

Making the Invisible Visible in the Contemporary Art Museum

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I, Ellen Pavey, confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis explores the communication of collection care work in the art museum. I take Tate as a single case study and apply qualitative methods to present a detailed account that documents the impact of surfacing this often-hidden work on the museum and young adults. It is the fundamental nature of collection care work as networked, intersubjective and knowledge producing that I argue is invisible to outsiders.

The overarching aim of the project is to explore the link between increased visibility and the potential to create a more inclusive and equitable museum. To do this I apply Hall's notion of encoding and decoding as an umbrella theory that organises the research into two phases. To understand the risks and benefits involved in the encoding process I use Bourdieu and DiMaggio's concept of field and capital interwoven with more recent scholarship that argues for the integration of emotions in the analysis of insitutional structures. With regards to decoding, I analyse the accounts of young adults involved in career building activities at Tate through the lens of sociocultural learning theories and notions of cultural capital.

I conclude by arguing that visibility should be considered a central component in cultural capital transactions across the institution and the organisational field, and I position Tate as the product of competing relationships that transform the institution into an 'anxious museum'. This in turn shapes the production of meaning. Meanwhile young adults read the materials Tate produces in oppositional and negotiated ways that are informed by their existing relationships with Tate, their personal interests, and their perceptions of the institution's anxieties. Ultimately, 'making the invisible visible' is a highly charged undertaking that cannot create a more equitable museum in and of itself but could offer a blueprint for a more permeable and inclusive institution.

Impact statement

This research aims to provide meaningful contribution to both academic and museum practitioner debates around the museum transparency and the role of collection care departments in museum work. Facilitated by the AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership scheme, this research benefits from a highly unusual level of access to a single institution in order to give a uniquely thorough and detailed account of the process of 'making the invisible visible'. Informed by Stuart Hall's model of encoding and decoding, I take a dialectical approach to understanding how museums use behind the scenes content as carriers of certain institutional messages and how they are subsequently received by young adults trying to forge careers in the art world. This is the first time this topic has been explored through in-depth qualitative research.

My research is intended to benefit practitioners and the museum sector more broadly in two core ways. I provide an extensive survey of the various risks and benefits associated with communicating behind the scenes processes, allowing for reflection on where changes might be made and how fostering greater transparency and access to collection care work might help Tate better realise its mission and aims. In response to the relative invisibility of collection care practitioners in museum studies accounts of museums, I have endeavoured to give voice to a range of staff at Tate in a way that surfaces their often-hidden experiences and gives insight into the relationship between individuals and the museum. I position collection care, in all its forms, as a fundamentally knowledge-making practice that when valued as such has the potential to offer new ways of making the art museum a more inclusive and accessible place for young adults. For the young adults involved in the research, I hope that their voices are heard equally clearly in this project and that I have offered another channel through which they might communicate their experiences to the museum sector writ large.

For academia, I present a foundation for the further exploration of anxiety in the museum as a way to understand how embedded institutional structures and relationships might thwart and act in tension with efforts to be more transparent and inclusive – and how these might be overcome or recast in order to create more democratic ways of working. Through an application of Bourdieu's concepts of field,

capital and habitus, I present a new contribution to the development of this area of theory through the consideration of visibility as a factor that impacts the acquisition and exchange of cultural capital in the art museum.

As an embedded researcher at Tate and contributor to the Reshaping the Collectible research project I have shared my research with Tate staff and contributed to public outreach through the organisation of a research display at Tate Britain and an accompanying international conference.

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1. Introduction

This research is undertaken as an AHRC funded collaborative doctoral partnership (CDP) between Tate and UCL and is conducted primarily at Tate, taking the work of the Conservation and Collection Care departments as a case study through which to problematise the proposition that greater transparency, and by turn greater inclusivity, can be achieved through making visible the currently invisible processes of museums.

It is through their holdings that museums build their identity, operate as educational institutions and, ultimately, justify their existence; collections are the locus around which the public and institution meet through exhibitions and displays (McLean 1999:83). Yet the mechanisms of care and maintenance that preserve these collections, the processes and expertise that determine their acquisition and interpretation, and their physical storage systems, are often opaque and off limits to audiences (Hooper-Greenhill 1992:7). As such, museum collections are subject to a curious dichotomy: they emerge at the public interface of institutions, but they often spend the majority of their institutional 'lives' enshrined in the most impenetrable areas of the museum, protected by layers of security and confidentiality (Brusius and Singh 2018:2). There is an inherent and troubling power relation that plays out via collections, particularly in the decision-making processes behind their acquisition, cataloguing and display, which is undertaken by a privileged minority of museum experts, whilst audiences are often unaware of these activities and thus are often excluded from the knowledge making process (Hooper-Greenhill 1992:5-7; Hohenstein and Moussouri 2018). Taken for granted assumptions thus emerge: the roles of insider and outsider, the distinction between museum professional and visiting public, and the stability of the relationship between subject and object (Hooper-Greenhill 1992:7). As Jane Henderson contends, 'even the conservation decisions we make are formed within the context of dominant patterns of thought' and thus perceptions of the neutrality of collection care work are fundamentally misplaced (2020:199). Collection care practices can therefore be viewed as a vital component in the maintenance of these institutional systems of governance and control - and for this reason it also carries the potential for disruption. Finding a means to 'open up' the work of collection care and conservation – to make 'visible' –

may have the potential to reveal this power imbalance and address the boundaries between institution and audiences that perpetuate exclusionary museum practices.

Despite the hidden nature of conservation and collection care work, studies have shown that there is a sustained and strong public desire to have access to behind-the-scenes areas of museums (Drago 2011; Hykin et al 2019; Podany and Maish 1993), and likewise professionals from these departments are keen to communicate their work to visitors (Brooks 2012; Muñoz Viños 2005; Podany and Maish 1993; Saunders 2014). The Demos report *It's a Material World* (Jones and Holden 2008) argues that public engagement with conservation work – and by implication increasing its visibility – has the potential to benefit not only the culture and heritage sector but also communities and the general public. Raising the profile of conservation ensures the engagement of policy makers, which in turn leads to greater funding to develop expertise. Meanwhile, public education initiatives can communicate the 'social importance of caring for the material world' and combat throw-away culture whilst contributing to social well-being (Jones and Holden 2008:16-19).

In the context of the contemporary art museum, evolving approaches to conservation and collection care could present new ways to open up this work and to create new methods of public engagement. For many contemporary artworks that include obsolete, perishable or intangible elements the work performed by collection care and conservation professionals contributes directly to the meaning and fabrication of the work; conservators often collaborate with artists and their estates to make informed decisions that preserve the 'identity' of the artwork rather than simply its materiality (Giebeler et al 2019:24). In some instances, conservation processes are visibly incorporated into the artwork itself. As the work of these departments continues to 'leak' into the public space of the museum an opportunity has arisen to reframe collection care and conservation processes as beyond 'fixing', and instead present it as a communal, creative and meaning making activity that incorporates a spectrum of skills and knowledge, ranging from the technical and scientific to more pragmatic problem-solving skills and artistic creativity (van Saaze 2009:29).

However, increasing access to the private areas of the museum and shifting to a more transparent way of working is not without risk to institutions. As a result,

tensions can arise as the discourse of access and inclusivity meets the need to safeguard reputations and collections (Pringle 2020:11). This project acknowledges that 'making the invisible visible' is a thorny, loaded issue for museums where much is at stake, and not least its relationship with audiences. It also considers the extent to which making visible collection care and conservation work is able to provide truly 'radical' forms of transparency (Marstine 2001) and whether such initiatives might challenge or simply reaffirm the status quo of the art museum.

This research takes Tate as its case study and offers new insight into the process of communicating collection care and conservation through a dialogic structure shaped by Stuart Hall's theory of encoding and decoding (1973). It considers, for the first time, the effects of making collection care visible on the museum and its audiences, with implications for the development of new theory around how to conceive of the role visibility and invisibility plays in the art museum. The research is organised around a central, overarching questions with three sub-questions:

To what extent might greater visibility of behind-the-scenes work create opportunities for the development of inclusive practices in the contemporary art museum?

- 1. What are the perceived risks and/or benefits for the museum in making the private and behind the scenes processes visible?*
- 2. What do museums believe that they are providing audiences by making behind the scenes processes visible?*
- 3. How do young adults respond to attempts to make visible the private and behind the scenes processes of the contemporary art museum?*

The chosen audience participants for this research are young adults, aged 16-25. This group are seldom the subject of visitor studies and are less frequent visitors to art galleries (Sim 2019:22). In recent years a proliferation of schemes across the cultural sector have emerged to encourage participation from young people. These often address economic barriers to the museum and heritage sector through reduced

tickets prices and include focused programming to appeal to the interests and issues affecting individuals in this age group (Brown 2018 np). This study seeks to explore whether the work of conservation and collection care could provide another site and avenue of engagement in the range of experiences currently offered to young adults and, perhaps, alternative points of access to museums, museum work and museum collections. Understanding how young people view and receive current programming connected to behind-the-scenes work, and how this might evolve, will provide an invaluable contribution to a growing, but still scant, area of visitor studies.

Finally, this research cannot ignore the unfolding events of the global Covid-19 pandemic and the rise in social justice movements that have emerged in 2020; they provide an inescapable political, social and economic framework that affects every participant in the study as well as the museum, its stakeholders and dependents (such as staff, contractors and local communities). Whilst the long-term repercussions of these events will take many years to evaluate, the short-term effects must nevertheless be addressed by the project. Workers in the culture sector currently face mass redundancies, with services for young people facing significant cuts (Youth UK 2020:6). Meanwhile, museums have become the focus of protests, debate and action around harmful legacies of colonialism; in many instances, drives for accountability are helmed by young people, and organised via social media.¹ In opposition to this activity, the Government has made clear that museums should follow official guidelines on the treatment of contested heritage (DCMS 2020a). Thus Tate currently finds itself caught in the irreconcilable position of meeting the demands of the Government, whose financial aid provides a lifeline for Tate in the face of unprecedented losses of revenue, and addressing the concerns, attitudes and beliefs of many of its staff and visitors, particularly those from the very demographics (such as young adults, local communities, BAME audiences, lower income audiences or disabled people) it seeks to reach.

When this research project was proposed, it emerged from an intersection of needs: to better communicate the work of collection care and conservation (particularly in

¹ See, for example, recent pressure on Tate Britain to address the violent colonial imagery in Rex Whistler's mural *The Expedition in Pursuit of Rare Meats*, which adorns the museum's restaurant. Calls for the removal of the mural have been led by the young art critics The White Pube, who garnered support through their Instagram and Twitter accounts. Their advocacy led to The Guardian covering the story, and the attention of the Labour MP Diane Abbott.

the context of contemporary art collections), to provide greater transparency and access to the working practices and decision-making processes in museums, and to increase inclusivity in the museum and heritage sector. As the research has progressed these needs have intensified and augmented in light of the major events that are currently disrupting and changing daily life in the UK and beyond; this research project adapted and responded accordingly.

2. Context of the research: Inclusion, exclusion, and young adults

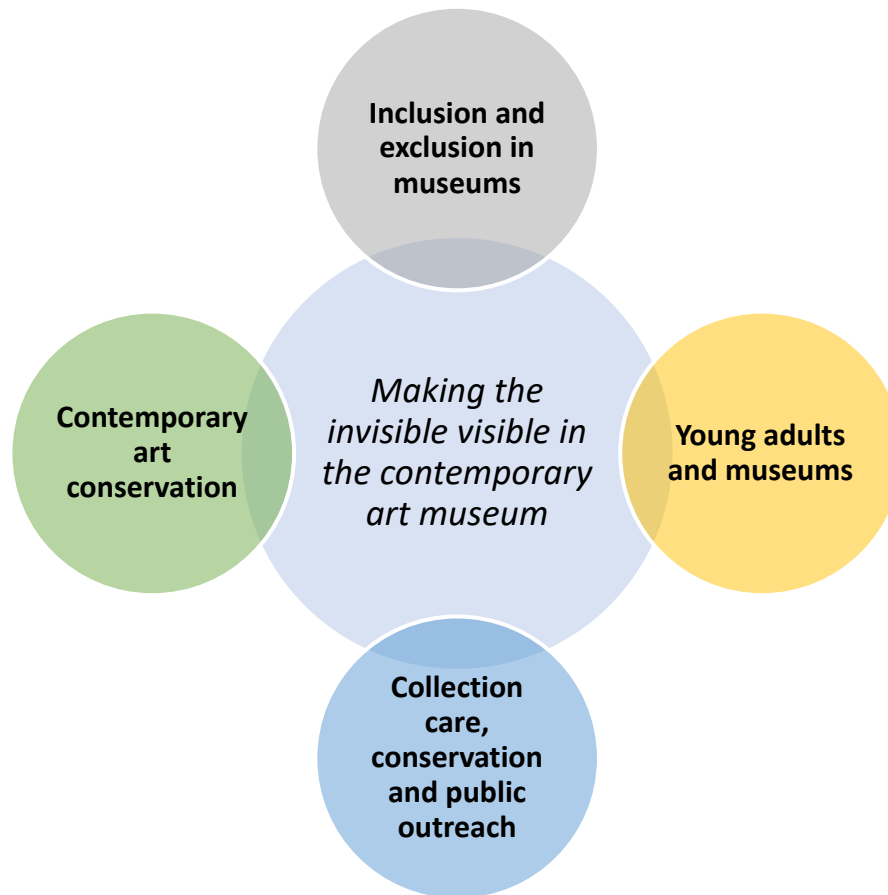


Figure 2.1 The four interlinking strands of the literature review.

