shows that museums *can learn from the inside*. While much of the PHF programme for organisational (presented in the introduction as a parallel context to this research) has focused on learning from communities, I argue in this conclusion organisational learning should also focus on the collective learning of staff that are currently working with communities¹¹².

This is an essential point which calls for consideration of how the knowing-in-practice of CE workers can enact a collective capability for CE in museums, and in this specific case, at TWAM; however, the recommendations are also transferable to other museum settings and indeed cultural policy. I suggest a focus on emphasising organisational learning is more productive than the rhetoric of organisational change that tends to focus on grand upheavals and large scale actions. While the conceptual shifts required are 'large', I am concerned with *action learning* and *small change theory*, which values small actions as contributing to more sustainable organisational learning for change.

10.4. Recommendations for organisational learning

Before I address these recommendations, I want to reflect briefly on the researcher's act of translating in-practice and ways of knowing into something that can be 'delivered' back to the organisation. As I described in my methodology, this study was designed to create knowledge that would be 'useful' to the research partner. This purposefulness was linked to both my personal collaborative research ethics and the funding requirements of the CASE model. I make these reflections also more widely in the context of the UK research impact agenda (see Pain, 2014).

¹¹² This outward-only focus is found across the PHF programme which I observed through various meetings and a residential weekend with other partner museums. The difficulty I found with this focus is that it shifts the responsibility for organisational change *onto community*. I would argue that the responsibility to make organisational change happen is entirely the responsibility of museums. It is the issue of legitimacy, rather, of actions and decisions, that is the key area for collaboration and contestation with communities. A key weakness of the TWAM 'Our Museum' programme as I came to see it is that in focusing on community it excluded Outreach: they are not part of the core engagement group; their skills and knowledges have not (yet) been used to inform the programme development. It is hoped that the reading of this thesis in the PHF context can contribute to this gap.

In this study I set out to consider the different ways of ‘knowing’ CE across a museum organisation. I found that broadly across the museum, CE is known conceptually through ideas of accountability and is known ‘technically’ through spectrums of participation (inform, consult, collaborate). By researching with CE practitioners, I sought to articulate other ways of knowing that get at ‘what happens’ in CE. Perhaps the greatest challenge to enable organisational learning is how to make this knowledge move into other parts of the organisation; to create resonances with other staff’s experiences, as well creating opportunities for as many staff as possible to experience these practices¹¹³.

In the final participatory workshop with Outreach, we discussed two questions:

- What would it look like/*feel like* if other staff understood how outreach worked and applied it to their work?
- How can we now help them to get there?

Together with Outreach we identified three groups of staff, managers, front of house, and curators as key groups in the museum in terms of their potential to influence change, linked to their job responsibilities and their critical mass. While I have not spoken much about Front of House so far in this study, they play a key role as the most public face of the museum, and therefore are important in this conclusion. The implications for organisational learning presented here drawn from this workshop and my own analysis of the overall research. I present the recommendations in three key points, focusing first on the implications of care (here I also return to the implications of accountability), the implication of craft, and finally, by considering how these implications can be put into action in other parts of the museum. Taken together, the recommendations also provide practical ways to expand the distributed model across the whole of the museum.

10.4.1. Implication of care

Talking about museums as spaces of care has much broader implications when we consider the institutional cultures of museum like TWAM: across the team staff feel undervalued and *uncared for*, a feeling that is further exacerbated in the context of austerity. Similar feelings were expressed by other museum professionals in the sector conferences and events I attended. I suggest there is an urgent need to re-centre caring work within the museum’s own cultures and structures. On this point I wish to be clear: museums will not

¹¹³ Helen Graham’s paper on ‘museums and how to know access’ (Graham, 2013) and the conversations I had with her have also inspired some of my final reflections.

be able to care for communities until they care for their own staff. von Krogh (1998) writes that the value of care is a key enabling condition for knowledge creation in organisations. In Chapter 7, I wrote that the value of care is the key enabling condition for community engagement. Bringing forward the arguments of Chapter 7, which outlined the different elements, practice and ethics of care, I argue here that the enabling conditions for organisational learning proceed from a standpoint of care. The demand for re-centring care does not only demand that communities are cared for (and about) but that the practices of caring also extend to and are nurtured by all the members of the organisation. As a reminder, care in this thesis is understood as attentive, responsive, as a 'proactive interest' in the needs of others (responsibility) and the provision of emotional and practice support (competence) (pace Tronto, 1993; Conradson, 2003b; Milligan and Wiles, 2010). I discuss the implications of care across the three staff groups identified above.

First, what might the practice of care look like if applied to management?

- *Recognising staff's contributions* is an essential element in building up care in organisational relationships. However, it would be naïve to expect that a 'recognition and reward policy' alone could ensure care in these relationships. Rather it will require managers to continuously encourage and promote staff's positive development in a number of different ways, for example through staff appraisal that engages more directly with staff identities, values and ambitions; as well as rewarding contributions that are not solely linked to targets or income generation.
- *Proactive interest in teams' work* by management is needed so that senior managers are more attentive and responsive to the ambitions and concerns of their teams. As Outreach put it: "They need to outreach to the organisation. Senior management kind of need to work with us like we work with community groups: we ask questions, we come to their place, we drink coffee, we discuss stuff, we have conversations, we collaborate, we use mutual language". This continuous exchange will ensure that management understand the more ethical core of engagement work, as well as understand the infrastructures that are required to sustain such ways of working, and to consider practical solutions to supporting these within the current structures of organisations.

- *Addressing commitment* to CE across the organisation is a key responsibility for managers. This will mean being clear about whose role it is to do community engagement and how, for example, by developing new clear job descriptions. Such changes will have to include teams in the process otherwise it will likely result in non-performative bureaucratic gestures. Managers will also need to take on a clear advocacy role in terms of CE, built upon what they have learned from the work of their teams.

- *Addressing organisational structures* which can be changed to support staff. Three areas in particular should be reviewed, around collections access and the ‘bolt-on’ approach to CE in museum programmes. The third area is around exhibitions: management need to include more staff in exhibition programming, as well as creating more opportunities for community co-production.

- *Addressing organisational cultures* is perhaps the greatest challenge in creating caring institutions. Management should create more opportunities for dialogue with their teams on how these internal issues can be addressed. This will require management to create safe, inclusive spaces for debate where staff can talk directly to management without fear of retributions – a simple ‘suggestions box’ will not achieve this aim. There is potential in the *Our Museum* programme to facilitate this, following my contention that museums will only be able to engage communities once they have ‘outreached’ their own staff. Managers can address organisational silos and stereotypes by promoting inter-team working, and facilitating staff placements within other teams and venues. Care in organisations is fragile, particularly when job security is uncertain and when workloads are heavy. Management needs to recognise the profound effects of austerity on staff and this should be discussed openly to foster a sense of solidarity within the organisation.

