6 Dialogues and heritages in the digital public sphere

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The chapters in this volume have suggested that the term 'dialogue' often raises normative expectations related to its potential as a vehicle for positive change. As Nicholas Burbules (2000), one of the leading theorists in dialogic approaches to education, proclaims in the opening section of his analysis of the limits of dialogue as a critical pedagogy:

> It seems that hardly anyone has a bad word to say against dialogue. A broad range of political orientations hold out the aim of 'fostering dialogue' as a potential resolution to social conflict and as a basis for rational public deliberation.
>
> (p. 251)

This also holds true for the fields of heritage and museum studies and practice since the 1990s, as well as in the European policies concerned with intercultural dialogue, as outlined in this volume. Rodney Harrison (2012) similarly provides strong support for this sentiment when he argues for dialogicality to be seen as an inherent aspect of the conceptualisation of heritage. Through the lens of a 'dialogical model', he argues, heritage 'is seen as emerging from the relationship between people, objects, places and practices' (p. 4). In this context, the concepts of *materiality*, *connectivity* and *dialogue* are 'central to understanding the role of heritage in contemporary societies' (ibid.) and allow us to deal more productively with uncertainty, crisis and controversy through the adoption of 'hybrid forums' in decision-making. Given such promise attributed to dialogues and dialogicality, this volume is a timely and critical intervention which has examined and tested the potential of both.

The case studies found in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of this volume have provided insights into how the dialogical potential of heritage, and particularly ideas connected with European heritage as a common or shared assembly of values, expressions and materialities, is perceived, practised and mobilised within the context of digital culture. These experiences of 'lived'

heritage-dialogicality were framed at the outset through the lens of current policies and documentation produced by the European Commission and the Council of Europe, especially flagship documents such as the *Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* (Council of Europe, 2005), the *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue – Living Together As Equals in Dignity* (Council of Europe, 2008), and the *Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the Internet of citizens* (2016) among others. Responses to both the policy and the case studies were found in three 'artefact vignettes', which aimed to showcase how a research-through-design methodology can allow us to experiment with some of the challenges emerging for European heritage and dialogue in digital culture.

These interdisciplinary and multimodal ways of approaching the topic of this volume have made evident that quite different conceptualisations and applications of the idea of dialogue can be identified in contemporary museum and heritage practice and thinking, as these enter the digital public sphere. While we do not seek to provide a definitive account of how dialogue, and the specific notion of intercultural dialogue, are mobilised and practised in current thinking, we are able to identify a preliminary set of observations to guide future thinking on this topic. These epistemological reflections, in turn, lead us to articulate three areas where further intervention is required to enable digital heritage practice to become dialogue oriented. These relate to methods for dialogue, skills, policies and strategies that reflect the tripartite relationship between European heritage, dialogue and digital culture.

Epistemological reflections

An overview of both the literature and practice outlined in the contributions in this volume makes apparent that one of the most fundamental factors is whether dialogue is understood as a useful end in, and of, itself *or* as useful only when it leads to action. This underpins the articulation of a distinction between two approaches: (a) dialogue-as-purpose and (b) dialogue-as-purposive. This distinction is a useful initial step to help us reflect on the often-assumed qualities of dialogic discourse as well as to articulate two productive ways in which cultural institutions support dialogue, emerging through the chapters of this volumes: (a) by creating opportunities for *dialogue as reflexive action*, and (b) by supporting *dialogue as purposeful listening*. It is these four elements that we discuss in the following sections.

Dialogue-as-purpose

In this way of thinking about dialogue, the end goal is to create the conditions for *dialogue to take place*, with little interest in the outcome of this

interaction. The dialogue may be construed quite simply as the act of 'talking face-to-face' with someone. It may be specified as talking with 'others' with whom one may not interact in everyday life, away from the museum. It may also mean dialogue with the 'other' through interpretative strategies, that is, bringing people in museum and heritage settings into contact with the 'other' but via the intermediary device of the exhibition rather than directly (as discussed by Arrigoni and Galani in Chapter 3). In the latter situation, the visitor finds out or may even hear from the 'other' but at a distance, which does not require direct interaction. Alternatively, the encounter may take place online so that the 'other' can see what has been responded to but may not engage directly with its authors or their point of view (as seen in Chapter 5 by Farrell-Banks). The goal here then is that an exchange of some kind takes place (of information, of opinion, of views) but the end goal of this exchange is not prioritised or even particularly clearly defined.