In chapters 2 and 3 I present the context of the research, broken down into four key areas that frame the project: ‘inclusion and exclusion in museums’, ‘young adults and museums’, ‘collection care, conservation and public outreach’ and ‘contemporary art conservation’.²

First, I trace a history of the concept of ‘inclusion’, a term much used in the museum sector, and position this in dialogue with the concept of ‘exclusion’. Drawing on the work of Stuart Hall, I present a definition of how the term is used in this project.

² I also include an additional explanation of how this doctoral research is in dialogue with *Reshaping the Collectible*, a Mellon funded research project led by the Collection Care Research department at Tate.

In the second part of the chapter, I consider young adults as a distinct and understudied group of cultural consumers. I discuss their relationship with museums, patterns of visiting and non-visiting, and conclude by focusing on the context of art museums and their specific conditions of exclusion.

In chapter 3 I focus on collection care and conservation and what is 'seen' and 'hidden' in museums. In the first half of the chapter, I review efforts to communicate the 'behind the scenes' areas of museums. Whilst this is often a popular strand of museum programming there are few studies to explain why, with almost no previous examination of the impact of visible collection care initiatives in art museums. I outline the core aims of the Reshaping the Collectible project and how the approach of the group has shaped my understanding of conservation work, particularly with reference to how contemporary artworks interact with museum practices.

2.1 Inclusion and exclusion in museums

Finding a definition for 'inclusion' in the cultural sector, and in particular museums, has consistently proved difficult to pin down (Hooper-Greenhill et al. 2000:11). There is a broad consensus that 'inclusivity' is a priority for museums, yet it is difficult to define what this looks like in practice (ibid). Much literature is devoted to analysing the role of museums as both responsible for perpetuating conditions of exclusion and being leading arenas for change, with emphasis placed on their relationship with the visiting (or non-visiting) publics they must serve (see for example Sandell 1998; Kinsley 2016; Hooper-Greenhill et al. 2000; Coleman 2018). Less has been written about inclusive practices *within* the museum as workplace, although this has begun to change. Whitaker argues that 'the institutional life of art museums is really one of people' – the people who form both their audiences *and* their workforces (Whitaker 2023:114). It follows, then, that museums must champion inclusive policies behind the scenes – promoting 'socioeconomic and racial inclusion' initiatives in the workplace – alongside their efforts to become inclusive spaces for their many publics; only then can they truly achieve their aims for social inclusion (Ibid). In this section I will thus consider the theme of inclusivity as one that is pertinent to both the public and private spaces of the museum.

2.1.1 A brief history of museums and notions of inclusion and exclusion

Museums have evolved significantly from their eighteenth-century manifestations as private and privileged spaces that housed the collections of a western elite (Sandell 1998). A desire to utilise museums for positive social change arose in the mid-nineteenth century, leading to the establishment of national collections, an emphasis on the educational potential of museums and increased access through free admission and later opening hours (Sandell 1998). The transformative potential of museums and culture was realised through the growth of the travelling exhibition, whereby 'cultural values' could be taken directly to the masses (Silverman 2010:8-9). This was accompanied by the advent of settlement houses, which saw artists, clergy and other social activists create communal spaces to assist and empower the poor with some developing museums as part of their work (ibid). However, this apparent evolution in attitudes to the public responsibilities of museums did little to address the fundamental issues of who owned and curated collections, nor whose taste was represented. Furthermore, as Sandell notes, the effect of these changes on audience composition is undocumented (Sandell 1998).

It was not until the mid-twentieth century that 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' emerged as terms with active political currency. Engagement with inclusion and exclusion at the level of government policy first emerged in 1970s France in response to a crisis of the welfare state (Rawal 2008; Sandell 1998). As the term 'social exclusion' gained international traction a proliferation of interpretations, caused by differing ideological frameworks, complicated definitions of both terms (Sandell 1998). Who constituted the 'socially excluded' and why, and how could a move toward 'social inclusion' – the implied antithesis – heal such ruptures? In Britain, the first significant governmental attempts to promote 'social inclusion' as a means to combat 'social exclusion' were initiated by New Labour in the mid-1990s. With the establishment of the Social Exclusion Unit in 1997 a new lexicon was adopted which emphasised how '... linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, poor health and family breakdown' could contribute to the exclusion of groups and individuals (Social Exclusion Unit 1997 quoted in Levitas 2006:125-126). By 2000 explicit emphasis was placed on the role of museums as instigators of societal change through a set of guidelines published in the government report *Centres for Social Change: Museums, Galleries and Archives for All* (West & Smith 2006).

Writing against the backdrop of New Labour's social inclusion policies of the 1990s, Sandell argues that museums should not be seen merely as the producers of cultural exclusion, but rather as the representatives of 'institutionalised exclusion' more broadly; as a location where forms of economic, social, political and cultural exclusion coalesce (Figure 2.2) (Sandell 1998:407). He broadly groups these areas into four categories, defined as: economic (lack of access to goods and services, income and production), social (lack of access to social services, opportunities for social participation and decision making), political (lack of access to human and political rights, freedom of expression and civil justice) and cultural (lack of cultural representation, opportunities for cultural participation and access to cultural institutions). However, he argues that it is precisely because museums embody intersecting forms of social exclusion that they have the potential to be repurposed as agents of social change. This, he suggests, can be achieved through the development of inclusive practices. Most significantly for the context of this research project, Sandell illustrates three modes of inclusivity for museums that operate on a sliding scale of impact, transparency and active social participation: the inclusive museum, the museum as agent for social regeneration, and the museum as vehicle for social change (Sandell 1998; Coleman 2018). The extent to which museums could and should adopt these functions would depend on the individual nature of the institution.

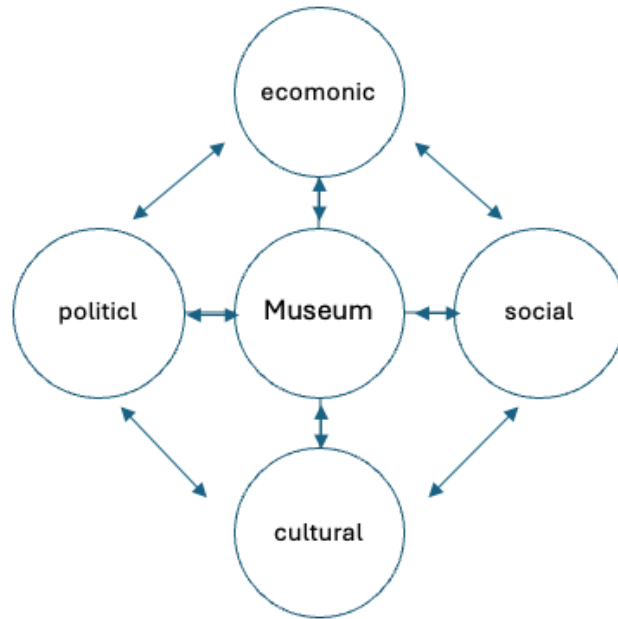


Figure 2.2 The cultural, social, economic and political dimensions of exclusion (adapted from Sandell 1998).

Some 20 years later, ‘inclusion’ has become a central concern for the majority of museums and ‘inclusive’ endeavours have become widespread (Kinsley 2016:474). Debate around inclusivity has become both more nuanced and more urgent in response to an increasingly networked and globalised audience. Building on the work of Sandell, connections between inclusivity and social justice have been more explicitly formulated, particularly within decolonial and feminist discourse, as it has become increasingly clear that ‘those who tend to not be included in museums are groups that have traditionally suffered systemic injustice’ (Kinsley 2016). Indeed, when museums and galleries do integrate social inclusion into their work it has been shown to be effective and beneficial on a number of levels. *Museums and social inclusion: the GLLAM Report* found that when museums made the effort to engage and provide for people at risk of social exclusion positive impacts could be traced at a personal, community and societal level, encompassing everything from increased self-esteem, community cohesion, and the enhancement of ‘lifelong learning’ whilst reducing crime and unemployment (Hooper-Greenhill et al. 2000:23-24).

Yet there is also ample evidence, as Rose Kinsley notes, that ‘despite the [American] museum sector’s attention to the idea of inclusion over the last 20 years, museums have not been able to diversify their visitor demographic base and workforce’

(Kinsley 2016:478). Recent data reveals that museum workforces are overwhelmingly white, female and able bodied with little indication of change (Arts Council 2020; Arts Council 2022; Adams 2019). A report commissioned by the Arts Council in 2016 showed a more detailed picture of intersecting barriers to working in museums. Education level was a key marker, with most people in museums tending to be overqualified for their jobs, particularly in medium and large organisations which often required advanced degrees (BOP Consulting 2016:19-20). Economic barriers were also stark: young adults (16-24) working in museums were less likely to have permanent roles with a reliance on internships (50% of which were unpaid) as a foothold into the sector (BOP Consulting 2016:28 and 31). Most notably, it was conservation and preservation practitioners who reported the highest rate of undertaking internships before securing employment (46%) compared to 39% of curatorial staff and 31% of education staff (BOP Consulting 2016:31-32). Whilst American art museums show some signs of improvement in diversifying their workforces, a recent Mellon Foundation report shows collections-based jobs remain the most homogenous in terms of race, with 77% of collections employees (and 80% of conservators) identifying as white (Sweeney et al. 2022:18 and 20).³

Many museums have adopted 'equality, diversity and inclusion' (EDI) policies to acknowledge and address the intersecting cultural, social, economic and political dimensions of exclusion. Wolbring and Nguyen note that the adoption of this trio of terms has been due to an increasing realisation within organisations that 'using any individual concept leads to limitations in fixing the problem' (2023:170). The Museum Association, through their EDI policy document, demonstrates the way that these concepts are at once different from each other and crucially enacted in chorus: diversity pertains to 'any characteristic which can differentiate groups and individuals from one another', including but not limited to those identified in the 2010 Equality Act;⁴ inclusion is 'a state of being and feeling valued, respected and supported'; whilst equality 'recognises that every individual should have equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents' (Museums Association n.d.).⁵ At Tate, a

³ There is no equivalent workforce report for UK art museums available at the time of writing.

⁴ The protected characteristics listed in the Equality Act are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. (Equality Act 2010, c. 4). Available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents> [accessed 12 August 2024].

⁵ Museums Association Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy, date unknown. Available at <https://www.museumsassociation.org/about/our-policies/edi->

commitment to EDI has led to the creation of staff networks (BAME, disABILITY, Parents & Carers and LGBTQIA+) to advocate for the needs of their respective members and a 'Tate for All' strategy has been implemented, leading to the creation of a dedicated Board and subgroups (Tate n.d.a.).⁶ Alongside a commitment to audiences, Tate is particularly focused on the diversifying the museum's workforce so that it 'more closely reflects the communities we serve' (Tate Gallery Diversity Workforce Profile 2023-24:1). As of 2023 the organisation has also begun to publish staff demographic data and pay gap reports across its Gallery, Commerce and Eats workforces on the museum's EDI webpage. Whilst the data does show incremental improvement towards meeting Tate's targets to increase the number of staff members from underrepresented groups in its Gallery workforce, unlike the Mellon Foundation report there is no breakdown of figures by department (Tate 2024:2).⁷

Yet despite these concerted efforts by museums to integrate EDI policies, research and personal accounts suggest that museums have remained uncomfortable or hostile spaces for many minority and underrepresented groups (Kinsley 2016; Dawson 2019; Sayers 2014; Taylor 2017). If government guidance, academic research, and an increased desire and genuine willingness among museums have led to a collective push for greater inclusivity, then why are museums and cultural institutions still failing certain audiences? Emily Dawson presents a compelling argument that there is a prevailing misunderstanding of exclusion and the excluded in the field of everyday science learning in science museums and institutions. A problematic 'deficit model' of thinking – present in both institutions and participation researchers - continues to cast minoritized publics as lacking: 'the people who experience the problem have become the problem' (Dawson 2019:28). Indeed, the wording of the 1997 Social Exclusion Unit's definition is a telling example of this positioning. In a logical extension of the 'deficit model', Dawson identifies the equally damaging misunderstanding of inclusion as a kind of 'crusade', whereby institutions programme 'worthwhile activities for publics to take part in for their own good' (Dawson 2019:29). To conceive of the 'excluded' as defined by a lack of knowledge

policy/#:~:text=We%20champion%20diversity%20and%20equity,We%20lead%20change%20by%20example [accessed 12 August 2024].

⁶ See Tate's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion webpage, available at <https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/working-at-tate/diversity-inclusion> [accessed 12 August 2024].

⁷ See Tate 2024a:2; Tate 2024b; Tate 2024c.

or understanding – and therefore capable of being transformed by the museum - is to reaffirm existing power structures between the institution and its publics. If inclusionary practices are positioned as transformative for disadvantaged or minoritized audiences, then there is a danger of simply welcoming these groups into the space of the museum without access to the structures of power that uphold it. In this instance ‘inclusion’ operates at the level of the performative, a mask that gives the illusion of change without any real stakes for the museum.