- *Openness and courage in decision-making* are key abilities for caring management. This requires senior managers to see the ‘bigger picture’ that links the work of all the different teams and venues. Staff need to see/feel that management have their ‘best interest at heart’ by making decisions based on the work of their teams (which they find out through a proactive interest in their teams). To this end, I proposed a framework of accountability, and there is scope to develop this further

into a tool or matrix for museum. This could take the form of creating value pyramids through an open process in which *all* staff (and, depending on the project, including communities) discuss and debate what relations and values are key in different museum projects and activities; the top of the pyramid will not necessarily have to have a single value but it will require that priorities are established. Such exercises could ensure that immediate relationships with community groups have as much 'weight' as, for example, the public interest argument. This is a practical attempt to introduce vibrant and ethical debates while developing CE work. This will require moral courage from management to act in situations where decisions are difficult, uncomfortable, and that may go against funders or politicians' will. This courage will also be required to speak out about inadequate resources and policies that impact negatively on the work that different teams are trying to do with communities. This involves being clear about the work that the museum is trying to achieve in the future for communities and society and not just in the short term. It will require managers to work in and with complexity, uncertainty and contradictions

- *Trust* is another fundamental enabling condition for care in organisational relationships. As managers take a proactive interest in their team's work values and ambitions, trust will develop in reciprocal ways, but it has to start with management.

Second, what would it look like if Front of House applied care to their practices

Front of House are a key staff group which can support the creation of spaces of care in the museum. This is done by welcoming visitors, acknowledging them (with hellos and goodbyes) and showing appreciation for their visit. It requires FOH to demonstrate warmth and friendliness that is responsive to make visitors feel they are being taken into account; and critically, that they are not being judged. It is about the active care work of creating safe, welcoming and inclusive museums. In fact, this applies to all staff: "Anyone who is working through any of the galleries, through any of the museum, our job, is Front of House at that time" (Outreach, 2013).

And third, what are the implications for curators?

For curators, two key elements of the practice of care of Outreach need to be translated. First, curators need to make communities feel valued and knowledgeable. This will require a conceptual shift in these teams away from the contributory model of the museum to a more courteous¹¹⁴ and humble outlook and practice, and a more generous relation to sharing expertise as (only) one amongst many ways of knowing. Second, it requires that these teams establish to trust with communities who are collaborating with the museum by sharing their stories and their objects. Curators need to create feelings of trust that run deeper than personal trust in an individual to create trust in the institution. This will require being open to communities about a whole variety of museum processes, for example, how they will take care of an object, what it will be used for, what information will go around it, when the opening will be, what will happen afterwards. It will also require being clear about the terms of the collaboration, and where there are external restrictions. Fundamentally, it requires a broader engagement with the means – the whole process of CE.

10.4.2. Implications of craft

Situating the practice of craft in museum requires promoting two key elements in organisations: creativity and professional autonomy. Senior managers have a key responsibility for nurturing creativity and an appropriate level of professional autonomy to ensure their organisations are vibrant and innovative. In their discussion of managing complexity in museums, Janes and Sandell (2007) make an important call for minimizing hierarchical structures and promoting creativity through self-organisation. They explain the advantages nurturing forms of self-organisation, and some of its principles:

“Decisions are made at the most local level where they can be made well, and this requires that managers respect and nurture the so-called informal leaders - those individuals who exercise influence and authority by virtue of their competence and commitment, and not because of any formal position in the hierarchy” (Janes and Sandell, 2007, p.5)

Supporting this form of autonomy and informal leadership is key to enable collective decisions made outside with the community to come back into the museum. Management will need to recognise and support the new roles of Outreach staff as active intermediaries between the museum and community which are emerging in the context of their new ways of working.

¹¹⁴ See Graham et al. (2013) on the idea of courtesy in museums.

Autonomy and creativity are defined in a wider institutional context, and managers must address their role in these cultures. At the same time, in this thesis I have demonstrated how creativity is also a distributed process which develops through an engagement with others, both between teams in the museum and with the wider community. As such, there is a need for senior staff to promote creative experimentation and exercise 'lenient judgement' (von Krogh, 1998) when staff taking risks makes errors or when projects fail. The focus instead should be on reflection and learning for organisational growth. Managers should encourage collaborative creativity by encouraging different teams to work together to address the issue of a lack of permission from peers. A fundamental enabling condition for nurturing creativity is trust. Managers need to trust their staff, for example, when they spend time outside of the museum. Trust will give rise to staff feeling recognised and valued in the organisation. It is the starting point to creating care-full and creative museums, and that which sustains them.

Viewing CE as craft emphasises the value of 'time' in the process of building community. This means that museum should expect and enable their staff to spend a significant amount of time, (say 10,000 hours¹¹⁵) on collaboration, meetings, visioning, making plans, doing advocacy, craft activities, celebration, etc. This time is required to localise and open up the issues facing the community, as well as their ambitions.

The notion of craft also has implications for curators. While there needs to be recognition that curators work differently with communities and for different reasons, craft enables a reconnection between the practices of curators and the practices of CE, which I have described in Chapter 8. It provides opportunities for curators and Outreach to work collaboratively to support each other's work, and to end the 'bolt-on' approach. Curators will need to provide more collections access and support for Outreach projects, and Outreach to enable more connections with community groups. This can support a productive blurring between the roles of these teams which can support new cultures of participatory museum practice.

The recommendations outlined above provide some meaningful measures of care, craft and accountability that can be applied to other teams' ways of working. The next question is then, how to communicate and transfer these concepts?

¹¹⁵ This is a nearly arbitrary number, based on 2000 working hours per year, and 2 staff working for 3 years on this process in the West End.

10.4.3. Enabling a collective capacity for CE in organisations

In suggesting the ideas of care and craft as ways of knowing CE, my aim was to re-articulate the *work* of CE as essential professional criteria and to give it value within the structures and cultures of organisation. At the same time, my account of CE as care and craft has reinforced the dual nature of these abilities, as a skill *and* a disposition. It is both a practical set of competences and a mindful orientation. The quality of engagement work, the feeling it creates, that which makes it valuable and meaningful, cannot straightforwardly be translated into a menu of actions or a checklist that can then be easily institutionalised. There is a danger also: in attempting to translate these nuanced abilities into a professionalised ‘skill’ – that can thus be taught, measured, transferred – there is a risk that we devalue the importance of ‘talent’, ‘insight’, and ‘empathy’ which may not be taught as skills exactly since these are acquired and honed over time through commitment, love, and experience¹¹⁶.

In talking about ‘abilities’ I am attempting to hold on to this duality. In thinking about ways to enact a collective capability – or ability – for CE in museum organisations, a different conception of ‘training’ is required that provides tailored approaches for different parts of the organisation. These should be aimed at creating helpful and resonant moments to access and recognise Outreach’s ways of ‘knowing’ community engagement.

