Heritage, Politics and the digital

Mediating Heritage Workshop

Helen Graham, 26th September
Keep Safe

Make Available
[Museums] are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society.

MA Code of Ethics, 2008, p. 9
Open to all

Representative of all

On behalf of all
Umm...this object is ‘rival’. We must make it a non-rival public good!
Making available!

Visitors as crowds

Keeping Safe!

Everyone now
Everyone in the future

Professional imagination
I know...we can make this object a ‘non-rival public good’ by putting it in a glass case!
Open to all

Representative of all

On behalf of all

‘Mediating’
Er...is it already a public good? But I’ve polished a case...

(a copy of a digital story)

(there are other copies and, as the museum speaks, five different people in five different places are watching the story)
Two Pink Lines

By Jade Lawlor

I found out I was pregnant on the 7th of May 2008. Even though I'd had a strong feeling I was pregnant for a couple of weeks beforehand, seeing a positive...

View this story
River and City

The River Tyne is at the heart of Newcastle’s identity. The prosperity that came from river trade and industry eventually created a demand for artists’ work and for splendid pieces of glass, silver, and ceramics. The river also allowed art manufactories to bring in raw materials and ship their goods all over the world.

Local artists were proud of their home area and visiting artists were impressed. They recorded Newcastle’s historic landmarks of the cathedral, castle and quayside, as well as new city developments, the railway, and rural suburbs. Above all, painters were attracted to the dramatic view across the river, with its growing number of bridges.
Coming into the public

Making an author

Making an object
Coming into the public

Informed consent

Accessioning

Public accountability
In Culture Shock! I think it was explicit from the start that these were going to be made available on the website, they were going to be accessioned as museum objects and that regardless of intellectual property law the museum has some kind of proprietary interest in the content produced. I think natural justice said that. And I think we were clear with people about that.

(Iain Watson, Director, Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums)
Making an author responsibility agency Informed consent
Making an object

as if material not digital

finished and fixed
That was the argument but...

Hang on...no objects, non-rival, personal and never finished... no right to ‘balance’?
Personal and the digital create different political logics for heritage

Personal and digital together pulls the ‘balance’ toward the present and individual

Power is localised and distributed – ‘heritage institution’ not beginning or end

Digital can help see and trace shifts it is creating...but can it also be a political tool?
Heritage is odd

Materiality has given heritage its politics

Digital does things to heritage

Watch what ‘digital’ is doing to ideas of heritage, publicness and political accountability...and use digital to intervene