Dialogue-as-purposive

By contrast, in this framing, *dialogue is the first step, the means, towards something else*, whether that be social change, political activism or outcomes relating to the museum's decision-making processes (such as collaborative decision-making, exhibition planning, and co-developing content for different audiences, as seen in Chapter 4 by Stuedahl *et al*.). Again, there are different types of dialogue in operation. Dialogue can be seen as part of the broader democratic goals of an institution and happens through participatory forms to provide a conceptual space where people can meet to figure out how to engage in representative democracy processes and systems. Dialogue here functions as a prompt and enabling mechanism to encourage and support contributors to dialogue to review and possibly change their position on contemporary issues, or how they might identify, or disidentify, with certain subject positions. As outlined in Chapter 4, dialogues of this kind are also iterative and evolve over a longer time frame.

We observe that the key difference between these two approaches to dialogue is how they are positioned in relation to change and transformation – and, ultimately, in relation to addressing cultural difference in Europe and the conflicts that embodies. In the former practices, we suggest, *change* is conceptualised as one of the *potential outcomes* of a reflexive encounter; in the latter practices, *change* becomes a *goal* that is pursued through a dialogic process. The boundaries between these practices are also blurred. For example, it is hard to clearly distinguish whether the dialogic process that took place in the *Science, Identity, and Belonging* project, discussed by Stuedahl *et al*. in Chapter 4, can be seen as an end in, and of, itself – that is, to create a welcoming space for members of the institution and members of a youth group to encounter each other and work together, or as a process

that had as a specific goal to change both the institution's and the youths' attitudes towards each other in relation to who has the privilege to author cultural content. As the authors present, change in approaches and attitudes indeed took place. However, this was often gradual and unanticipated and required openness, reflexivity and reflection on behalf of all involved in the process. It also required physical and intellectual space where experimentation with the dialogic process was possible.

Moreover, the chapters in this volume suggest that although cultural institutions have experience in facilitating and/or instigating dialogue in their own premises, primarily within a participatory museological framework (Chapters 3 and 4), they are less confident with purposefully extending these practices into the digital public sphere. This comes through clearly in the interviews with museum professionals presented by Arrigoni and Galani in Chapter 3, in which interviewees expressed their dilemmas in encouraging (or not) participation on their institution's social media platforms in relation to the history of Jewish people and the Holocaust. Furthermore, Farrell-Banks's contribution (Chapter 5) demands that we both pay attention to the asynchronous dialogic encounters about heritage on Twitter, which often take place without the involvement of cultural institutions, and reflect on the limits of institutional involvement on dialogic encounters online in the context of right-wing politics.

Assumed qualities of discourse

As explored in Chapter 2, in relation to discussions about European identity, the literature about dialogue tends to be premised on the importance of a positive recognition, and respect for, difference and diversity, which is simultaneously framed within a call to acknowledge the unity of human experience as an overarching framework. This accords with the European Union's (EU) official motto of 'Unity in diversity', which came into use in 2000 and is meant to describe 'how Europeans have come together, in the form of the EU, to work for peace and prosperity, while at the same time being enriched by the continent's many different cultures, traditions and languages' (European Union, n.d.). Notably, policy makers and heritage practitioners alike tend to imagine dialogue resulting to consensus and civil engagement rather than discord. This is evident in European policy on intercultural dialogue in which dialogue is often aligned with terms such as 'respectful exchange' and 'mutual understanding' and antithetically positioned in relation to terms such 'mutual suspicion' and 'intolerance' (Council of Europe, 2008). Such approach to dialogue reinforces Stanley Deetz and Jennifer Simpson's (2004) observation that use of the word often 'foregrounds specific normative hopes' (p. 141) for society, with the

conditions in which such dialogic interactions are perceived to take place often offering suggestive visions for the kind of societies that its advocates hope to achieve. These normative hopes for a culturally diverse but ultimately harmonious future is a common, often unproblematised, trope in many EU policies relating to either culture and heritage, intercultural dialogue or digital citizenship. They also underpin significant initiatives such as the 2018 official year of *European Cultural Heritage* and investment in infrastructure programmes, such as *Europeana*.