For Front of House, it could take two stages, first a conversation about their own experiences and ambitions (and the organisational barriers they face), followed by training that would focus on engaging them as active producers of welcoming spaces of care in museums.

For curators, it is less about one training day but rather it is about hundreds of interactions and exchanges between curators and Outreach, creating opportunities for curators to be involved in outreach activities outside of the museum; as well as opportunities to spend time with Outreach partners. Over time these will enable curators to see/hear/feel Outreach’s skill sets and gain insight into the means for meaningful engagement. Without this, the suggestion that participant decision making is not the ultimate goal risks dangerous co-option in supporting staff control and expertise.

¹¹⁶ A similar argument is expressed in the critique of the professionalization and ‘skilling’ of therapy (Moloney, 2013; Davis, 2000) I am grateful to Jenny Laws for bringing this literature to my attention.

For managers, it is also about creating resonances through which senior staff can also see, hear and feel Outreach's practice. Managers need to make themselves available to listen to Outreach's work – the proactive interest I described above – and Outreach need to recount their stories with the same depth, nuance and passion that moved me (as a researcher) to write about their practice. As one member of staff put it in the final workshop: “[We need] to get [managers] to think about how they ended up coming into museums in the first place. It's like we want to take them back to the passion before they had to deal with staff, and budgets, or whatever there is” (Outreach, 2013). There is a potential to cultivate these resonance through the ‘back to the floor’ days that senior staff are expected to do, as well as creating opportunities for senior staff to go to outreach sessions: “spend some time with workers, help make cups of tea, talk to the clients, and have a real honest experience” (Outreach, 2013). There is however, a danger to be highlighted here, in over-simplifications and in lazy abstractions. But equally, there is something intensely hopeful.

As a study which aimed to create ‘useful’ knowledge, it is also hoped that this thesis itself, in articulating the skills and knowledge of community engagement as it has, can provide another resource for organisational learning.

10.5. Avenues for further research

This study inspires a number of avenues for further research. They start with a conceptual shift from a contributory model of CE to a distributed form of the museum, which opens up a completely different set of approaches, methods and principles for future research in museum theory and practice.

While the study specifically addressed CE, its collaborative-ethnographic methodology could usefully be applied to other teams and towards the distributed form of the museum. The assemblage perspective presented in this thesis opens up further research avenues in this vein by including *all* staff in the ways in which the museum is assembled – including Front of House, and ‘behind the scenes’ workers, such as Communications Officers, Designers, and also cleaners (see Morgan, 2012, on the everyday practices of display glass cleaning). Ethnographic research into these ‘unseen’ elements of professional museum work can tell us more about how the museum and its cultures are assembled, as well as how organisations learn and change.

Focusing on other areas of the museum through a distributed view can also open up a range of vibrant and creative forms of museum activities with communities that are not only restricted inside the boundaries of institutions, and that contribute to producing and sustaining culture as a new kind of public organising.

While this study was unique in focusing on museum professionals, there is a definite need for more research that focuses on co-inquiry with community. This is especially needed at this time of continuing 'normalised' austerity. The discussion of the role of cultural organisations in progressive localism in Chapter 9 points towards a new and significant area for research exploring alternative foundations for participation and social engagement, as well linking to broader research on social justice (Sandell and Nightingale, 2012).

Another important strand which stands out clearly as an avenue for further research is in exploring the value and role of cultural engagement in improving health and wellbeing – a new field of study and practice in museology that Chatterjee and Noble (2013) call 'Museums in Health'. This research is ever more needed given the current challenges to health and wellbeing and has clear implications for the museum sector more widely.

This thesis has drawn together the arguments for the position of the museum as distributed. It is no longer useful to think about the museum in isolation, as only a place of display – the politics of possibility have changed. The theory of the distributed museum is an optimistic one and the hope is that it will instigate new networks of engagement between museums and a whole range of community organisations and localities, and stimulate research into supporting new museum geographies.

Appendix I: Brief facts about Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums

Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums:

- manages archives and museums collections on behalf of the five local authorities of Tyne & Wear (Newcastle, South Shields, North Shields, Gateshead and Sunderland) and Newcastle University;
- is responsible for twelve museums, galleries and heritage sites;
- is governed by a Joint Committee of 15 elected members;
- is one of 16 Major Partner Museums in England;
- manages the Arts Council's Museum Development programmes across the North East;
- has been awarded *Designated* status by the DCMS in recognition of the importance of the following collections: Art, Science & Technology, Natural Sciences and Archives relating to shipbuilding and maritime trade;
- manages two World Heritage sites: Arbeia and Segedunum;
- has been awarded Full Accreditation Status by Arts Council England (ACE) in respect of its museums;
- has c. 290 staff
- attracted 3,051,116 users in 2011-2012, comprising 1,800,418 in-person visitors and 1,250,698 virtual visits to its website;
- was successful in securing over £779,000 of external funding for development projects during 2011/12;
- has won 69 national and regional awards for excellence in the last 10 years;
- is regarded as a model of best practice for social inclusion work in UK museums and has a national and international reputation, for in the quality of management, education, audience development, outreach, access and interpretation;
- Approximately 300 - 400 volunteers are active at any one time depending on the time of year.

TWAM Brief Facts, 2012, on file.

Appendix II: 'Museums and Community Engagement: Baseline report on perceptions of community engagement in Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums Staff' – February 2013

This report was written as a result of an online organisation wide survey and presented to TWAM during the research. The Executive Summary, Methodology and Introduction are included for reference here.

Executive summary

The aim of this survey was to establish how TWAM recognises, supports and values community engagement work, to help understand the drivers and barriers to involving staff in community engagement activity. This survey highlighted a number of key findings about staff views on community engagement and the factors affecting involvement. These include:

Key findings

There lacked a shared understanding of the term 'community engagement'. Respondents used the term to refer to a very broad range of museum activities which varied in terms of time commitment and staff involvement. Views seem to be shaped by team are, each with different models of engagement.

- A large number of staff (80%) considered community engagement to be an important part of their job.
- However, what the rest of the survey begins to show is a number of divisions in staff responses.
- In terms of having the skills and confidence, around a quarter of respondents stated they did not feel they had the skills or confidence to undertake community engagement.
- Although nearly all staff indicated they were personally interested in engagement work, many staff indicated that they often lacked the opportunity to undertake this work, especially for staff outside of Outreach and Learning Teams. This was linked to poor internal communication about engagement activities and community networks, and the need for more joined-up forms of working between different teams.
- In terms of motivational factors for staff to undertake this work, the key drivers identified included: personal enjoyment; personal learning; a sense of the importance of this work, in particular, in terms of making a difference to local communities/society; a sense that community opinions matter. Line manager support and encouragement was also highlighted as an important motivation.
- The issue of institutional support was key, and staff answers presented a mixed response: 41% stated they did not feel supported by institutional structures and procedures; 29% answered they did not know, with several respondents linking this to a lack of internal communication about engagement activities.