2.1.2 Black Lives Matter and the 2020 reckoning in museums

The extent to which museums failed to adequately address the vectors of exclusion laid out in their EDI policies, and the stubborn persistence of the deficit model approach to audiences, was laid bare following the societal reckoning triggered by the murder of George Floyd by a white police officer in Minneapolis on 25 May 2020 (Ahmed et al. 2022). The killing, captured on video and shared millions of times around the world, sparked a series of global Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests that sought to draw attention to the structurally racist foundations of many institutions and ‘pierce the shield of white ignorance’ (Ahmed et al. 2022:2 and 7). The pressure coincided with the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, itself a time of ‘high anxiety and alertness’ (ibid). Museums were positioned as part of an insitutional landscape that upheld structures of white dominance and supremacy and in response to growing public and internal pressure many released solidarity statements promising to combat racism and adopt an antiracist approach to their work (Chevalier et al. 2023). Chevalier et al describe some of these statements as ‘tepid’, suggesting that ‘many museums see racism and oppression as something that exists outside of their walls in “society”’ (2023:258). Furthermore, many of these public expressions of support for BLM ran counter to the lived experiences of their Black employees (Ahmed et al. 2022:13). What emerged was a gulf between the promise of EDI policies and the reality of the lived experiences of museum staff and visitors, all the while making visible the ways museums continue to be enmeshed with historic systems of racial oppression. The extent to which museums uphold their commitments to change will become clearer with time, but these events are nevertheless an important context for this research project. As cultural institutions face a crisis in legitimacy, the stakes of

greater visibility and transparency around institutional processes have become greater and more urgent.

2.1.3 Inclusion and exclusion in art museums

Duncan argues that Western public art museums are steeped in bourgeois values and collecting habits that are rooted in their origins as the projects of rich patrons or royalty (1995).⁸ They represent a certain kind of international bourgeois culture, evidenced in the proliferation of similarly sized and organised art museums in the Western capitals of the world (Duncan 1995:3; Jung 2014). In this way they are 'potent engines of ideology', according to Duncan, that hold international currency (ibid). Their design to tell stories of nationhood and art history is by its very nature exclusionary, defining 'other' – often non-western – as inferior; thus, art museums become spaces of 'civilizing rituals' into the dominant culture for their visitors (Duncan 1995).

Art museums have long been the subject of scrutiny around the ways they appear to perpetuate divides between so-called high and low culture resulting in the reproduction of the cultural dominance of the ruling classes (Zolberg 1992; Tanner 2003:152). Bourdieu and Darbel's 1967 study *The Love of Art* has proved to be foundational in this area of exploration, taking as its genesis the problem that art museums, funded because of their perceived public good, nevertheless manage to reproduce social and cultural structures of stratification and exclusion (Bourdieu and Darbel 1967). Art museums, Bourdieu later argued, contribute to the process of social reproduction in their legitimisation of social and class differences (Randal Johnson, introduction for Bourdieu 1995:2). The ability to read or interpret artworks is consequently shaped by a person's accumulation of cultural capital (a result of the advantages bestowed on them by their class and education) which contributes to their ability to understand and feel at ease in an art gallery: 'a work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded' (Bourdieu 1984:2). Stripped back to its

⁸ It should be noted that Duncan's observation applies to large Western public art museums; literature on the audiences of independent contemporary galleries, art venues and collective spaces is rare. Indeed, these artist or community led spaces often act in opposition to large institutions and aim to build more inclusive arts environments that directly challenge what they perceive to be capitalist, state aligned, gated spaces. See for example Artists Space in New York (<https://artistsspace.org/home>).

essence, Bourdieu presents a theory that explains why art museums offer a sense of belonging to some and feelings of exclusion and inferiority to others (Duncan 1995:4). Bourdieu's work will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4, but its introduction here is intended to document the first concerted effort to understand the exclusiveness of art museums and to provide context for the ways in which art museums have been explored as institutions with distinct conditions of exclusion that attract and cater for a certain narrow demographic.

Studies of art museum visiting have provided complex answers to who is excluded by art museums and why. Following the work of Bourdieu, class and sociocultural factors continue to be explored by some researchers (most directly by DiMaggio 1996 and Zolberg 1992). There is evidence that art museums continue to be largely visited by audiences with higher incomes (Jung 2014:132) who share certain characteristics such as more liberal political views and an openness to new art forms (DiMaggio 1996:175). In the UK, meanwhile, there is supporting statistical data that shows socioeconomic differences continue to correlate with those who engage with museums and those who don't. Government data specifically for art museums is hard to find, but across the museum sector more broadly there is a significant gap in visits between those from the upper socioeconomic group (61.5% visited a museum or gallery in 2015/16) to those from the lower socio-economic group (37.4% visited a museum or gallery in 2015/16) (DCMS 2016:4).

Yuha Jung's research turns to a local art museum to try and understand the numerous intersecting vectors of exclusion that keep 'lower-class' visitors away.⁹ She finds these to include the perception of the art museum as an elitist space, the name of the museum (when it is associated with a rich or elite family), and the imposing nature of the building itself (Jung 2014). Visitors felt included when the museum actively worked to reverse these elite, aloof and unwelcoming characteristics: lower-class visitors were more at ease when their 'needs and

⁹ 'Lower-class' has different national connotations that beyond the scope of this thesis to explore. I use 'lower-class' here to directly quote Jung but acknowledge that this is a difficult and contentious term. I include discussion of class alongside socioeconomic exclusion as part of a broader overview of the literature that seeks to emphasise that those who are excluded by museums tend to be those who face other forms of societal exclusion and disadvantage.

interests' were catered for and when activities and exhibitions were 'interactive, hospitable, and offered beyond the walls of the museum's galleries' (Jung 2014:136).

It should be noted that Jung's research focuses on the context of a local art museum, and, as Fyfe and Ross have demonstrated, local museums contribute to the formulations of the surrounding community's class and social distinctions in situated ways (Fyfe and Ross 1996). All of which is to say that while these examples offer general insights, there are additional factors which apply to a multi-site cultural organisation like Tate which caters for millions of visitors each year, ranging from local communities to international tourists. As Prior has argued, the twenty-first century's postmodern, hyper-capitalist art museum is a new kind of organisation attracting a new and diverse audience who blur high and low culture in complex, nuanced ways (Prior 2003; 2005). This requires reconsidered forms of enquiry.

To do this we might look towards the organising structures of the art museum as a means of creating and perpetuating exclusionary practices. First, we must consider the collection – what is deemed art worthy of national representation, international celebration and art historical significance. In his essay *Whose Heritage?* Hall shows how the notion of 'heritage' contributes to the building of a national identity that is collectively 'imagined' through the objects that it collects, conserves and displays and in this way, collections become important symbols for those who 'belong' in a nation (Hall 1999). When applied to national art collections like Tate, which have traditionally been disproportionately white, male, western and able bodied, the same barriers to national and cultural belonging apply and are additionally charged by the discipline of art history, which determines whose art is considered to be of cultural, symbolic and economic value. An example of this exclusion can be found in the work of Patricia Failing, who has exposed the exclusions experienced by Black artists in the New York art scene of the 1980s. These artists found themselves trapped in a cycle of exclusion from both the art market (which saw work by Black artists as less commercially valuable) and museum collections (which deemed art by Black artists as less culturally significant) – two worlds locked into an inexorable feedback loop of cultural taste-making (Failing 2021 (1989) np). Failing further argues that art museums mask racial exclusion under the guise of judgements of 'esthetic quality', turning to Lowery Sims' description of curation as a discipline that is exclusionary by nature: curating is 'the act of discrimination, making choices that are the expression

of our eye, our taste, our sense and standard of quality' (Sims 2020 quoted in Failing 2021 (1989) np).

Trying to redress these exclusions at the level of collection and display is not as straightforward as simply changing collecting strategies or programming more diverse exhibitions. As Jung has shown, the Met's exhibition *Harlem on My Mind: The Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968* (1969), perpetuated harmful stereotypes and damaged already fragile relations with the Black community despite the museum's aims to showcase Black American culture (2015). The exhibition was curated by two white men, did not consult or include the perspectives of the community, presented an 'ethnography' of the Harlem Renaissance that treated it as a bounded and separate culture divorced from the multicultural reality of New York and, tellingly, failed to include any actual artworks (Jung 2015:1).

The Met controversy hints at a second equally important and interrelated zone of exclusion: the organisational systems of knowledge production and the people who are able to participate in these systems (Hooper-Greenhill 1992:5-7). As discussed above, UK museums have homogenous workforces that do not reflect the demographics of the nation (Arts Council 2022). Li has found a similar situation in the American museum sector, arguing that diversity and inclusion initiatives in art museums 'are only symbolic because museums have not adopted the structural changes that will lead to diverse and inclusive artistic representation' (Li 2021:795). Whitaker too considers the intersections of exclusion that happen in art museum workplaces, paying particular attention to issues of pay (2023). She argues that economic equity is fundamentally a matter of valuing people as much as collections – moving from 'hoarding objects to honoring people' - and that this is a vital step towards greater inclusion (Whitaker 2023:115). Clearly, exploring the issue of exclusion in the art museum (and exclusion from museum more generally) is multifaceted, bringing together sociocultural factors related to visiting with the internal structure of museums (both as generator of knowledge and as everyday workplace), the content of collections, and the influence of the art market and art world. In the next subsection I discuss a model for thinking about integrating institutional transparency as a way of demystifying the exclusive practices 'behind the scenes' of museums and encouraging greater inclusivity and more meaningful relationships in the public facing areas.

2.1.4 Inclusion and visibility: ‘dashboard transparency’, ‘radical transparency’ and ‘situated revelations’

Janet Marstine, through the prism of museum ethics, has provided the most detailed discussion of visibility as it intersects with inclusive practices by focusing on the idea of transparency. Transparency, I argue, is an important facet of visibility that is inherently tied to truth, accountability, vulnerability and relationships. If visibility might be explained as the moment where an object, knowledge making practice or person/s emerges into consciousness – is seen or shown to visitors in the museum – then transparency is about the ethics and purpose of what is made visible.

Marstine’s work identifies levels of transparency, sifting through initiatives to determine what is merely illusory (seeing through glass structures), ‘transactional’ but ultimately obtuse (‘dashboard’ transparency through performance outcomes and numbers), and ‘radical’ (empowering and meaningful for communities) (Marstine 2013). Her ideas provide a crucial frame for this project, particularly when trying to understand and identify museum attitudes to transparency and the inclusive possibilities afforded by communicating collection care work.

First, Marstine warns us not to be deceived by the proliferation of glass in modern museum architecture: ‘glass becomes a trope to communicate openness, inclusivity, and community engagement’ (2013:2). She guides us to consider the surface of glass and what this reveals: the reflective qualities of the material, its physical presence as a barrier, its uncomfortable closeness to Foucault’s panopticon through the encouragement of surveillance (Marstine 2013:2-3 referencing Bennett 1995:63-39). Like Star and Strauss, Marstine thus sees this as indicative of an inseparable relationship between visibility and invisibility (Star and Strauss 1999). Applied to the context of collection care, her argument leads us to consider the value of visible storage, such as Crenn’s belief that such structures ‘demonstrate’ democratisation (2021:97) and Stubs-Lee’s findings that perhaps the justification for such displays is shakier, and the accompanying invisibilities more extensive, than we may realise (Crenn 2021:97; Stubs-Lee 2009).

Dashboard transparency, meanwhile, pertains to the sharing of statistics and information, such as reports and policy documents, environment performance data, visitor statistics or financial accounts (Marstine 2009:10). This has a number of

benefits for the museum: it is a way to communicate with stakeholders, to encourage accountability through the judgement of quantitative measures of success, and to allow staff to track outcomes and measure impact (ibid). In these ways it is beneficial for the museum but what does it really offer the public? It is transparency ‘in a flash’, Marstine argues, presenting a sense of accountability (2013:9). It may open the museum up to external evaluation – but only from those for whom it legible and therefore meaningful. Furthermore, it is ‘highly scripted’ and relies on the perceived neutrality of ‘numbers’; in reality, though, this ‘masks a politically fraught process of negotiation and compromise’ and ‘reflects the conflicting goals of sharing and controlling information’ (Marstine 2013:10). The release of information in a bid to be transparent is a symptom of what Macdonald has identified as the increasing pressure on publicly funded museums to justify their use of ‘taxpayers’ money’; it is thus the government that is the core *reader* of these documents and the stakeholder for whom they hold meaning (Macdonald 2002:32-33). It is important for the context of this research to note that Tate, like its peers, publishes the kind of reports and data that Marstine and Macdonald describe as part and parcel of an ‘audit culture’ that creates a ‘transactional’ mode of transparency. Indeed, the staff diversity workforce profiles mentioned above could be considered in these terms (see section 2.1.1, p. 26 of this thesis). As such I will incorporate this into my data collection as secondary contextual information for the way the museum approaches the subject of visibility.

It is radical transparency that Marstine identifies as the most productive and beneficial, both for museums but particularly for audiences. This state has five tenets, which I have summarised below (Marstine 2013:13):

- Shaped by a critique of dashboard transparency.
- Committed to a reciprocal relationship between the museum and its audiences.
- Shares the processes of value-based decision making.
- Empowers participants to make informed choices in how they engage with the museum.
- Is dependent on internal and external alignments.

Through these points, a connection between transparency and power emerges that supports the arguments of both Hooper-Greenhill (1992) and Star and Strauss (1999) that visibility is related to power structures. For Marstine, radical transparency is achieved through what she terms 'situated revelations'. These happen when the disclosure of data - or information – is 'meaningful for constituents through contextualisation, translation and mediation as they identify the agendas of the experts doing the framing work' (Marstine 2013:3). This is inherently political because it enables informed critique of the museum, facilitates the development of 'equitable knowledge sharing' and thus allows the public to more meaningfully participate in the work of the museum (ibid). Situated revelations should also be audience specific and prioritise their needs, particularly in the case of making museums more transparent to minoritized groups (Marstine 2013:14). It is fundamentally related to human rights to knowledge and as a result encourages 'democratic pluralism' where parties might disagree in productive ways that recognise the other's expertise and skills as equal (Marstine 2013:14-15). All of which is difficult for museums, who are unused to sharing power, slow to change, and closely monitored by stakeholders and governments.