However, as already discussed in Chapter 2 of this volume, cultural difference and diversity are not fixed phenomena but as a socially constructed set of ideas and practices are fluid and in constant negotiation. The contributions to this volume evidence the potentialities of museum space to host and inspire such negotiation. In this context, what emerges is that cultural institutions are ideally positioned to advance dialogue in two aspects of practice: (a) in *creating dialogic opportunities for reflexive action*, and (b) in *supporting dialogue as purposeful listening* which, while clearly complementary, are not synonymous.

Dialogue as reflexive action

Dialogue as understood here involves a kind of reassessment of one's own position and a recognition of the situatedness of subjectivity – the place from where one speaks. This is also a position that Paulo Freire takes up in his work on education, where, he argues, 'dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's "depositing" ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants' (Freire, 2005, p. 89). Rather, dialogue in the Freirean sense is, as Stuedahl *et al*. explore in their chapter, oriented towards a pragmatics of implementation that puts a primacy on authentic dialogue as both 'reflection and action' (ibid., 2005, p. 86) in which the subject, in particular, is responsible for this process.

While Freire's work focuses on dialogue that takes place among individuals, we see the value of this particular emphasis on reflexivity and action as potentially significant for heritage institutions in a networked society. Innocenti (2016), exploring the role of cultural institutions in issues of migration in Europe, argues that 'cultural networks and networking have played an increasingly important role as infrastructures for supporting transnational and cross-sectoral cooperation and cultural dialogue, and creating cultural value' (p. 277). Cultural networks, according to Innocenti (ibid.), can be 'instrumental' in the role of cultural institutions in Europe in addressing the 'need for a coherent narrative, a story of a society and its cultural, historical and social contexts' (p. 278). Equally, we argue, network society and the ongoing investment on digitisation schemes offer cultural institutions

a unique opportunity to overcome the limitations of their often histori-
cally determined narratives and spheres of knowledge by connecting them
to those of their communities and other institutions. The promise of con-
nectivity through and around heritage resources among individuals, insti-
tutions and groups not only affords cultural institutions the opportunities
to contribute to their own awareness of their socio-cultural world but also
provides these institutions with tools to create spaces (actual and online) for
reflexive, that is, relational and situated, identity construction and dialogue.
Attempts of this kind were reflected upon by the interviewees in Chapter 3
of this volume; these, however, also pointed at the challenges these attempts
to connectivity between institutions and other communities face in the con-
text of the public sphere, as discussed later.

Dialogue as purposeful listening

Complementarily to the notion of dialogue as reflexive action, the chapters
of this volume also highlighted the conceptualisation of dialogue as civic
listening (especially Chapter 3). In this conceptualisation, it is the act of
active listening and being heard that matters, rather than a need to convert
another to one's own viewpoint and resolve or cede all differences of opin-
ion. Wood, for example, writes:

> [D]ialogue does not necessarily idealize or seek common ground. The
> search for (and belief in) common ground may thwart, rather than
> facilitate, genuine dialogue, because almost inevitably the dominant
> culture defines what ground is common or legitimate. Rather than the
> reproductive goal of finding 'common ground' or 'resolving differ-
> ences,' dialogue allows differences to exist without trying to resolve,
> overcome, synthesize, or otherwise tame them [. . .]. By extension,
> this means that dialogue does not necessarily preclude standing one's
> ground firmly, but it does require that in doing so one remains open to
> the call of the other.
>
> (Wood, 2004, p. xviii)