- 85% of staff agreed that community engagement was a strategic goal of the organisation. However, in terms of a team perspective, the answers were more divided: half agreed that community engagement was a strategic objective of their team, while 28% disagreed, and further 17% stated they did not know.
- Staff identified a number of barriers to community engagement. The most significant barriers included: lack of time within current workloads; lack of dedicated staff; lack of opportunity; lack of funding; and the need to change set ways of working. Other barriers included: a feeling of encroaching on other staff's work; lack of senior level support; too much extra administration involved; lack of recognition.
- When commenting on current practice, respondents highlighted several areas of good practice, including: friendly inclusive venues; high quality programmes and projects; and highly skilled staff.
- Staff also indicated a number of areas where the museum could improve its engagement work. Notably, many respondents reiterated the need for more staff (beyond the Outreach Team) to be given more opportunities to develop engagement work. They highlighted the need for long-term strategic planning to embed engagement work across the organisation, including more joined-up and partnership working (both internally and externally). Staff also indicated that TWAM should involve communities more in decision-making in terms of the museum work.

Recommendations

- The terms 'community' and 'community engagement' should be clarified and a typology of activities developed.
- There is already strong commitment to this work across the organisation. The Museum should consider providing more opportunities for different staff to undertake some aspects of community engagement work.
- Staff should be involved in strategic planning as established through the 'Over to You' programme.
- There may be a need to formalise institutional strategies in relation to community engagement.
- More internal communication and better recording and dissemination of current engagement networks are required.
- The barriers should be considered along with practical steps to address them.
- The Museum has highly skilled people so should consider running internal training courses.
- There is a need to recognise current funding climate and the impact of this on staff.

Introduction

This report is the outcome of a TWAM staff survey conducted between July and October 2012. The survey aimed to assess staff perspectives of community engagement work. The overall goal of this small survey was to explore staff attitudes towards community engagement and the factors affecting their involvement. In particular, the aim of the survey was to establish how TWAM recognises, supports and values community engagement work, to help understand the drivers and barriers to involving staff in community engagement activity.

The survey was designed as part of the PhD research of Nuala Morse, which is looking more broadly at issues of community engagement in museums (see communityengagementresearch.co.uk).

The findings of this survey are presented in this report as part of the 'Over to You' (Our Museum Paul Hamlyn Foundation) programme. 'Over to You' is about changing the way museums work towards addressing community needs and becoming more rooted in local communities. A key element of this programme is organisational learning and reflective practice – that is, the way in which museum organisations and individuals can make sense of, and adapt to change.

The first year of this programme at TWAM is about 'broadening the conversations' around community engagement. As such, this report provides a baseline against which change in organisational culture might be assessed.

A further objective of the survey was to establish the potential need for training and other forms of support for staff around participation and engagement work in museums.

Objectives

The two aims of this survey were to establish how TWAM recognises, supports and values community engagement work, and to examine the different drivers and barriers to involving staff in community engagement activity.

The first objective of the research was to examine the range of engagement work taking place in the museum, and its frequency.

The second objective was to consider how staff relate their own professional circumstances to community engagement practice, including their motivations for doing this work.

A third objective was to consider whether staff felt supported by their institution to undertake community engagement.

A fourth objective was to consider some of the barriers identified by staff to becoming more involved in community engagement work.

A final part of the survey gave space for respondents to reflect on what TWAM is currently doing well in terms of engaging people, and what it could do better.

Methodology

The survey was distributed to all staff as an online survey between July and October 2012.

The survey answers collected are entirely anonymous. Only the first question asked respondents to identify through their professional activities (for example, curatorial, management, conversation, etc).

Front of House	3
Administration	11
Design	3
Curatorial	19
Research	9
Documentation	6
Outreach	6
Archives	4
Learning	21
Conservation	5
Communications	5
Management	8
Volunteering	7
Other	3

Table1: Breakdown of respondent’s areas of activity

‘Other’ responses included fundraising, partnership working, project coordinator, targeted work with looked after children, and maintenance & construction of display. Staff often identified as being part of 2 or 3 different museum activities. This wide scope of activities provides a broad picture of some key questions around community engagement in museums.

The survey was composed of 10 multiple choice questions, many of which included space for free text comments. At the end of the survey were two open-ended questions for people to reflect on the museum’s wider practice of community engagement.

The form of the survey and the questions asked are informed by the wider PhD research – for example, question 2 (Do you coordinate, organise or facilitate any of the following or other forms of engagement?) is based on wider interviews and conversations with staff who described a great diversity of community engagement work at TWAM.

The data was analysed and this report written by Nuala Morse. The executive summary highlights the main findings of the survey, while the main report gives further detailed analysis of the responses through both quantitative and qualitative data.

Response Rates:

67 people viewed this survey, of which 46 people responded to all the questions. As such, this survey only represents a small proportion of TWAM staff.

**Appendix III: Examples of exhibitions with community involvement:
1994 to 2009**

The People's Gallery		
<i>Al Hambra: a study exchange to Spain</i>	Jan/April 1995	West End Muslim women searching for Islamic influences in Spain, their experience captured in images. In conjunction with Newcastle Libraries & Arts, City Challenge and Newcastle One World Association.
<i>Mass Observation</i>	July/Sept 1995	Mass Observation brought together 248 disabled amateur photographers, who recorded a day in their lives during March 1995. Images ranged from disability issues to family life, which provoked conversation and debate about how disabled people are catered for/ A follow-up day of events centre around guest speakers talking about Disabled issues. In Conjunction with NorDAF (Northern Disability Arts Forum).
<i>People for People</i>	Aug/Sept 1995	CVS (Community Service Volunteers) provided a creative display recording the work carried out by volunteers in the community. The exhibition was displayed as an oversized photograph album with art and crafts adding a 3-dimensional aspect.
<i>Cruddas Park - David Pearson</i>	Jan/April 1996	A black and white photographic documentation of Cruddas Park, the environment and its people. As a caseworker in a West End project for men with mental health problems, David Pearson has viewed the West City from a unique perspective, which emphasises the need to view people of the West End in a humanistic manner, despite the concrete environment and social deprivation that is linked to the area.
<i>Interaction - Art as Therapy</i>	Jan/April 1996	The joint project between Plummer Court Occupational Therapy Department and Byker Bridge Skills Centre art rooms produced a variety of art and crafts, paintings and sculpture, which explore the use of art as a medium.
<i>Speak for Ourselves</i>	Feb/April 1996	This self-advocacy group of adults with learning and physical disabilities embarked upon a training course in black and white photography, also using digital imagery. The accreditation of the course was carried out by TOCF (Tyneside Open College Federation). Opened by the Speak for Ourselves Group.
<i>Illusions-Delusions</i>	Sept 1996/Feb 1997	An exhibition of work including photographs by young Bangladeshi women from the West End of Newcastle.