Marstine's radical transparency argues that the museum must see its audiences as active participants in the life of the museum, leading to the creation of 'fruitful, porous boundaries between the institution and its publics' (Marstine 2013:4 and 15). This is important for this project's focus on the experience of young adults who have an interest in working in and with museums; radical transparency emerges as a possible route to allowing young people to feel empowered by and in conversation with museums and to be able to understand and question the way institutions organise the world. In considering the context of Tate we might look toward the *Circuit* project (see section 2.2.3) as one such initiative that can be categorised as a concerted effort to move towards a state of radical transparency. Although the project has since ended, guidelines and observations were put in place that seem to align with Marstine's five tenets in their broad agreement that young people need access to the museum and need to be let into decision making processes (Tate and Paul Hamlyn Foundation 2017:13). However, whether a state of radical transparency has since been achieved requires further investigation.

Art museums are remarkable for their relationship with living artists, who can open doors to new ways of creating inclusive and democratic practices and who might have the voice and power to act on behalf of the public to challenge museums (Lee 2023). A recent Tate project with Tania Bruguera demonstrated how artists and artworks can also push the museum towards radical transparency. As part of her Turbine Hall commission in 2018, Bruguera specified that a group of ‘Tate Neighbours’ be created, who would act as a local advisory committee meeting regularly with the museum. She intended the initiative to ‘challenge the institution’, ‘explore how Tate could be a better institution’ and ‘inspire people to take action’ in their own lives (Tate 2018: video, 00:20-00:40).¹⁰ The group, with the guidance of Bruguera, were able to lobby for the renaming of Tate Modern’s main galleries to the ‘Natalie Bell building’ in recognition of a local community organiser. Yet the extent of their continued influence at Tate, and further evidence of change is hard to measure. Furthermore, whilst Natalie Bell is prominently celebrated through the efforts of Bruguera and the Tate Neighbours, even a fleeting visit to Tate would reveal the numerous other donors and corporate sponsors whose names proliferate the galleries; their power to influence Tate appears to be far greater.¹¹

2.1.5 Summary: implications for the research

Inclusion, Coleman argues, ‘is not a single achievable point’ and it is beyond the scope of this literature review to draw definitive positions in a long and varied debate that is yet to be resolved (Coleman 2018:9). Instead, I seek to find a working definition of ‘inclusion’ that can help answer the overarching research question in this project. To do this I will be guided by the work of Stuart Hall, which I feel best draws together some of the strands of thought outlined above (1999). In this way museums become places for those who ‘belong’. In accord with Sandell’s description of institutionalised exclusion, Hall argues that those whose heritage, practices or culture are not represented, are, by implication, perceived to belong neither in the

¹⁰ See Tate, 2018. *Tania Bruguera and Tate Neighbours – the Art of Social Change | Tate Exchange*. YouTube video available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TI9QSA9gs> [accessed 7 January 2023]. Bruguera’s Turbine Hall commission 10,148,451 ran from 2 October 2018-24 February 2019 at Tate Modern [see <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/hyundai-commission-tania-bruguera>].

¹¹ Herrero (2020) has written about the relationship between art museums and their corporate sponsors, with particular reference to Tate’s relationship with BP and the protests this sparked. This article will be discussed further in chapter 4 within the context of people’s emotional attachments to museums.

museum nor in national society as a whole. Hall calls for cultural institutions to 'rewrite the margins into the centre, the outside into the inside', but in a way that does not demand those who are excluded to themselves '*become* "other" to belong' (Hall 1999:10 and 13). This same principle can be applied to who belongs behind the scenes of museums and how knowledge construction takes place there. Alongside this definition I will also integrate Marstine's spectrum of transparency as a way to understand how inclusion and exclusion intersects with visibility and invisibility. If we combine this with Whitaker's urge to interrogate the everyday human work of museums and the conditions of work for the staff who create the 'heritage', then we might summarise that to be included is to be *represented* and to *belong*, but in a way that acknowledges and preserves difference in its multitudinous and intersecting forms; that writes difference into the narrative that museums tell about culture from the inside out.

2.2 Young adults and museums

Despite an increase in studies over the last decade, young adults' attitudes and relationships to museums remain a comparatively understudied area, with in-depth qualitative approaches still proving to be rare (Tzibazi 2013). What does emerge from the available literature is a general consensus that young adults are less likely than other age groups to visit museums and that this is an issue that museums of all kinds are keen to address (Hughes and Moscardo 2019; Barron and Leask 2017; Drotner, Knudsen and Mortensen 2017; DCMS 2016; Tzibazi 2013; Denver Art Museum 2012; Gofman et al 2011; Mason and McCarthy 2005; Xanthoudaki 1998). Indeed, the most recent Taking Part Survey carried out by the UK Government found that 45% of 16-24 year olds had visited a museum or gallery in the last 12 months; only the 75+ age bracket visited less frequently (DCMS 2020b).¹² However, it is important to note, as Hughes and Moscardo do, that studies of young adult visiting figures tend to focus on Western audiences; for example, their literature review found that young adults in China, unlike their Australian peers, were more frequent visitors to museums (2019). Their study is a reminder that while young people across

¹² Unlike the 2015-2016 Taking Part Survey, this report does not offer a statistical breakdown of the types of museums respondents visited.

continents share certain core attitudes towards museums – most importantly that they are not places ‘for’ young adults - there are nuanced differences at a national and even local level.

Before going any further it is necessary to define who ‘young adults’ are and how I apply this term in the research project. My use of the phrase ‘young adult’ is distinct from ‘young people’, the latter of which is generally used in UK museums and social studies to describe those under the age of 18 and sometimes including young children (see for example MuseumsEtc 2009).¹³ ‘Youth’ meanwhile was used by the UK government in the 2022 Youth Review to denote people aged ‘11 to 18, or up to 25 for those with additional needs’ (DCMS 2022 np). In the UK, membership and access schemes for young adults are often targeted at an age group ranging from mid-teens to early/mid 20s, although the bracket differs slightly between institutions.¹⁴ Despite this general consensus amongst organisations, there is little indication in the literature as to why such a broad age range has emerged as the norm, nor is there critical interrogation as to why this age group is assumed to share interests or benefit from the same outreach methods (Hughes & Moscardo 2019:517). In their study of late-night programming attendance at the National Galleries of Scotland, Barron and Leask approach the difficulty of making meaning from such a large age range by viewing ‘young adults’ as Generation Y visitors (who the authors define as born between 1980 and 1995 - often known as ‘Millennials’), using the notion of age group ‘cohorts’ to argue that individuals from the same generation ‘share similar patterns of behaviour with regard to work, leisure and consumption’ (2017:476). Whilst their study offers one way of addressing the age span issue, the scope it creates does not align with museums’ own definitions of young adults, with Gen Y aged between 20-35 at the time of Barron and Leask’s study. As a result of this lack of consensus in the literature, the sources I draw on in this section will unavoidably present sometimes inconsistent definitions of young adults. For clarity and practical purposes, in this research project I will use Tate’s

¹³ Mason and McCarthy use the phrase ‘young people’ in their study of art museum visitation and non-visitation in Auckland although their participants would fit into a ‘young adult’ age range. Similarly, Tate’s young adult programmes are referred to as ‘young people’s programmes’, although they cover the age group 16–25. Despite this I will refer to the participants in this study as young adults to make clear that this research does not apply to the under-18 age group.

¹⁴ For example, Young Barbican is for 14–25-year-olds, NPG Youth covers 14-21, and the British Museum Young People’s Programme is for 18-24 year olds.

age grouping of 16-25 years to determine the ages of the young adults I recruit, which broadly aligns with other large publicly funded museums.

2.2.1 Points of disconnection between young adults and museums

Various hypotheses emerge as to why young adults might be deterred by or feel uncomfortable in museums. In their study of young people's art museum visiting, Mason and McCarthy identify in their literature review three areas of dislocation between young adults and museums more broadly: negative perceptions of what museums are prior to visiting, resulting in 'threshold fear'; social exclusion at the level of collective and personal identity, often in relation to collections or programming; and a mismatch at the level of cultural definitions and consumption stemming from a fundamental difference between 'those who present art and the culture of those who might view it' (2006:21-23). Since Mason and McCarthy's study, Hughes and Moscardo (2019) and Barron and Leask (2017) have presented further evidence that young people feel like museums are not 'for them'. The former show that young adults across continents perceive museums as places that don't allow fun and sociable experiences, nor do they address the issues and subjects that are relevant to young adults' lives (Hughes and Moscardo 2019). Meanwhile Barron and Leask, in their study of 'lates', found attempts to create social events were successful in providing rewarding and engaging experiences for millennials but nevertheless these occasional takeovers of the museum failed to increase engagement with the permanent collection or to attract new visitors more generally (2017). Furthermore, there seems to be a strong association for young adults between museums and school trips, surfacing memories of structured learning and compulsory visits (Xanthoudaki 1998:161-162; Gofman et al 2011:606). Indeed, ART31, a joint project between the University of Kent and supported by Arts Council England, found that the majority of young people they surveyed still accessed the arts through school, college or university (2018:20).¹⁵

Stepping back further, and interlinked with the broader issues discussed by Hall and Sandell of social exclusion at a societal level, we may also be able to draw

¹⁵ The ART31 survey covered an unusually broad age range of 10-25, hence their use of the term 'young people' as opposed to young adults.

connections between the exclusion of young adults and the institutional structures that govern society – of which museums form an integral part. In their study of young people's participation in political and public life, Pitti, Mengilli and Walther argue for the concept of 'liminal participation' as a way to avoid reducing young people's practices in the public sphere to either 'recognized' or 'non-recognized' (2023). Although their work is not concerned with museums, there are nevertheless applicable areas of context. They describe the important part that youth participation plays in the evolution of societies and characterise youth practices as always changing and evolving due to the 'dynamic and transitory nature of young people's lives' as they exist on the threshold of adulthood (Pitti et al. 2023:146 & 150). Furthermore, it is through the lens of institutions, who ascribe normative behaviour, that we judge the actions and contributions of young people, suggesting there is a 'right way' and a wrong way to participate in public life (Pitti et al. 2023:148). They demonstrate this through analysis of three case studies that highlight the complexity of young people's practices: graffiti artists who undertake commissioned work alongside illegal 'tagging'; another group who volunteer with children and migrant community projects whilst also attending protests and squatting; and a third group of 'ultras' who stage cultural events and volunteer in the community but also take part in vandalism and violence (Pitti et al. 2023:151). Whilst their examples incorporate the extremes of legal and illegal activity that appear far removed from patterns of museum visiting and interaction, they nevertheless offer insight into how we might be alert to what is deemed to be legitimate forms of contributing to society, how institutions control and judge behavioural and cultural norms, and what is considered the 'right way' to organise and push for change. It is therefore liminality, they argue, that best describes the reality of young people's practices which often combine both 'recognized and non-recognized forms of engagement', testing the idea of clear boundaries between participation and non-participation (Pitti et al. 2023:148-149).

Taken together, these findings suggest levels of deterrence that begin at the museum door, sometimes stemming from childhood experiences and historic perceptions of who a museum is for and what it represents; continue with the contents of collections and their curation; and are sustained by the environment and behavioural norms imposed by the values and structures of the museum itself. All of this, meanwhile, is undergirded by larger issues of how society views the

contributions of young adults. The indication is that remedying these points of deterrence through programming alone may not be enough.

2.2.2 Strategies for building relationships and appealing to young adults

Young adults are, of course, not a monolithic group and there are studies that explore the spectrum of attitudes to museums and why some *do* choose to visit. Various strategies for encouraging young people to visit and engage with museums have been proposed. This can roughly be sorted into suggestions that look to marketing and employing tactics from leisure and entertainment industries; incorporating elements of digital technologies that allow for forms of communication and interaction that are more in line with an audience segmentation that are often described as digital natives; and employing emancipatory pedagogies that allow young adults to drive the conversation.

Manna and Palumbo choose to investigate exactly what it is that makes museums attractive to young people in Italy (2018). Whilst it should be noted that their findings are specific to Italy (their classification of a large Italian museum, for example, is an institution with 15 or more staff), there are nevertheless some useful insights. Writing from a tourism and leisure perspective, they find that holding targeted events, renting spaces in the museum, and providing ancillary areas such as restaurants and museum shops attracted young people, suggesting that one way of making museums more appealing is to reframe them as places of leisure (Manna and Palumbo 2018:515). Barron and Leask, however, found that although the staging of targeted late-night events were indeed popular with young adults, they had limited effect on their overall visiting and engagement with permanent collections (Barron and Leask 2017). Intriguingly, Manna and Palumbo also note (and without further analysis), that in larger museums the ability to ‘visit restoration labs was associated with a greater affluence of young people’ (ibid).

The role of digital technology has also been suggested as a possible means of bridging the gap between how museums communicate with their audiences and the ways young people receive and digest information. Hughes and Moscardo found that both Chinese and Australian young adults thought that integrating digital technologies – such as mobile apps and use of social media – would make

museums 'more fun, engaging, comfortable and social' (2019:529-530). An earlier study carried out by Hughes and Moscardo would seem to support this. They found that young adults who were directed to use their mobile communication devices during a visit spent significantly longer in exhibitions and were, perhaps surprisingly, more likely to read in gallery texts (2017:43). Similarly, Barron and Leask found that Millennials were most interested in 'technology-based interactive activities', opportunities to use their mobile phones to take photos, and any activities with a social aspect (2017:482 & 484; see also Leask and Barron 2013:398-399). Yet integrating digital technologies is not without difficulties: keeping up with the fast pace of advances in technology and the development of trends amongst young adults is both costly and logistically difficult for a sector that relies on public and charitable funding and is notoriously slow to make changes.