In the context of many current societies where public discourses are highly
polarised around specific contentious topics such as migration, national
identity and religious beliefs, this idea of 'purposeful listening' or 'civic lis-
tening' appears to be extremely relevant (see Chapter 3). This idea assumes
that the right to speak is contingent on the obligation to listen; reciprocity
is key. One qualification here is that although this kind of purposeful listen-
ing does not require anyone to give up their position, it presumes that par-
ticipants in dialogue accept conflict as a potentially useful and productive

position. This requires a conceptual transformation of a kind. It means that heritage institutions should adopt exhibitory and engagement methods that allow them not only to display controversy but also to explore conflict and, specifically, to model behaviours which encourage the public to engage in purposeful listening and encounters with other opinions in a way that does not lead to a simple breakdown of communication. In other words, we recommend that part of future institutional practice around digitally mediated dialogues needs to involve the development of a pedagogy of purposeful listening and of engaging with differences of opinion that can be shared with audiences.

The limitations of dialogue

While it is possible to see the productive potential of the conceptualisations of dialogue outlined earlier, there are some obvious limitations in thinking through how this would work in practice. Wood was writing about the value of not pushing for consensus of opinion in 2004 before the global release of Facebook and before the mass co-option of social media for political persuasion and propaganda, particularly by right-wing interests. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is a range of opinions, some optimistic and some deeply pessimistic, about the likelihood of people encountering and responding positively to views other than their own given that today's online environment is increasingly dominated by user preference learning algorithms which tailor our online experiences to match our pre-existing interests and values. As Papacharissi (2002) pointed out in the early 2000s, reflecting on the promise of the Internet to revive the public sphere: '[t]he same anonymity and absence of face-to-face interaction that expands our freedom of expression online keeps us from assessing the impact and social value of our words' (p. 16). This is a significant factor in how we can now think about the potential for dialogue in the digital public sphere to bridge different worldviews. This might well lead us to be less hopeful about the likelihood for digital dialogues and self-reflection to take place without being supported and encouraged. However, it can also lead us to argue that the need to try to find ways for societies to develop better ways to have public conversations about difficult topics is an urgent task for all stakeholders. Similarly, we would argue that the importance of continuing to strive for a digital public sphere based on strong civic values and principles is greater now than ever before.

From another angle, this volume has pointed towards the commonly held perception of the role of public heritage institutions in Europe as representing the dominant, and often monologic, cultural *status quo*, through their collections and cultural resources that have a symbolic value in relation to

narratives emerging from contested actions in Europe's past. These representations and articulations have framed and constrained interactions between diverse communities and between institution and individuals historically and, we argue, limit our collective capacity to engage in dialogue. Within the digital public sphere, which promises openness and plurality but 'does not guarantee democratic and *rational* discourse' (Papacharissi, 2002, italics added), the dilemma for public cultural institutions is whether they can open up for dialogue the topics and practices that underpin their own existence and popularity. We need to acknowledge, however, that institutions operate within cultural, political and economic contexts; these play a role in shaping institutional behaviours and boundaries as heritage organisations negotiate new ways of maintaining their practices while increasing their relative market power and value in the global scene, an aspiration articulated for public cultural institutions in national scale (e.g. the *Culture White Paper* [Department of Media Culture and Sport, 2006] in the UK) and European policies on access to digital cultural resources and digitisation. These institutions, we observe, are progressively caught in the competing demands, on one hand, of harnessing digital technology to increase their 'soft power' globally and, on the other hand, prioritising dialogic activities that promote a new kind of humanist digital civicness for them and their publics.

It is also important to acknowledge that the digital public sphere, as we refer to it in this volume, continues to reflect the point of view of individuals and institutions whose 'lived' experiences of digital culture takes place in democratic societies, with little appetite to officially regulate participation and access to digital cultural resources and platforms of expression. The debates and critiques of the dialogue-oriented practices by cultural institutions articulated in this volume should be seen in this context. We are mindful that many of the presumptions underpinning our discussions of dialogue and public discourses do not apply in countries where there is state control or censorship of the media and public sphere. The shape and nature of public conversations through digital media in those countries has already attracted significant scholarly attention but it is beyond the scope of our study here. We now turn to the brief discussion of three areas of future practice to which this volume contributes.