<i>Eurofest - Our Friends in Europe</i>	Oct 1996/Feb 1997	An display of banners, art work and photographs produced by Newcastle school children depicting the 1996 Eurofest and the Euro 96 football tournament
<i>Jigsaw, Young People's Visions of Utopia</i>	Oct 1997	The culmination of a four-month long project by Northumbria Coalition Against Crime, involving 500 young people around the region, to create 350 separate jigsaw pieces. The pieces were brought together in the Great Hall to create a striking and colourful exhibition.
<i>Picturing Myself</i>	Nov 1997/Jan 1998	A photographic project by the Barnados organisation, which gave 68 young people, including some from Tyneside, a chance to show visions of their own world. The exhibition was premiered at Discovery before touring Britain.
<i>Home from Home: British Pakistanis in Mirpur</i>	Jan/March 1999	An exhibition of photographs showing the culture and everyday life of Mirpur, a region in Pakistan with many links to Britain and people in Newcastle.
<i>Represent</i>	July/Nov 2003	A multimedia exhibition by members of the North Shields-based Motive 8 youth development project exploring the lives of socially excluded young people in Tyne & Wear.
<i>Byker Young Heritage Project</i>	Nov 2003/Jan 2004	An exhibition of photographs created by young people from Brinkburn Centre in Byker. The exhibition combines new images and archival photographs to show the ever-changing face of Byker.
<i>Young Roots</i>	Nov 2003/Jan 2004	Young people from across the North East region used photographs to explore cultural heritage and its relevance to their lives. The exhibition is a result of a collaboration with young people involved in the Heritage Lottery funded Youth Roots Project
<i>Changing Lives - Painting Times</i>	Feb/April 2004	An exhibition of artwork and ceramics by the West Denton Community Association Day Care Centre.
<i>Whadda ya mean Anti-social?</i>	Jan/Feb 2006	This exhibition explores the issues and concerns of young people in the West End of Newcastle and their experiences of Anti-Social Behaviour. The theme of Anti-social behaviour is explored through the use of art, photography, video and music. The work is as a result of a year-long project organised by a youth worker and the Scotswood Area Strategy. The exhibition also looks at Anti-Social behaviour from different eras and the changing face of the West End over the years, utilising images from the Evening Chronicle and the Benwell community archive.

<i>Our Gateshead</i>	Jan/Feb 2006	Our Gateshead 2005 brings together the work achieved by North East Council on Addictions clients in their weekly art classes. Working with the Keeper of Contemporary Collecting, the group have put together a room that showcases the ideal living space. The group based the layout and contents on the sorts of things they have at home, bringing the Museums collection up to date.
<i>Street Skate Style</i>	June/Sept 2006	Street Skate Style was an outreach project exhibition in collaboration with the Wallsend Skaters Group to create a documentary of their culture including footwear, clothing and skateboards. The objects displayed were accessioned into the permanent collections.
<i>Punk79</i>	Nov 2006/Jan 2007	An exhibition celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the Punk music revolution through the voices, artefacts and memorabilia of local band members, producers, writers and fans. The exhibition came about because of suggestions made by members of the public. Over six months, a dozen volunteers helped to create an oral history archive by capturing the memories of local bands and fans - over 40 hours of oral history interviews were conducted with up to 30 people. A CD jukebox provided the gallery sounds, playing the oral history recordings along with classic tracks from the period. Individuals donated objects both temporarily and permanently to the TWM collections.
<i>PIX</i>	Feb/April 2007	Three groups of Deaf young people from Monkhouse Primary School, Heaton Manor School and New College Durham worked with an artist to create an exhibition of sketches and photographs.
<i>HMP & Me</i>	Dec 2007/Feb 2008	This exhibition examined the daily life of people living and working in North East prisons today. It reflected the everyday routine people follow in prison and explored emotional responses to different institutional living environments. TWM partnered with Stretch (independent arts organization) Regional Resource Centre at Beamish Open Air museum and inmates of two regional prisons, HMP Low Newton and HMP Kirklevington. The exhibition displayed work produced during three projects in the prisons and displayed photographs, sculpture, screen prints, oral histories and personal items from the individuals involved. The exhibition also included temporary donations made by the prison service and objects from TWM collections that relate to prison life past and present.

<i>Sound & Vision</i>	June/July 2008	This exhibition was inspired by the science and industry collections relating to broadcasting and showcased the art work, a film and a drama performance of 12 young people, aged 13-17 years from the North of England Refugee Service (NERS) Youth Integration Project's Thursday Club. The performance addressed issues regarding the media's representation of young people and explored how they would like to be represented and recognised in the media, and how they would like to contribute to today's society.
<i>Mind the Gap</i>	Nov 2007/May 2009	Mind the Gap was a People's Gallery exhibition exploring the history and people's personal experiences of mental health, distress and illness in the North East and challenge stigmas surrounding mental health issues. The project was delivered in partnership with the Northumberland, Tyne and Wear Service User and Carer network, which acted as a steering group. More than 20 groups from across the region are involved in the network and provided content and support for the exhibition.
People's Choice at The Laing		
<i>The People's Choice 2: the Children's Choice</i>	May/Sept 1994	The labels for this selection of paintings from the permanent collection and drawing of their own versions of the paintings were prepared by seven children from the Partially Hearing Unit of Thorney Close Primary School. The project benefited both the children's development of language skills and the museum's visitors, who gained a fresh interpretation of the museum's fine art collection.
<i>The People's Choice 3</i>	Oct 1994/Jan 1995	This exhibition of paintings and drawings was made by residents and staff of St. Cuthbert's, Gateshead, and Pennywell House, Sunderland, Bail Hostels. They chose more than 30 works as part of a drawing project led by Robert Sudent, a visual artist.
<i>The People's Choice 4: Ronnie's Choice</i>	Dec 1995/Feb 1996	The fourth in a series of exhibitions of paintings selected by local people was chosen by Ronnie Musgrove, who retired from his post as an Attendant at the Museum and Art Gallery in 1995. The paintings he selected were from the permanent collection and reflected the development of his interest in art during the twelve years he worked at the Museum.
Clothes from the Closet		
<i>Clothes from the Closet</i>	March/Sept 1995	Children from Walkergate Primary School created a display of fantasy outfits with costumes from the museums' extensive collections.