Drotner, Knudsen and Mortensen, meanwhile, show that young Danes (polled in a national online survey of 'a random representative sample of 13–23-year olds') are most likely to describe museums as 'exciting', 'educative', or 'boring' (2017). Like Xanthoudaki, who suggests that museums are most appealing to young adults when they adopt more interactive ways of learning (Xanthoudaki 1998:161-162), Drotner et al found positive attitudes to the educational role of museums, with respondents noting the possibility of easier and different types of learning (Drotner et al. 2017:462-463). 'Exciting' museums, meanwhile, seemed to combine learning with fun, immersion and novelty (Drotner et al. 2017:465). Their study indicates that, crucially, young people assess museums through their prior interests, leading to three modes of engagement: wanting museums that cater for their existing interests, wanting museums to challenge or expand their prior perceptions, or 'tak[ing] it upon themselves to make museums an enriching experience' (Drotner et al. 2017:469).

A third strand of outreach to young adults involves the integration of emancipatory pedagogies that aim to give voice to young adults and redress power imbalances. As outlined above, this strategy is a core tenet of developing inclusive practices that go beyond encouraging visiting and instead aim to change the term of the relationship at an institutional level. It is most prominently used to reach out to young adults from marginalised and underrepresented groups (Xanthoudaki 1998). These programmes should benefit young adults in ways that are relevant to their own lives, not focussing on turning them into discerning cultural viewers but empowering them to be

independent critical thinkers (Sayers 2014:356). As Sayers puts it: ‘do programmes for young people provide them with the skills to think about art or do they invite them to think?’ (ibid). This requires a difficult task for museums: they must relinquish their comfortable and established identity as the ‘expert’ but still provide an educational experience for young adults (Sayers 2011). Furthermore, adopting emancipatory education frameworks that are ‘bespoke’ for more vulnerable individuals is a challenge for staff trained in formal or perhaps more traditional ways of educating in museums (Tate and Paul Hamlyn Foundation 2017:17) Yet the potential, as researchers and museum practitioners have agreed, is significant: working within an emancipatory, participatory and collaborative framework not only makes the museum a more welcoming space to visit but may also lay the groundwork for deeper, long-term relationships with young adults (Sayers 2014; Xanthoudaki 1998; Tate and Paul Hamlyn Foundation 2017).

2.2.3 Young adults and art museums: an ambivalent relationship

Art museums and galleries have been shown to have their own unique intersections of discomfort and exclusion for young people. Art galleries continue to be symbolic of the kind of ‘institutional exclusion’ identified by Sandell (1998). They can be interpreted as sites of ‘privilege, wealth and middle-class values’ and, particularly in the case of large international museums like Tate, can be seen as ‘locations of symbolic and literal power’ by young people (Sim 2019:22). Yet, at the same time, art making, artists and the ‘arts’ as a broad category have been shown to be immensely valuable to young adults.

There is ample evidence to show that the arts are important to young adults, yet art museums continue to remain uninteresting or even uncomfortable places to visit. The UK Government has provided evidence to suggest that young adults are currently underserved by art institutions. The 2015-2016 Taking Part survey by DCMS showed a high level of arts engagement from young people: 79.3% of the 16-24-year-olds surveyed said they had attended an arts event or participated in an arts activity in the last 12 months – the highest level of arts participation across all the

age groups surveyed.¹⁶ However, when asked about specific kinds of ‘arts’ activities only 10.7% of respondents in this age group had visited a public art display or installation in the last year, and only 13% had visited an exhibition or collection of art, photography or sculpture (the lowest levels of participation in this category of activity across all age groups). It is clear that young adults are highly culturally active, but that their interest and modes of cultural expression and consumption do not seem to align with institutional categories of ‘art’ nor the institutions in which it is displayed. The ART31 survey, published two years later, came to similar conclusions around the appetite for the arts, finding that 67.8% of the young people who completed their online survey considered the arts to be important or very important (ART31 2018:4). Asked to name their favourite pastimes the most popular were sport and gaming, closely followed by art (visual art, drawing, painting, illustration) and music (Art31 2018:14). This is echoed in Mason and McCarthy’s work which found that young adults wanted ‘a greater variety of art styles and different types of exhibitions’ (2006:29).

A unique advantage that art museums do have, however, is the ability to facilitate collaboration between young adults and living artists as a way to recast the gallery as a space of creativity, fun and experimentation and to approach education as an art practice in its own right. Whilst art galleries are not the only type of museums or heritage sites to work in this way, situated within art galleries these collaborations become part of the art historical context of the ‘educational turn in contemporary art’, providing opportunities to create art *in* the art museum, challenging the remoteness of the very objects that reproduce difference and distinction (Lee 2023:295; Bourdieu 1984).¹⁷ Lee’s study analyses the impact of a collaboration project at MoMA between a group of young adults and contemporary artist Adelita Husni-Bey. Participation structured through the artist’s critical pedagogic practice created an

¹⁶ ‘Arts’ in this survey encompassed books, film, photography, music, street art, crafts, dance, theatre, circus, pantomime, video games, as well as art galleries and their collections. See the Taking Part Survey (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/taking-part-survey-data-analysis-tools#taking-part-who-participates-tool-1>) and its data dashboard (<https://public.tableau.com/profile/taking.part.survey#!/vizhome/WhoParticipates-Arts/Responsesbreakdowns>) [accessed 2 October 2020].

¹⁷ Examples of contemporary artist responses to heritage sites are numerous. Jeremy Deller’s 2012 project ‘Sacrilege’, a full-scale inflatable replica of stone henge upon which visitors were encouraged to play and explore, exemplifies the ways contemporary artists can enrich and challenge conventions around visiting and interacting with heritage, bestowing the freedom to explore, play and touch in ways that traditional heritage sites might prohibit (<https://www.themoderninstitute.com/artists/jeremy-deller/works/sacrilege-2012/62/>) [accessed 15 December 2023].

anarchic space within - but crucially conceptually separate from - the museum, providing a liberating and non-judgemental environment in which to learn (Lee 2023). The young adults were also given the opportunity to 'experience' art rather than just look, and the experience of showing an artwork they co-authored within the hallowed space of the art museum had a positive effect on their self-esteem (ibid). In this way contemporary artists, who are often themselves suspicious of large institutions, are shown to be effective collaborators with young adults, capable of creating alternative spaces in art museums that allow for the kind of 'liminal' participation forms that Pitti et al describe.

Whilst most studies concerning the relationship between young adults and art museums tend to focus on visiting or non-visiting (e.g. Mason and McCarthy 2006) there is a growing recognition, led by museums themselves, that there are fundamental forms of exclusion that take place 'behind the scenes' which prevent young adults from accessing careers in the arts (Moss 2020). As ART31 reveals, almost 50% of the young people they surveyed desired to work in the arts, but few had career advice on how to access the creative industries (ART31 2018:5). Although their respondents do not mention museum careers explicitly (this might indicate a lack of awareness about the existence of museum careers in general), the authors of the report suggest that young people need to be given more information about the variety of different roles available in the arts (ART31 2018:19).

As outlined in the previous section, there is no detailed study into art museum workplace demographics, but we might draw some conclusions from the existence of schemes started by art museums to open up new routes into employment (Tate and Paul Hamlyn Foundation 2017; Moss 2020). Tate's *Circuit* project and the subsequent *Routes In* initiative are two such initiatives that attempted to use Tate's resources to remedy the underrepresentation of BAME, working class, disabled, and 'hard to reach' young adults in the creative sector.¹⁸ In the *Circuit* report Mark Miller positions Tate's relationship with young people as a matter of social and civic responsibility that lies at the heart of the institution's mission to serve all UK citizens

¹⁸ The *Circuit* project defines 'hard to reach' as: Having a long-term disability (physical, sensory, hidden, learning); young parent; young carer; homeless; Gypsy, Roma, Traveller; looked after child / care leaver; refugee; asylum seeker; home educated; in youth justice system; not in education employment or training (NEET); in hospital / long-term physical or mental health needs; having a parent or carer in receipt of state benefits (Tate and Paul Hamlyn Foundation 2017:40).

(Miller in Tate and Paul Hamlyn Foundation 2017:13). Read in full, their findings locate, interrogate and seek to redress core imbalances that define the terms of art museum/young adult relationships. These can be grouped as operating on a number of levels that comprise ontological (mismatched values and identity); epistemological (professional knowledge that is only accessible to insiders); temporal (in which art museums rush relationships that take time to build, yet also move too slowly to make change); cultural (acceptance of some cultural forms over others); institutional (internal hierarchies, governance structures and ways of operating that are opaque to outsiders, not listening to the views of young people); and societal (lack of diversity within Tate and a tendency to treat young people as a homogenous group) (Tate and Paul Hamlyn Foundation 2017). In essence, the barriers between young adults and large national art museums operate on a number of planes and require a holistic, systemic approach to dismantle.

Recognising that one of the fundamental findings of the *Circuit* project was the lack of opportunities for young people to gain a foothold in the arts, the *Routes In* report provided more focused recommendations for how arts organisations can help young adults from under-represented backgrounds plan a career in the cultural sector. Their recommendations are expansive, covering everything from changing the internal processes of museum recruitment to brokering connections between young adults and professionals, helping with the acquisition of experience through (crucially) paid internships and work experience schemes, and providing structures of care and support for young adults once they enter the workplace - such as mental health support and well-being initiatives (Moss 2020:13-14). The report sets a benchmark for how large museums might be best placed to support young people through their extensive networks and pools of funding. Tate has built on these recommendations with the introduction of the Tate Collective Producers scheme, which brings together groups of young adults at each Tate site who have been selected from youth and education organisations local to the galleries. The scheme is designed to give young adults (aged 16-25) - with little or no professional experience in the arts - an opportunity to make connections and build their CVs through tailored workshops, curating projects, and producing events and media for Tate, all whilst being paid the living wage. In return, it seems, these young adults operate as intermediaries between the gallery and their peers, ensuring that Tate's

programming is appealing and relevant to the young adult audiences the gallery seeks to reach.

The benefits of internships and work experience programmes, like Tate Collective Producers, have been studied by Xanthoudaki, who notes that long-term training initiatives are significantly more established in North American museums than their European counterparts (1998). She argues that offering traineeships and internships is a matter of social justice; museums are able to equip young people with specialist insight, such as conservation techniques, but also more general skills like communicating and collaborative work, all of which could help to alleviate problems of youth unemployment on a broader scale, not just in the cultural sector (Xanthoudaki 1998:167). In addition, training schemes also offer opportunities to encourage young people to feel like they belong in museums, to gain confidence, and offer opportunities to socialise with peers and older adults (ibid). It also seemed that giving young adults 'real' responsibilities to contribute to the work of museums was an effective means to install ways of learning more closely aligned with emancipatory pedagogies. As she explains, in successful cases, 'the roles of the 'expert' and the 'trainee' seem not to be strictly followed, and the 'trainee' can become 'expert' through direct experience in a familiar environment and through being entrusted with facilitating educational experiences in respect of other groups of visitors' (Xanthoudaki 1998:168-169). However, beyond some internal efforts by museums, and Xanthoudaki's work from the 1990s, there is very little in-depth qualitative research into how these work experience and training schemes impact their participants' lives and influence their perceptions of museum work. Understanding the evolution of the relationship between under-represented young adults who want to forge careers in the art world and large art institutions is a potentially rich area of study.

2.2.4 Summary

In this subsection I have explored the literature around the relationship between young adults and museums, surveying the reasons why this age group are consistently less likely to visit museums, and the strategies organisations have put in place to remedy this. What emerges is a complex landscape of barriers that point

towards fundamental differences in the ways museums organise and present the world and how young adults experience it. As Xanthoudaki summarises, there is a 'lack of correspondence between the institutions' services on offer and youth interests, ways of life and needs' (1998:169).

I considered art museums as a distinct locus of strained relations with young adults, emphasised by the gulf between very high levels of arts appreciation and participation at a societal level and markedly low levels of art museum visiting. This is indicative of another fundamental dislocation between museums and young adults; in this instance it relates to how they categorise, consume and make 'art' and how art museums present a gated and narrow view of art history. More significant still were the barriers beyond the gallery spaces, indicating a lack of 'routes in' to jobs in art museums for many young adults. This situation in turn exacerbates the feedback loop of alienation, with homogenous workforces and engrained institutional practices slowing the rate of change in the public facing areas of the museum.

Providing ways for young adults (particularly from underrepresented backgrounds) to actively enter the museum workforce or forge careers in the arts is one such way to begin to work towards a more inclusive museum. Encouraging visiting and in-gallery learning alongside schemes to make the museum, as an organisational structure, legible and navigable to those formerly excluded by it is an important step towards ensuring art museums become more democratic spaces. If we are to view inclusion through Hall's lens, then we need to ensure museums are open to everyone who comprise the nation; only this will enable institutions to present rich and complex narratives about culture that enable and encourage difference.

3. Context of the research: communicating conservation and collection care in the contemporary art museum

This chapter brings together two further areas of exploration: efforts to make conservation and collection care work visible and the particular conditions of care demanded by contemporary artworks. I begin by presenting a survey of approaches to communicating collection care work, weighing up the positives and drawbacks of each. I then outline some of the emerging approaches in the conservation of contemporary artworks, drawing links between changing processes and the potential for new narratives about conservation work to emerge into the public realm. I conclude with discussion of how all four areas of literature, presented in chapters 2 and 3, are combined to shape the development of this research project.