Ways forward

Through the engagement with the relevant policies and literatures, the *in-focus* explication of practices concerning dialogue and digital technologies (particularly through Chapters 3, 4 and 5) and the provocations proposed by the artefact vignettes, three areas of practice emerge as significant in contributing to a productive roadmap for European heritage and dialogue

in digital cultures: *the role of design as a relational and future-oriented method*, alongside *the development of transmedial digital skills and literacies*, and *the articulation of strategies and policies of convergence between digital heritage and dialogue*.

Enabling dialogue through design

The role of design in museological practice was brought up in both Chapters 3 and 4 – in the former, Arrigoni and Galani referred to design in relation to the development of dialogic digital exhibits in both European and other international contexts; in the latter, Stuedahl *et al*., specifically focused on the application of design approaches to engender dialogic interactions between museum staff and a group of youth of multi-ethnic background to co-create a digital interactive sound installation for the Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology. Farrell-Banks also alerted us to how design features of Twitter engender certain kinds of dialogic behaviours. Last, the artefact vignettes put forward alternative and future-oriented treatments of dialogue in digital cultures, re-examining, for example, the performativity of dialogic 'civic' listening (artefact vignette #3) and the use of visualisation as generative of reflexive thinking around identity. All these instances point towards the capacity of design and research-through-design methodologies to enable heritage professionals, researchers and policy makers to imagine both alternative forms of dialogue and alternative structures that may support productive engagements with alterity within both physical and digitally mediated museum spaces. On a practical level, we argue that design gives cultural institutions more readily the permission to use experimentation to co-create new meanings and forms of expression around heritage, which have the capacity to align with their audiences' (and non-audiences') everyday experiences, as demonstrated by Stuedahl *et al.* in chapter four and articulated by the ERICArts report (2008), discussed in previous chapters.

On a purposive level, we argue, design methods furnish the European cultural sector with a renewed ability to imagine, digitally. Wood, in her reflection on how dialogue can be engendered within asymmetric contexts of power, concludes: '[i]t is difficult to imagine what might motivate such efforts on the part of those who are comfortable within current social structures, but precisely this kind of imagining is needed' (Wood, 2004, p. xx). Work that is presented in this volume points to the capacity of design to deal with the unknown through imagination: 'the role of the unknown as a driver of meaning formation' becomes apparent 'when we put imagination on the "agenda" of design' (Folkmann, 2014, p. 8), as it becomes apparent in the 'futurescaping' workshop with heritage professionals, which was the context of the *Transformation Machine* (artefact vignette #1).

This is not to advocate that designing for dialogue in digital culture should be preoccupied specifically or primarily with the future. This volume is mindful of McPhail's (2004) comment in the context of interracial dialogue, that 'dialogue that is future-oriented runs the risk to side-step unacknowledged differences in the interlocutor's perspectives'. We instead advocate the role of design in enabling the European digital heritage sector to develop what Balsamo (2011) calls a 'technological imagination' – or what we have informally called in our discussions about this volume 'digital imagination' – that is, in the case of digitally mediated dialogues in heritage, the capacity of heritage professionals, community groups, individuals and policy makers to imagine dialogic relationships, spaces, structures and processes *with* digital technology and not *about*, *for* or *because of* it.

Developing techno-social literacy skills to enable dialogue

Undoubtedly, development of digital literacies is a significant step forward in cultivating both 'technological imagination' as discussed earlier and confidence among heritage professionals, individuals and communities in engaging with dialogue around heritage in the digital sphere. This urgency is fully represented in all relevant European Union policies, which see the development of digital literacy skills as a means to enhancement of creativity among Europeans and strengthening of democracy by reinforcing 'access to and participation in open culture' (Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the Internet of Citizens, 2016). This prioritisation of digital skills development as a means to inclusive cultural experiences also permeates the 2018 report on *Promoting Access to Culture via Digital Means: Policies and Strategies for Audience Development*, which suggests that digital technologies allow a 'fundamental disentangling of what used to be understood as mainstream and hard-to-reach groups' (p. 18) as digital literacies (or lack of) lead to re-configuration of groups with access to culture.