<i>Clothes from the Closet 2</i>	May 1997/May 1998	Trainees from NACRO (a crime reduction charity) chose items from reserve costume collections. The trainees also displayed some of their own designer and made-up garments.
<i>Clothes from the Closet 3</i>	Dec 1998/Sept 1999	Students from John Spence Community High School and members of the Write Away group at Age Concern Newcastle combined energy and experience to select a wide range of costumes from the collections.
<u>From the Vaults</u>		
<i>From the Vaults No. 5</i>	Oct/Nov 1996	Procter & Gamble visited the stores at the Laing to make their own personal selection of pictures and pottery and displayed them with their comments.
<i>From the Vaults No. 11</i>	Oct/Nov 2000	Creative writing groups visited the stores at the Laing to make their own selection and displayed them alongside their creative writing.
<i>From the Vaults No. 13</i>	Feb 2002	The Laing worked with participants from a residential home for adults recovering from drug and alcohol problems.

Appendix IV: TWAM Mission statements

Mission Statement 1990

“To promote and enhance Tyne and Wear – its history, environment, arts and science through excellence of service which educates, entertains and inspires.”

Mission Statement 1993

“Tyne and Wear Museums assembles and protects evidence of human and environmental development in Tyne and Wear, and provides the fullest access to that evidence to people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities.”

Mission Statement 1997

“Tyne and Wear Museums assembles and protects evidence of human and environmental development. In making this fully accessible, we strive to improve the quality of people’s lives in Tyne and Wear, acting in partnership with others as an agent of social regeneration”

Mission, Vision and Commitment Statement and Beliefs 2003

“Our mission is to help people determine their place in their world, and understand their identities, so enhancing their self-respect and their respect for others.

Our vision for the future is for everyone in Tyne and Wear to have access to museum provision, to use this access and to value it for the significant positive impact that it makes upon their lives, and to provide worldwide access to museums and collections.

Our commitment is to a World-class service that is innovative, imaginative, creative, totally inclusive, secure and sustainable”

Beliefs

At Tyne & Wear Museums we believe that:

- We make a positive difference to people’s lives
- We inspire and challenge people to explore their world and open up new horizons
- We are a powerful learning and educational resources for (all) the community, including people of all ages, needs and backgrounds
- We act as an agent of economic regeneration and help build and develop communities and aspirations of individuals
- We are fully accountable to the people of the North East.

Mission, Vision and Commitment Statement and Beliefs 2012

“Our mission is to help people determine their place in the world and define their identities, so enhancing their self-respect and their respect for others.

Our vision for the future is for everyone to have access to museum and archive provision in Tyne and Wear, to use this access and to value it for the significant and positive impact that it makes upon their lives. We will provide real or virtual, worldwide access to our museums and archives and their collections.

Our commitment is to a World-class service that is innovative, imaginative, creative, totally inclusive, secure and sustainable”

Beliefs

At TWAM we believe that we:

- make a positive difference to people’s lives

- inspire and challenge people to explore their world
- are a powerful learning resource for people of all needs and backgrounds
- act as an agent of economic regeneration and help build and develop communities and the aspirations of individuals
- are fully accountable to our stakeholders and users
- should make our resources accessible to everyone

Appendix V: Outreach Team targets (2004-2006)

In 2004-2006, the overarching targets for outreach were:

- To engage with 4000 people
- To engage with non-user groups (defined as individuals who have not accessed the museum in the last 12 months)
- To engage with people with limited success in formal learning environments

The workload was divided according to this table:

Number of projects	Project size	Approximate number of people we would engage per project/event.	Total number of people engaged for each project size
3	Big event/project/community festival	100 per event	300
7	Medium	10 per project	70
30 (3 per month but excluding 2 months figures for Christmas and holidays)	Small	6 people per project/event	204
		Total number of people engaged	574

In addition the following DCMS target groups were identified:

- Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups
- Disabled People
- Social category C2, D and E groups
- Young People (over 16s)– in particular those excluded from school and disaffected youth groups

Appendix VI: A selection of favourite projects as chosen by Outreach staff members

“Who Are You?” Banner Project (2005-2006) – As part of the Destination South Tyneside Exhibition at South Shields Museum, members of the Apna Ghar Multicultural Women’s Group designed and created banners which depicted their migration stories. The group is made up of women of all ages from 17 up to 50 from many countries, including Bangladesh, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Algeria and India. The project ran for 8 weeks. Two banners were created, with images depicting the homeland of the different women, their journey here, their first impression and how they see themselves now and what they would miss if they had to leave. The images are hand painted on silk. The project gave the women the chance to explore aspects of their own identity and sense of place, to learn new skills and develop existing ones and to see their work displayed as art of a high quality exhibition within the Museum. The women also came into the Museum for two weekend workshops on henna painting and sari demonstrations.

Pimp My Ride project (2007 – 2008) – I worked with a youth group in Bellingham in Northumberland to “pimp up” a car inspired by museum collections. It was really hard work both because of the nature of the group and the project itself – it hadn’t been done before and even just buying the car itself threw up loads of issues. It was very challenging but definitely worth it when it was finished and we saw the finished result!

BYP love project (2007 – 2008) – I worked with a small group of NEET 16 year olds on a fashion project which then also linked into the Love exhibition at the Laing, where a ball dress they made was displayed. The project developed naturally from participant interests and their progress as the project unfolded shone through both in the skills they developed and their increased confidence / self esteem. The workers commented how much one girl in particular developed because of the project where she hadn’t in previous projects.

YAP visit to Woodhorn / Christmas Crafts (2007 – 2008) – A group of young mums visited Woodhorn, and from their feedback we developed a Christmas crafts programme for them. I met with the worker a year later who said that as a result of the project two young mums were booking a mini-bus once a month and continuing to visit local museums with their children and partners

Striking Times (2009) – working with ex-miners to put a series of displays together – I thought it was very important to get their memories and opinions for this project.

Culture Shock – A day in the life (2009 – 10) – This was an arts and CultureShock project inspired by a day in the life of a roman soldier on Hadrian’s Wall with young people with learning difficulties (16 – 19 year olds). I was really welcomed into the group, there was a great atmosphere, and the young people at the end of the project were so proud of their finished stories.

Great British Art Debate, partnership with Tate Britain (2009-2010), - Project with Arts for Wellbeing, an open access arts studio, responding the exhibitions at the Laing – wonderful end result that the group were so proud of.

Appendix VII: History-led projects with community involvement

These exhibition projects were identified by the History Team as significant in having developed their practice in terms of involving communities.

Objects of Desire (1999-2000): encouraged more than 1,400 local people to select their favourite items from the TWM collections, which were then displayed in exhibitions.