3.1 Communicating conservation and collection care

The work of the collection care and conservation departments in museums provides a particularly rich case study for the investigation of visible and invisible practices. The exploration of 'making visible' is justified in this project through an increasing body of literature that calls for greater museum transparency (Marstine 2001); the appetite of visitors for greater access to 'behind-the-scenes' content and experiences (Hykin et al. 2019; Lithgow et al. 2012; Drago 2011; Podany and Maish 1993); the increasingly complex nature of contemporary artworks that demand more sustained and overt interventions from conservators (Van Saaze 2009; Domínguez Rubio 2014); the strategic goals of professional bodies (ICON 2022); and, not least, due to the desires of conservation and collection care practitioners to communicate their work to the public (Brooks 2012; Muñoz Viñas 2005; Podany and Maish 1993; Saunders 2014; Williams 2013). The recent proliferation of initiatives to foreground conservation and collection care in museums is indicative that there is a desire for visibility and, relatedly, a perceived problem of 'invisibility' at play.

Compiling a review of literature around the communication of collection care and conservation reveals an uneven field from the outset. Whilst there are many examples to reference, alongside a growing body of articles on the subject of public communication, what soon becomes clear is that these deal almost exclusively with

conservation, conservation science, or visible storage (technicians, art handlers and registrars do not feature at all in the literature). Meanwhile evaluations are scarce, with little to no in-depth qualitative research, and with almost all literature on the subject authored by conservation practitioners; it seems to be a largely ignored subject by museum and visitor studies disciplines. More significant still is the lack of analysis or reflection on public conservation initiatives in art museums. Beyond a few familiar examples – such as the Lunder Conservation Centre at the Smithsonian American Art Museum – very little attention has been paid to the impact of making conservation work visible in these settings. Indeed, in almost thirty years of the IIC Keck award (for prompting the public understanding of conservation), only two projects in or in collaboration with art museums have won, the most recent of which was 2010 (Lithgow 2015:61; International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic works, n.d.).¹⁹

Art conservators, of all disciplines, and particularly those from large organisations, regularly collaborate through research projects, publish widely in journals, contribute to conferences, feature in public media (such as tv, radio and film), and undertake public and private tours (see for example Williams 2013). Yet the voice of conservators working in art museums – and particularly conservators working with contemporary artworks – is conspicuously absent in the lively practitioner debates around visibility.

3.1.1 Public enthusiasm

Various studies have suggested museum visitors find behind the scenes content and experiences to be engaging and, at least on the surface, somewhat suggestive of inclusive practices. However, none have dealt with the context of contemporary art and the contemporary art museum. Drago reports that visitors to the British Museum's *Conservation in Focus* exhibition 'felt included' (Drago 2011). Likewise, the Preserving the Past exhibition at the Getty also reported high levels of interest on

¹⁹ These projects were the aforementioned Lunder Conservation Center at the Smithsonian American Art Museum (1994) and the 'Painting Techniques of Impressionism and Postimpressionism' project organised by the Wallraf-Richartz Museum and Fondation Corboud in collaboration with the Cologne Institute for Conservation Science at the University of Applied Sciences in Cologne, Germany (2010). See <https://www.iiconservation.org/keck-awards> for a full list of winners

the part of visitors and, of those interviewed, most were able to discuss at least one of the principles of conservation with ‘impressive accuracy’ (Podany and Maish 1993:107). The recent *Conservation in Action* programme at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston similarly reported high levels of engagement from audiences, with the authors reporting that visitors displayed a better understanding of decision-making processes and the complexity of artworks (Hykin et al. 2019). It is imperative to note that the examples cited above deal with either heritage objects or pre 20th century artworks. Taking the form of evaluation studies, the findings from these initiatives invite further research as to *why* visitors find such content engaging

3.1.2 Visible conservation and collection care: a survey of approaches

The history of attempts to make visible conservation and collections-based work is interwoven with the development of conservation as a discipline and the changing priorities of museums. Pye and Sully illuminate the complex history of western conservation, showing it to be a relatively young but fast evolving discipline that is continuously shaped by, and responsive to, forces beyond its professional field (2007). These include advances in scientific knowledge; the development and use of new materials in society; museological discourse around what a museum is and who it is for; the threat of ecological catastrophe; changing societal attitudes towards what constitutes heritage; ethical debates around loss, human remains and repatriation; and political support for specific kinds of research and preservation (ibid). The history of communicating conservation unfolds against this backdrop.

As discussed, there is ample evidence to suggest that communicating collection care is popular, but it is necessary also to understand the different offerings presented to audiences. A review of recent and current initiatives reveals a spectrum of distinct approaches that each emphasise different aspects of conservation work and as such are more, or less, suited to certain types of objects, collections and locations. In the following subsection I will provide a summary of the most common ways that museums have exhibited or communicated collection care and conservation work and explore the various pros and cons that they offer, as described by practitioners.

Conservation 'in action'

A number of museums and heritage organisations have attempted to present conservation 'live' in galleries (for example the National Trust conservation in action programme, and *Operation Night Watch* at the Rijksmuseum). This can take the form of working on an object in situ in the public spaces of a museum, particularly when that object is unable to be moved. One such example is addressed by Lithgow et al in their report on the treatment of the James Thornhill wall paintings at Hanbury Hall (Lithgow et al. 2012). The deterioration of the wall painting presented an unusual and unique opportunity to show conservation work on a visually arresting feature of the house in an area already spacious enough to accommodate visitors; over the course of 3 months of weekends the work at Hanbury house was viewed by 944 visitors on 15-minute tours, with all given the opportunity to directly interact with conservators (Lithgow et al. 2012:183). The benefits of this were considered significant by the National Trust: visitor surveys reported an overwhelmingly positive response with 87% of people polled saying the experience had enhanced their visit even though the majority of attendees (82%) had not come for the tour but instead had come for a 'nice day out', to 'entertain children, meet friends or use the tearoom (Lithgow et al. 2012:184). This context is important as it shows the broad appeal of the display to an audience who were drawn to Hanbury for leisure and entertainment reasons rather than specifically learning. Yet on the other hand, this may indicate a difficulty in marketing these events to potential visitors and/or its inability to be a draw to the house in and of itself. The opportunity to present a long running conservation work in the gallery allowed visitors to 'see and discuss every stage of the treatment', suggesting, perhaps, a sense of public accountability and a way for the National Trust to gather public reactions to decision making (although this is not explicitly described in the report) (Lithgow et al. 2012). The strong evidence of visitor engagement also led to the initiative being celebrated in professional circles (winning an award from the Pilgrim Trust, a heritage funding body) (ibid).

'Live' encounters with conservation thus offer many benefits. Alongside the observations listed above is the opportunity it affords to see the real-life connection – often narrated by practitioners themselves - between expert and object; casting the relationship as one that is both technical and emotional. Yet despite the success some practical issues can be observed in Lithgow et al.'s account. With closer

attention it seems that there wasn't actually a large amount of conservation 'in action' when visitors were in the galleries: as the report details, 'little practical work was carried out during the guided tours due to the property's desire to provide continuous engagement at weekends when visitors were numerous' and as a result 'the two lead conservators were completely occupied in interacting with successive guided tours' during this time (Lithgow et al. 2012:183-184). What emerges then, is a vision of compromise: undertaking the real work of conservation in situ necessarily severs the opportunity for interaction with the public, and vice versa, interacting with the public puts processes on hold.²⁰

The conservation lab on view

Closely related to seeing conservators working on an object in the gallery space are initiatives to 'open up' conservation labs, where the lab itself, rather than an object, becomes the vehicle for communication. This often involves the construction of large glass partitions to offer views into conservation studios and laboratories, as well as the provision of accompanying talks and tours. According to Lithgow, presenting conservation science as a situated practice in heritage organisations has much potential yet continues to pose a number of challenges. Conservation science, she argues, needs to show that it benefits people and society and not just objects, and because of this it is worthy of further investment and support from stakeholders (Lithgow 2015). Indeed, conservation is able to be a potentially fruitful area of communication precisely because it acts as a bridge between disciplines and as such is able to expand our understanding of heritage through the scientific analysis of materials, which has the potential to give greater insight into the uses, meaning and history of an object.

The Liverpool Conservation Centre, part of National Museums Liverpool, was open from 1996-2010 and offered an exceptionally comprehensive exploration of the work of conservators. Its establishment included the first ever permanent exhibition dedicated solely to educating the public about conservation and within this was included a section dedicated to 'the laboratory on display' (Watts et al. 2013).

²⁰ Informal conversations I have had with conservators at other institutions underscored this; whilst they enjoyed interacting with the public, undertaking any work in situ nevertheless slowed down the process.

Looking back on the project, former staff have offered some crucial insights in what they describe as the process of presenting the 'lab as display case' (Watts et al. 213:19). Their terminology is revealing; when conservation labs become 'transparent' boxes they risk become mere theatres of science and this is precisely the problem the Liverpool Conservation Center faced. The layout of the lab was designed to enable as much of it to be visible as possible so that spectators could watch conservators at work and a demonstrator was often on hand to explain processes and act as an intermediary when scientists were at work (ibid). However, during periods when the intermediary was not present, scientists were often too busy to interact with visitors. Furthermore, it was not unusual for there to be occasions when no lab work was taking place at all. They soon discovered that for conservation labs to be interesting to an unfamiliar public they have to be activated by scientists and 'brought to life' through mediation (Ibid).

The most profound difficulties arose when the realities of lab work collided with visitor expectations of what a laboratory does and looks like (Ibid). The authors blame popular culture for setting up unrealistic expectations of labs as futuristic, gleaming spaces constantly populated by busy scientists when, in reality, they are everyday workspaces containing a variety of more or less spectacular equipment, sometimes busy but other times still (Ibid). 'When compared to the CSI labs', their display case laboratory 'sadly, did not look the part' (Ibid).

The Lunder Conservation Center is the perhaps the most notable example of the visible laboratory format in art museums. As mentioned above, it has garnered international praise amongst conservation funders and practitioners and continues to operate today whilst similar initiatives in the UK have been forced to close due to funding cuts.²¹ Like their counterparts in Liverpool, the labs are viewed through a glass window but also rely on the help of intermediaries through tours and talks to bring the spaces to life and provide 'behind the scenes' experiences (Peters and Romanek 2008:2).²² The impact of the Lunder Center can be measured through a different kind of activation of the space: a long term relationship with a local high

²¹ The Liverpool Conservation Centre closed in 2010 and the British Library Centre for Conservation closed in 2014.

²² I am grateful to Amber Kerr-Allison, Chief of Conservation at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, who gave me a tour of the Lunder Center on a recent visit to Washington DC.

school allowed science students to visit the labs and learn from and even work with conservators. Over time this led to a doubling of the number of students enrolled in the chemistry lab at the school (Kerr-Allison et al. 2013:94). Of additional importance to this study is the Lunder Center's recent opening of the 'live' conservation of Jenny Holzer's time-based media installation *For SAAM*. Comprising multiple strips of LED diodes arranged in a towering column, the work is vulnerable to the diodes periodically burning out and requiring replacement. To prevent the newly added diodes appearing brighter than their neighbours, the strips must be aged first. The rolling need for replacement parts resulted in the Lunder Center making this technology permanently visible; visitors can walk through a corridor where strips of LED lights undergoing the aging process comprise one side of the walkway. Whilst the technology requires no physical presence from conservators the processes are carried out 'live' and visitors can watch them unfold behind glass. It is a remarkable admission of the fragility of some contemporary artworks and the massive amount of technology and energy that must be expended on their preservation. It also seems to be unique in its situated and permanent communication of time-based media conservation. Unfortunately, there is no literature available on how the display came about nor any audience evaluation on the impact or learning outcomes.

Taken together, the Lunder Center and Liverpool Conservation Centre examples demonstrate the tightrope to be walked between exhibit and workspace, proving that the technology and spaces of conservation science – although they might be the initial draw – are not in and of themselves engaging. Mediation is key; merely *seeing* work take place, as Brooks cautions, runs the risk of obscuring the complexities of thinking and practice (Brooks 2013:5).

Visible storage

Open and visible storage, like the glass walled laboratory, presents another opportunity for museums and heritage organisations to give visual access to 'behind the scenes' areas. Visible storage is not the focus of this research project (and is not currently a strategy used by Tate), but it is nevertheless worth briefly engaging with this form of 'visibility' as representative of a current trend to demonstrate 'openness' and 'access' to collections. It is through the idea of 'access' that these displays come

to be deemed efforts to democratize knowledge, which is often cited by museums as justification for this approach (Orcutt 2011:214). Yet, as Stubbs-Lee found in her research, the idea of a public demand for open storage was mostly based on assumptions, with museum professionals unable to cite any specific evidence or metrics of evaluation that proved public appetite for seeing museums stores (2009:279). Furthermore, none of the museums Stubbs-Lee used as case studies were able to present *all* of their collections, despite their best intentions. In the case of the American institutions she surveyed, most visible storage efforts were funded by the Luce Foundation, who exclusively support access to American historic collections, thereby creating a system where non-American objects were unable to be included and thus left hidden (Stubbs-Lee 2009:282). This detail reminds us of a crucial component across all the approaches discussed in this chapter: who decides what is made visible and under what conditions?

The question of what is seen is further compounded by the visual cacophony caused by open storage, whereby expanding the visibility of entire collections has the inverse effect of obscuring the unique properties of individual objects (Brusius and Singh 2018). Presenting more objects, without the structure of an exhibition to guide interpretation and draw out connections, requires more work on behalf of the museum to find new and innovative ways of helping the visitor structure their encounter with the open storage (Orcutt 2011) and as Stubbs-Lee found, most visitors do not use the catalogues that are often provided in these displays (Stubbs-Lee 2009:284).