However, what is important to highlight here is that this development of digital skills and literacies should specifically and consciously aim to combine technical competencies with social/dialogic ones. As Chapter 2 specifically articulated, drawing on van Dijk's (2011) definition of network society, it is important to pay attention to the fact that in networked society, technical and social networks come together. Therefore, the skills required to support dialogue should also reflect this hybrid state; in other words, the 'convergences between different literacy traditions' identified by the recent *Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the Internet of Citizens* (Council of European Union, 2017) is the key for skills development to foster both institutions and individual 'consumers, creators

and prosumers' (ibid.) of cultural resources who are also attuned to the dialogic (or lack of) dimensions of these practices. This leads us to the third aspect of this roadmap, the development of relevant policies and strategies.

Developing dialogue through policy and strategy

One of the key observations by several of the contributors to this volume is that although museums and heritage organisations are often engaged in hosting and supporting dialogue in their space, this is commonly initiated and delivered by specific departments, or even individuals, in the organisation, often within a consciously articulated participatory museological frame of practice (see Chapters 3 and 4). Conversely, overarching institutional strategies around dialogue are sparse despite the policy framework provided by the Council of Europe's (2008) *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue*. This reflects, we propose, the slippage in the use of terms 'dialogue', 'intercultural dialogue' and 'dialogicality' in both heritage and policy discourse. On one hand, the inherent dialogicality of heritage renders strategies on dialogue in heritage institutions potentially redundant or, in the best case scenario, tautological to mission statements, exhibition strategies and programming. On the other hand, intercultural dialogue is treated as an instrument and is subsumed in strategies around community engagement and outreach. Although we do not advocate here the proliferation of institutional strategies on dialogue, we suggest that it is worth raising the question: if 'hardly anyone has a bad word to say against dialogue' as suggested earlier, what institutional strategies are better suited to promote the value of dialogue within an institutional framework and whose responsibility is it to reflect on and advance dialogic practices around heritage in heritage institutions?

We observe similar ambiguities in the strategies related to digitisation of heritage and access to digital heritage, which fall short of addressing the dialogic aspect and potential of this work. Chapter 2 has already highlighted that in European policy, the dialogic aspect is primarily dealt with through policy around interculturalism, heritage and diversity, whereas policies around digital heritage are primarily, but not solely, concerned with digitisation of cultural resources and broadening access to digital cultural production and consumption. It may be that this is the reason why individual heritage institutions and national level policies also do not make a strong enough connection between digital heritage and dialogue; that is, because the supranational policy and funding framework does not encourage them to do so. Although the emphasis of *A New European Agenda for Culture* (2018) on the interconnections between cultural heritage and digital is a positive step to this direction, we also advocate that strategies and initiatives across these

two areas should also be specifically linked to activity around intercultural dialogue in Europe, rather than treating it as their outcome or their context.

The starting point has to be that given there is this ever-growing and powerful digital public sphere, heritage organisations, community groups, politicians and policy makers need to develop *new principles and frameworks* for thinking through how the convergence between cultural heritage and digital developments will interface with the tensions and opportunities of dialogue, as articulated in Chapter 2. We argue that other media platforms such as television provide insights into how long-standing institutions in these domains have already worked through such issues. In this process, heritage organisations need to think specifically about what kind of digitally mediated dialogues around and through heritage are envisaged in this context, who will participate in them, what do they want to achieve from them and how can the breakdown of dialogue be avoided?

In the conclusion of her critical history of online social media platforms, the media theorist José van Dijck (2013) poetically suggests that '[t]he ecosystem of connective media needs watchful caretakers and diverse gardeners in order for it to be sustained' (p. 176). It is now time, we argue, for cultural institutions to re-imagine themselves as both caretakers and gardeners playing an active role in this new ecosystem; to mobilise the agency that is afforded to them by the digital and their long-standing experience in engaging with many forms of alterity in order to propose new and innovative ways of thinking and, as a result, transcultural being.

Acknowledgements

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