Making history (1999-2000) Sister project: the museum's first large scale contemporary collecting project, reflecting the museum's ambition of creating a museum 'of the people'. The project worked with 220 people from across Tyne and Wear that represented different ages, interest and background, and who were asked to donate five items that had been significant at one point in their lifetime, along with a personal testimony, "using their own words and expressing their own thoughts and feelings" (Making History publication, 2001). The project collected 900 objects altogether, including a Steps poster, a dungeons and dragon book and dice, a paper weight in the form of a side of bacon, and a pair of swimming trunks. In particular, the project aimed to work with people who described themselves as 'non-users' who were identified through community groups, residents associations and support groups in the area.

Memory Net (2005): a web based project which explored the lives of communities across the North East who have a connection to the sea. The project included an exhibition and publication featuring memories and pictures from seamen, fisherman, boat builders, divers and surfers who contributed to the web project. (www.twmuseums.org.uk/memorynet/)

One in Four (2006) part of a national project called 'Rethinking Disability Representation' lead by the Museum Studies Department at the University of Leicester and involving a wider national partnership. The project reflected the fact that one in four of in the North East population is likely to have a disability, impairment or major health concern. It included objects and filmed oral histories from a variety of disabled people, as well as a section of the history of disability. The project developed new participatory approaches to exhibition decision-making by involving people as part of the exhibition team: a consultation group made up of eight local disabled people was set up to consider issues of representation and decide on the key message of the exhibition, its theme and content. Other groups were also approached to provide content, which was then selected by the consultation group.

What's Your Story? Discovering Family History (2012) This exhibition on Family History focused on first person narratives of a group of people who have researched their family histories. The narratives were developed through oral histories and interviewees were involved in writing and proofing the final text for the exhibitions. Alongside the exhibition were workshops to introduce visitors to genealogy; as well as a volunteer-led website <http://www.whatsyourstory.org.uk/>

Appendix VIII: Performance Management at TWAM

“Since 2003, it has been policy to produce a Corporate Plan for the museum service (although corporate plans had been produced before this). The plan deals with the service-wide issues, aims and objectives, followed by sections dealing with each of TWM’s principal ‘clients’ The Plan is produced in relation to Best Value Performance Indicators (linked to the Local Area Agreement priorities), the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) indicators and the Renaissance in the Regions targets.”

(Tyne and Wear Museums Corporate Plan, 2003-2008)

Note: In 2010 DCMS no longer required specific performance monitoring

Tyne & Wear Museums’ Client Bodies

Tyne & Wear Museums’ Client Bodies	
Client	Sites/Functions
Newcastle City Council (Lead)	Discovery Museum Laing Art Gallery
Gateshead Council	Shingley Art Gallery
North Tyneside Council	Stephenson Railway Museum Segedunum Roman Fort*
South Tyneside Council	Arbeia Roman Fort South Shields Museum
Sunderland City Council	Monkwearmouth Station Museum Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens (Winter Gardens*)
University of Newcastle upon Tyne	Hancock Museum*
Added from 2004-2012	
Department for Culture Media and Sport -	Support for all of above (except those marked*) through grant in aid and for a range of central access and inclusion initiatives.
Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA)	Leader of Regional Hub
Added from 2012	
Arts Council for England (ACE)	Support for all of the above (except those marked*)
The National Archives (NA)	Archives

These extracts are taken from the TWM Corporate Plan 2004-2009 and the Corporate Plan 2007-2012 in order to illustrate the performance management regime at TWAM and some of the shifts over the period of the research (including the ‘Story of CE’).

Best Value Performance Indicators for Museums: (2004-2009)

BVP a) Number of visits to/usage’s of museums per 1,000 population

BVP b) Number of those visits that were in person per 1,000 population

BVP c) Number of pupils visiting museums/galleries in organised school groups

Core DCMS Performance Indicators (2004-2009)

Core DCMS targets	2003/2004 estimated outturn	2004/2005 Plans	2005/2006 Plans	2007 onwards
Total Numbers of Users	1,389,200	1,550,00	1,550,000	1,775,000
In Person	1,154,000	1,300,000	1,300,000	1,500,00
Website visits	235,200	250,000	250,000	275,000
Number of Children Visitors (Under 16)	710,000	715,000	715,000	825,000
No. of Loans to venues in England	75	75	75	75
No. of C2, D & E visitors	443,770	546,000	559,000	645,000
No. of Children in organised educational programmes both on and off site	100,000	110,000	110,000	115,000

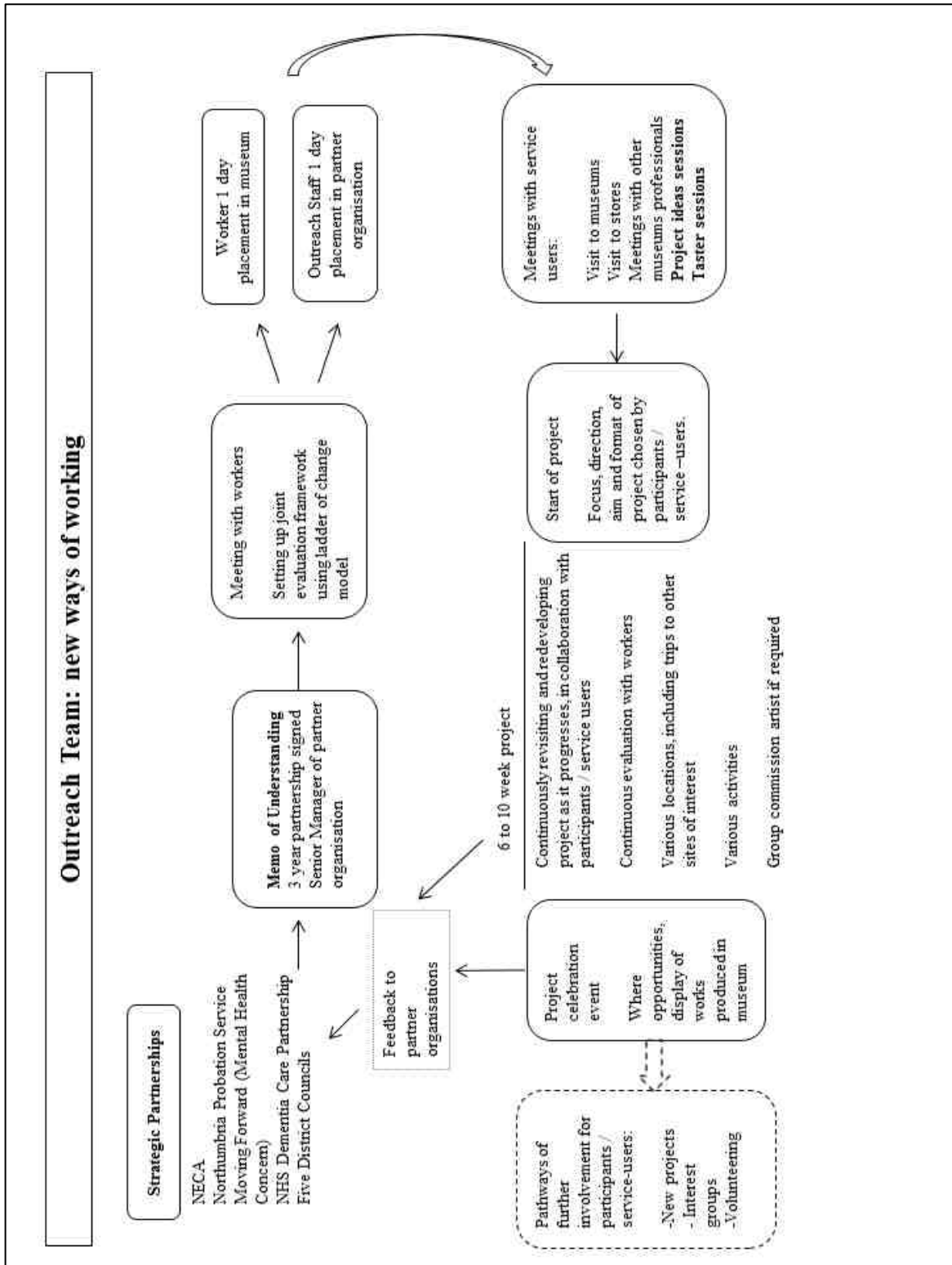
Other DCMS Performance indicators (2007-2012)