The overwhelming sense in the available literature is that open storage facilities offer museums a tangible way to satisfy their core remit to provide access to collections whilst also showing the mechanisms through which they care for them. Furthermore, there is also evidence to suggest that developing visible storage centres encourages the improvement of collection care practices that now find themselves thrust into the public consciousness (Stubbs-Lee 2009:284). On a wider level Crenn interprets these schemes as a crucial step towards the democratisation of museums and part of a welcome trend towards greater transparency (Crenn 2021:97). Further research, however, is required to determine what such displays truly offer visitors beyond merely a demonstration of openness.

Exhibitions and displays

Some museums and heritage institutions make use of temporary or permanent displays to communicate conservation work. These may incorporate a number of elements, from text panels to videos, interactive displays of tools and materials, opportunities to talk to conservators, focus on pests or external threats to collections, and case studies of objects (Podany and Maish 1993; Drago 2011; Hykin et al. 2019; Watts et al. 2013; Lithgow et al. 2012). Thematic approaches to exhibitions vary but the central problem that the creators of these displays face is, as Podany and Maish summarise, the issue of ‘making the complex simple’ for a non-specialist audience (1993). The Getty’s *Preserving the Past* exhibition took a multi-layered approach in its attempt to give an overview of the key processes and principles of the profession and drew on audience research by their colleagues to determine the most effective means of communication. Determined to avoid focusing on the complicated minutiae of the everyday nor an over romanticisation and dramatization of the discipline, they aimed to ‘involve visitors in a deeper appreciation of what they were seeing and what they had not been aware of’ (Podany and Maish 1993:102). The key, it seems, was through collaboration with their colleagues in educational roles who were able to act as facilitators and answer questions. (ibid). Whilst other museums have noted the difficulty in training volunteer tour guides to answer questions about specialist conservation techniques (Price and Stoehr 2013:9), the Getty found that experienced museum educators, who were given lectures by their colleagues in conservation, were key translators for visitors (Podany and Maish 1993:103). In addition, the location of the exhibition in the museum was important. Taking the work of the antiquities department as its focus, the exhibition benefited from adjacency to the antiquities collection, with the hope that visitors would be able to immediately apply the information they had learned to their visitor journeys (ibid).

A second consideration the organisers of exhibitions faced was what role to afford objects in the presentation of conservation work. Objects can be helpful vehicles for relaying information regarding the interaction between material, treatment and meaning through their individual biographies. Price and Stoehr found object led displays to be more successful than displays organised via concepts or processes, not least because volunteer guides were able to learn and deliver information more easily when given objects to structure their tours around (2012:10). At the British

Museum, Drago explains how the team selected objects that represented different areas of the museum's collection and showcased the organisation's relationships with source communities (2011:30-31). Yet, crucially, these objects also needed to be visually interesting (ibid). Indeed, this is an issue that seems to be common across all the approaches surveyed here, with initiatives privileging objects that are visually striking, materially interesting or tactile over more intangible forms of conservation.

Integrating technology

More recent examples of making conservation visible have integrated digital technology as tools to enhance understanding and increase engagement. Museums are increasingly producing social media content, online Q&A sessions, videos, and audio materials that explain conservation processes and give glimpses of the 'behind the scenes'. Yet there is little to no available analysis of the impact these methods alone offer; what emerges in the literature is more descriptive in nature and pertains to how technology and digital content is integrated into exhibitions. Drago's account of the British Museum exhibition describes the integration of screens as a simple means to show objects, tools that processes that could not be included in the display and to tell 'treatment stories' (2011:32-33). Slightly less than half the visitors to the show stopped to watch the screens although they did prove helpful for those who preferred not to speak to the conservators, either because of language barriers or shyness (2011:33 and 36).

At MoMA, conservators Cynthia Albertson and Anny Aviram have described how they embedded contributions from the conservation team in the exhibition *Diego Ribera: Murals for the Museum of Modern Art* (2011-2012). This included an audio guide narrated by the conservators, interactive features on the exhibition website, blogposts with technical findings and iPhone and iPad apps (Albertson and Aviram 2013). The pair describe how the complex installation process, and the collaboration this necessitated, required the conservators to play a pivotal role in the making of the exhibition. The nature of the artworks and the collaborative working processes required to care for and understand them thus opened avenues for new stories to be told about conservation work and the materials of the murals themselves (Albertson and Aviram 2013:64). Creating digital didactic materials with conservators seems to

have emerged as a result of this ‘total collaboration’ and the unexpected discoveries the installation process revealed, creating ‘teachable moments’ that could be packaged into interactive methods (ibid). The MoMA case provides an interesting insight into art museum context, but unfortunately there is no publicly available analysis of how visitors made use of these materials.

Sharing skills

Skill sharing initiatives can offer audiences the ability to learn how to conserve their possessions and the world around them (Price and Stoehr 2013:11) but also offer opportunities for conservators to learn in return from individuals and communities with cultural connections to objects in museum collections (Peters 2020:9). Price and Stoehr describe the benefits of such outreach projects in their history of Winterthur’s conservation programme. Staff created publications for general audiences about how to care for their own ‘collections’ and ran workshops that offered advice on how to store and care for personal and sentimental objects such as family photographs, papers and records, and materials that commonly form the basis of household objects like textiles or silverware (Price and Stoehr 2013:13). The popularity and use of such public programmes can perhaps be explained by Pye and Sully’s observation that we are undergoing an expansion in what society considers as ‘heritage’ - and therefore what is worth collecting and preserving - coupled with increasing public interest in history and conservation issues (Pye and Sully 2007:20 and 22).

Conservators can also learn from their communities. Peters notes that conservation has always been a social practice, but more recently the profession has begun to embrace alternative ways of understanding the social worlds of objects and opened up to include the perspectives and contributions of the communities for whom they hold significance (Peters 2020). Objective and subjective approaches to conservation will be discussed in greater detail in section 5.1.5, but for now it is important to note the emancipatory potential of collaboration and mutual learning. This is particularly important in redressing power imbalances with indigenous groups, whose objects may be held in museum collections and subject to conservation practices that may be in conflict with their cultural values and beliefs (Peters 2020:9-11). Creating conditions of *equal* knowledge exchange, whereby practitioners work

with communities to learn local or traditional practices of making and preserving and combine these with Western approaches, are now becoming models for best practice (ibid).

3.1.3 Inclusion and exclusion in conservation outreach

Building on the ideas discussed in the previous section, it is necessary to step back and consider wider themes of inclusion and exclusion in communicating the work of collection care and conservation. Conservation often benefits from a sense of 'faux neutrality', that assumes the care of collections is an impartial and noble task (Henderson 2020:1; Peters 2020:16-17). Yet conservation and collection care are not immune from propagating exclusive practices in the museum. Henderson reminds us that to 'keep' is an inherently political decision, and due to the lack of diversity in the conservation profession, these decisions are made in western museums by a majority white, middleclass workforce (Henderson 2020).

Furthermore, if the role of conservation is to preserve material objects for future generations, conservators must ask for whom are they performing this work? (ibid). Just as Hall asks whose heritage is considered 'Heritage', so Henderson asks who do conservators imagine as the beneficiaries of their work? If the imagined future audience is the same as those who visit museums today, then there will continue to be a lack of diversity both behind the scenes and in the public spaces of the museum (ibid).

Jones and Holden argue that conservation nevertheless has the potential to be a site for the development of inclusive practices; and here we return to the idea of skill sharing. This is because there are a number of aspects of conservation that have the potential to resonate with people outside the profession. Notions of individual and collective care are universal values that can also take culturally different forms (Jones and Holden 2008:75). Embracing different notions of care, be it 'keeping' for future generations, allowing an object to materially deteriorate, or choosing to prioritise its intangible or spiritual value, diversifies the decision-making process and compels the museum to embrace new forms of collecting that challenge Western epistemologies of ownership and order (Jones and Holden 2008; Henderson 2020; Azoulay 2019). Mediation can also occur through the skills and decision-making

processes used. Jones and Holden use 'Rob' as an example, who restores video games in his spare time. In his hobby he chooses to preserve something that he 'find[s] important and connects to [his] sense of identity' – much like the motives behind conserving national collections (Jones and Holden 2008:79).

Finally, recent literature has sought to reposition conservation and maintenance as a fundamentally creative act; even the production of 'sameness' is a creative endeavour (Domínguez Rubio 2020:41-43). These aspects – the individual and social nature of care and its cultural expressions, transferrable skills and decision making, creativity – can all become potential mediators in 'making the invisible visible'. In contemporary art conservation - where the identity of the work may be prioritised before its materiality, where Rob's video game repair skills are shared by time-based media conservators, and where conservation interventions in the 'life' of works can literally (re)create the object - these points of mediation have much potential to engage and involve visitors.

3.1.4 Summary

This section presents the case for increased visibility of collection care as something that might prove beneficial for practitioners, audiences, communities, and the museum alike. Yet there are significant gaps in the literature and much still to be explored. Despite the proliferation of approaches described above, each with their own advantages and drawbacks, discussion and reflection on the visibility and communication of collection care seems to be neglected by museum studies and almost wholly confined to the realm of conservators and conservation scientists. Other collection care practitioners are largely absent from the debate, as are conservators and scientists working with contemporary artworks. Another core question is: do these initiatives go far enough? If we are to apply Marstine's criteria of dashboard and radical transparency, then the visible conservation initiatives described above seem closer to the former. Learning about conservation through displays or demonstrations still retains the power imbalance between collection care practitioner and audience. Whilst participants might increase their knowledge there is no real emancipatory aspect. Indeed, it seems to be practitioners who gain the most from these initiatives as they raise the profile of their respective disciplines. Skill

sharing does go some way to redressing this, but only if there is a true exchange between institution and public; merely passing on skills to a willing audience is perhaps more closely resembles the deficit model of outreach. Analysis of *how* people benefit (inside and outside the museum) is missing, as is reflection on *what* exactly is made visible and the significance of this. How this interlinks with particular kinds of objects and the museums that house them is also absent. All of these provide particularly rich avenues of further exploration. This research project aims to begin to address these gaps in the literature.

3.2 Contemporary art and contemporary art museums

The specific conditions of contemporary art museums, and the varied nature of their collections, present a further modulation of the social possibilities of conservation. A tension exists between traditional approaches that hold on to the material sanctity of the art object, and the need for a more socially focused approach that responds to the increasingly complex needs of artworks that take, for example, intangible, ephemeral, collaborative, organic or digital forms (Laurenson 2006:np). Such complex artworks have necessitated the extension of professional networks, resulting in increased communication and collaboration between different arts institutions, as well as the welcoming of specialists previously considered exterior to the world of fine art conservation – such as computer scientists.²³ As Laurenson summarises, ‘the suggestion that conservation might need to broaden its sphere of interest sits, somewhat uncomfortably, as a threatened loss of clarity to its original remit’ (Laurenson 2011:35).

Conservation practices have had to keep pace with artworks that have a more socially engaged and collaborative agenda, such as participatory performance works (Marçal 2017:97) or works that explore the very systems and networks that constitute cultural production (of which museums themselves play a part) (Halsall 2016:441-442). Furthermore, recent approaches to conserving, caring for, and collecting such artworks have necessitated processes that have produced an

²³ For example, during a recent event at Tate (part of the Reshaping the Collectible project, 4 April 2019), representatives from the Guggenheim explained how collaboration with computer scientists helped the museum understand how to preserve their net art collection and develop a shared language for fixing, editing and writing code.

increasingly elastic understanding of authenticity. Works in multiple iterations and editions have challenged the latent objectivist notion of the original, whilst artworks that unfold over time, sometimes with multiple anonymous collaborators, or even in a digital space beyond the physical walls of the museum, present further challenges to the sanctity of the art object.²⁴ Ethical decisions around the acquisition, preservation, treatment and restaging or re-exhibiting of these works have taken on new complexities and as a result conservation and collection care staff have become ever present in the 'life' of these works. As van Saaze's research has found, for many contemporary artworks 'the existing division between practices behind the scenes and the artwork in the public space of the museum becomes unclear', and thus 'it is particularly interesting and relevant to explore what happens behind the scenes as back-stage and frontstage become increasingly intertwined' (van Saaze 2009:29). Her work stops short of exploring what such newly porous boundaries mean for the museum visitor, but the implication remains that as artists continue to explore new technological and conceptual avenues, conservators and collection care staff increasingly engage in activities that contribute to the meaning of the work, and this in turn impacts its manifestation in the public space of the museum.

3.2.1 Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum

My understanding of the concerns and concepts attached to the care of contemporary artworks is shaped by my involvement with a Mellon funded research project at Tate spearheaded by the Collection Care Research department.

Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum (RTC) is interdepartmental and collaborative in nature. Their work deals with many of the issues outlined above and takes as its central concern the 'lives' of six artworks (or clusters of artworks) in the museum collection. These are works that provide challenging examples for conservation and collection management due to the complex nature of their materials or form (for example time-based media or performance works). The project asks how these artworks might change the museum, and in doing so they hope to conceive of new theoretical frameworks

²⁴ Net art provides a particularly taxing conundrum for museums – not least because works evade conventional forms of acquisition by remaining online despite 'entering' the collection.

through which to develop Tate's collection care and conservation models. The overarching research questions that guide the project are: 1.) How do we conserve and manage our contemporary collections and legacy in a way that is agile and responsive to the specifics of an artist's practice and the context in which they are working? Are we conserving practices or histories? 2.) How is the museum navigating these boundaries between the uncollectible and the collectible? How is this impacting the market? How will the boundaries be redrawn in the future? 3.) What can we learn from explaining a history of Tate's response to new forms of artistic practice? 4.) How might we maximise the benefits of research conducted in a museum context for audiences and practitioners?