DCMS Performance Indicators	2004/2005 Plans	2005/2006 Plans	2007 onwards
Number of adult visitors	580,000	585,000	675,000
Number of over 60s visitors	234,000	234,000	270,000
Number of overseas visitors	26,000	26,000	30,000
Number of repeat visitors	884,000	884,000	1,020,000
% of collection stored in correct environmental conditions	65%	70%	72%
% of collection internet accessible	1.5%	2%	2.5%
% of time open	50%	50%	50%
% of visitors who thought experience was good or very good	97%	97%	97%
Number of learners in onsite educational programmes	145,000	145,000	150,000
Number of learners in educational outreach programmes	10,000	11,000	11,500
Grant-in-aid per visitor	£0.92	£0.93	£0.81
Revenue generated from sponsorship and donations per visitor	£0.10	£0.12	£0.15
Other non-grant revenue generated per visitor	£0.75	£0.80	£0.85
Av. no. Of days lost sick per employee (excl. long term)	8.8	8.5	8.4

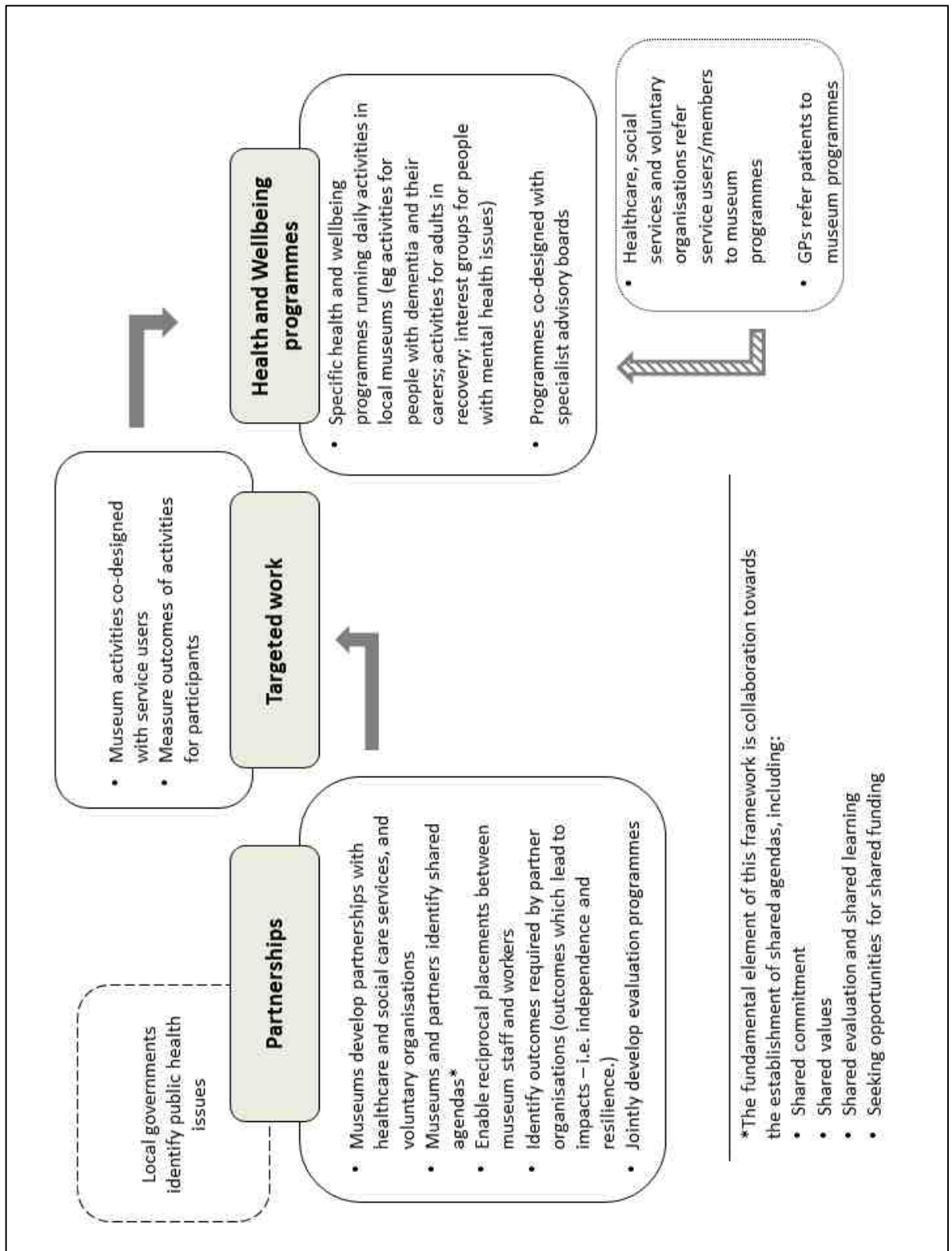
TWAM Priority Areas (2007-2012)

Our Strategic Aims reflect six Priority Areas identified and developed from the: Local and national government shared priorities for public service delivery Inspiring Learning for All framework DCMS Strategic Priorities Renaissance in the Regions priority areas Local Area Agreement priorities
The six priority areas are:
P1 Children and young people
P2 Economy, enterprise and regeneration
P3 Safer, stronger and healthier communities
P4 Lifelong learning for All
P5 Learning, Leading and High-Performing organisation
P6 Collections Stewardship and Access

Appendix IX: Outreach new ways of working



Appendix X: Museums and Wellbeing Framework



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