Central to this project is the notion that there is a lag between the evolution of contemporary artmaking practice (both materially and conceptually) and the way the museum organises itself (its infrastructure, departments and practices) and the way it organises the world (the categories into which artworks are organised and notions of authenticity and change). Two key areas of exploration that are important for RTC and this research project are the notions of 'networks of care' and 'unruly artworks'. The former is a concept developed by Annet Dekker to characterise the multiple dependencies of internet artworks and how these exist outside of institutional frameworks (2018). 'The resilience of net art', she explains, 'is built and distributed through a complex and interrelated system of networks that present an assemblage of artistic, technological, political, and social relations which merge to form a variable entity' (Dekker 2018:92). Her conception of care as requiring distributed knowledge and incorporating non-institutional stakeholders is applicable to other kinds of contemporary artworks (and lays the foundations for conceiving of the museum as a more expansive plane of exchange Schäffler 2019:87). Domínguez Rubio's notion of 'unruly artworks' feeds into this in its ability to theorise the relationship between these complex artworks and the institutions that house them (2014). Artworks are not in and of themselves unruly, rather it is the museum's inability to incorporate them – and the way they resist institutional processes in return – that casts them as such (Domínguez Rubio 2014).

3.2.2 Summary

This collaborative PhD was proposed via Reshaping the Collectible, and as such my conception of contemporary conservation is informed by the emerging scholarship of this team.²⁵ My research will satisfy strand four of the project –

‘Making the Invisible Visible’ - but will not be actively involved in the team’s research into selected artworks and their conservation and stewardship needs. Instead, my PhD will act as an independent satellite to the project, by exploring one of the overarching themes. I will approach Reshaping the Collectible as a way to conceptualise the art museum as an open and interconnected network and plain of exchange and the moments of making visible that will be explored as part of my research methodology will include materials produced by the team such as films, displays and audio projects. Incorporating the issues attached to the care of contemporary artworks is vital for a research project that thinks about the particular conditions of visibility and invisibility in the context of the *contemporary* art museum. Understanding the care and longevity of these works is an acute area of concern for Tate and other art museums with similar collecting remits.

3.3 Implications for the research

Chapters 2 and 3 brought together four key areas of investigation that undergird this research project. These are:

- Inclusion and exclusion in museums
- Young adults and museums
- Communicating conservation and collection care
- Conserving contemporary artworks

Reviewing these themes together, some avenues of exploration emerge. I discussed inclusion and exclusion as a matter of *belonging*, both in museums as institutional spaces and in what is considered to be heritage and culture on a societal level (Hall 1999). This, I argued, was related to who constructs knowledge *in* the museum, drawing on Whitaker’s argument that museum workplaces can also act against embedding inclusive practices (2023). A through-line can be drawn to some of the

²⁵ My supervisor Professor Pip Laurenson is the Project Leader of RTC.

issues affecting young adults, who often have ambivalent relationships with museums and can feel alienated from them. An overview of recent literature suggested that young adults consume culture in ways that are jarring with museums' more traditional ways of ordering and presenting the world. Writ large, this translated as a fundamental failure of museums to serve the interests and meet the needs of young adults (Xanthoudaki 1998:169). Greater focus on how museums meet the career ambitions of young adults and offer them skills and routes into the cultural sector emerged as an understudied yet acute area of concern. This intersects with the wider issue of belonging: who is able to participate and cross the threshold into the museum workforce? Who creates knowledge?

Meanwhile, collection care practitioners are undergoing a crisis of representation. Consensus among conservators, whose voices emerge most often in the literature, is that there are many benefits to increasing their visibility to the wider museum sector, its stakeholders, and the public alike. There is lively conversation about how this should be done – overcoming strains on practitioner time, tackling perceived neutrality, recasting worn narratives, and combatting oversimplification – yet these discussions themselves remain curiously hidden. A dichotomy thus emerges: 'behind the scenes' content forms an increasingly prominent part of museum programming and outreach but garners little interest as a serious area of enquiry from those outside the conservation world or in academic circles. Conservators and other collection care practitioners working in art museums are under-represented in the literature. Closer focus on the issues that some 'unruly' contemporary artworks pose – and the ways that conservators and theorists approach these in new and radical ways – might offer different a different path through the murky issue of visibility.

Conservation and collection care thus emerges as the nexus of these four routes of enquiry. In the moments where it intersects with public outreach, it links audiences, staff, and collections with learning alternative skills and surfacing hidden careers to open up new routes into the museum. For young adults this could have an impact on those who feel shut out of museum careers but nevertheless invested in culture. Could understanding more about collection care - it's skills, ethical conundrums, collaborative approaches and ways of recasting the relationships between humans and objects – offer different points of engagement? Here, Marstine's categories of transparency become an important way of framing this tessellation of issues (2013).

Does increased visibility of collection care offer ways to develop radical transparency, or is it merely dashboard transparency in a different guise? And can young adults and practitioners benefit in equal measure? If so, it could begin to redress the imbalances of power within the museum and in its relationship with young adults. The avenues of exploration raised here will shape the choice of theoretical framework and research design.

4. Theoretical Framework 1: understanding the institutional context

Hohenstein and Moussouri have demonstrated that ‘culture is situated in society’s power relationships’, and that this in turn is reflected in the way museums function as collecting institutions that systematise, present, and represent knowledge (Hohenstein & Moussouri 2018:266 and 268). Adopting a theoretical framework that conceptualises how museum practices are interlaced with power structures, as well as their own internal logics of operation, provides a way to understand ‘why things are the way that they are’ – i.e. how the divide between public and private spaces (where knowledge is produced) is constructed and maintained by museums, how this interlinks with transparency, and, ultimately, the implications it has on museum drives for the development of more democratic ways of functioning (Ibid).

Building on discussion in the previous section, it is necessary to consider how the actions and processes of collection care and conservation might interact with I intend to address actions on a micro, meso and macro level, considering the role of individuals and practices within the broader context of the museum and its dependencies. Employing a theoretical framework that can account for the connection between individuals, museums and society is necessary for the branch of inquiry in this research project that seeks to understand museums’ often ambivalent attitude to transparency.

I use DiMaggio’s theory of the organisational field (1991) and Bourdieu’s concepts of field, cultural capital and habitus (1983; 2009 (1993)) to situate Tate as a product of relationships both within and beyond the museum. This in turn allows me to conceptualise how art museums function in society and in relation to other institutions. I also discuss the role of emotions in institutional work. This can occur on an individual level in the relationship between people and organisation (Voronov and Vince 2012) and, I propose, manifest at an institutional level: I incorporate Miceli and Castelfranchi’s (2005) definition of anxiety as a potentially fruitful way to approach the tensions caused by efforts to increase museum transparency (Marstine 2013).

4.1 Fields

The concepts of 'fields' has emerged in sociological studies as a means to simultaneously think about the micro and the macro – how actions at the individual and institutional level might be analysed concurrently (Dowd et.al. 2009:399). In the sociology of culture, this has broader implications for understanding how 'meaning and value are produced in society' (Ibid), and, in the context of this research project, how the knowledge making apparatus of the museum is produced by the presence of an organisational field, the individuals within this field, and greater external forces of power, class and the field of cultural production. Whilst there are a number of significant branches of field theory, there are nevertheless unifying principles, which John Levi Martin has identified (Martin 2003). These include what can be defined as a field; how fields come into existence; how analysis can be conducted; how causality can be interpreted; and how individuals and their cognition can be explained in relation to fields (Ibid). I have summarised Martin's core observations in the table below (Table 1).

Commonalities in field theory	Explanation
Shared conception of what a field is	An analytic area in which individuals or institutions are positioned. Positions of persons in a field are based on their interpersonal relations. An organisation of forces, which both induces motion and impedes it (through the presence boundaries). A space of contestation and goal-oriented striving, according to a set of internalised 'rules' - akin to a 'game'.
How fields come into existence	When groups of actors frame their actions vis-à-vis one another. When a set of individuals are striving after a similar goal. When individuals move between a set of institutions 'with minimal dislocation of subjectivity'.

How analysis should be conducted	In depth analysis of a particular case enables the revelation of general principles of the larger field. The existence of a field can be found in its effects.
How causality should be interpreted	Causality is found in motivations, and fields are defined by certain common motivations.
How we understand the relation of fields to individuals and their cognition	The way an individual takes in information about the world is both relative to their position in the field but also gives the individual information about their own position. Cognition is a 'web of extero- and interspecific information'.

Table 1: Summary of overarching concerns in field theory identified in the article 'What is Field Theory?' (Martin 2003).

In this section I will look to two branches of field theory that have significant relevance to art museums: Bourdieu's field of 'stratification and domination', and Powell and DiMaggio's field of 'interorganisational relations' (Martin 2003:14; DiMaggio 1999; Bourdieu 1983). For the purpose of this study they provide useful ways to approach how art museums construct 'taste' through arbitrary and hidden mechanisms (Fyfe 1999; Bennett 1995), how museums exert a 'mutual influence' upon each other (DiMaggio 1999:267), whilst also understanding how a professional field comes into being via struggle for influence between academics, employees, funding bodies, artists and other stakeholders whose presence wax and wane over time. As a result of the commonalities listed above DiMaggio and Bourdieu's theories, although different in their methodology and focus, can be said to nevertheless share 'fundamental affinities' and 'point in the same direction' (Martin 2003:14). In the following subsections I will demonstrate how elements of both branches can be useful in exploring: how art museums (re)produce hierarchical structures of taste making and collecting; how field dynamics of contestation and striving give form to museum identities, missions and workplaces; and how this might help construct an analytical framework through which to hypothesise the extent to which recalibrating the (in)visibility of collection care in the art museum might impact the dynamics of the fields in which such organisations participate.

4.2 Paul J. DiMaggio and organisational fields

DiMaggio's process of analysis alerts us to the power of external actors (particularly other institutions) to shape how organisations function. Examples include funding bodies (in DiMaggio's case this is the Carnegie Corporation); professional bodies (the American Association of Museums); and the role of universities and art history courses that defined 'high art' and encouraged a culture of connoisseurship that subsequently impacted art museum acquisitions and the activities of curators (DiMaggio 1991). For this research project, DiMaggio's call to intertwine study of the struggle between actors at the level of the organisational field with the identity and activities of museum professionals can be tentatively mapped onto the context of Tate's current activities, with methodological implications. Understanding what becomes visible and how requires an understanding of the influence of external actors who might enable, inhibit or otherwise shape how the 'invisible is made visible'. For example: The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is funding the current Reshaping the Collectible project at Tate, to which the PhD is associated.²⁶ This foundation has also recently funded a similar initiative at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA).²⁷ Meanwhile, Tate's conservators have and continue to share knowledge in a network that includes SFMOMA and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and a recent Reshaping the Collectible event invited Christiane Paul, Curator of New Media Arts at the Whitney Museum of American Art, to participate in a public event and a closed-door professional roundtable discussion in order to explore the future of Net Art collection, curation and conservation in museums. The role of an international organisational field – and the impetus to keep up with, or innovate ahead of, other art institutions - may be a factor in understanding how Tate approaches the task of making the invisible visible.

In addition, it is important to understand how staff involved at all levels of the museum (from art handlers and conservators, to public programmes and outreach

²⁶ In adopting a reflexive methodology, it is important that I consider how the actions and interests of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation have enabled this research project to take place, and to what extent their financial aid has contributed to greater museum transparency in the organisational field.

²⁷ The Artist's Initiative ran from December 2013 – May 2019. See <https://mellon.org/grants/grants-database/grants/san-francisco-museum-of-modern-art/41300615/> and <https://www.sfmoma.org/artists-artworks/research/artist-initiative/#:~:text=The%20Artist%20Initiative%20is%20a,grant%20from%20the%20Andrew%20W> [accessed 21 June 2020].

and, at the apex of the power hierarchy, senior management and directors) are influenced by professional affiliations, education, and other conditions of habitus that might affect how they execute their role within the institution, what they consider the function of the museum to be, and how they might approach the possibility of increased access to the inner workings of the museum. In this study, the need to gather this information will inform some of the topics for discussion in semi-structured interviews with staff.

4.2.1 Museums as a product of conflict

DiMaggio identifies a growing tension during the early twentieth century between two distinct 'missions': the traditional museum, controlled by trustees, patrons, donors and specialists who valued 'collecting, conservation and sacralisation', and the reformist museum, instigated by 'professionals and educators' who called for museums to 'educate, exhibit, and interpret culture' for a broad general public (Marontate 2007:287; DiMaggio 1991:270). The result was the legitimization and normalisation of a continued state of 'conflict over the interpretation of the museum's mission' which persists to this day (DiMaggio 1991:268). This is because museums 'accommodate agents with conflicting visions of what a museum should be (trustees, professional curators, accountants and marketeers) who are continually putting the museum together as a more or less coherent project' (Fyfe 1996:210). By considering the context of an organisational field and interviewing individual practitioners at various points in the (in)visibility matrix, I hope to understand how making visible the social nature of conservation and collection care might contribute to, or be impacted by, the ongoing struggle to define the purpose and vision for Tate that plays out between different actors within and exterior to the museum.

4.2.2 The impact of collecting and collections on institutions and organisational fields

Art museum collections and their collecting agendas simultaneously shape, and are shaped by, the presence of fields. As discussed above, the field of cultural production is inherently linked with the way museums designate, produce and

respond to notions of cultural value. Meanwhile, collections and their evolving needs can create ripples in the dynamics of institutions and organisational fields. Fyfe's text 'A Trojan Horse at the Tate: Theorizing the Museum as Agency and Structure' provides both an attempt to understand the museum/society relationship through fields and a focus on the role acquisitions and collections might play in disrupting field relations and forcing change within an institution. Whilst his key reference is Bourdieu, Fyfe nevertheless engages in an institutional analysis that seeks to impose some theoretical order on interpreting the 'untidiness of institutional worlds' (Fyfe 1996:224). The Trojan horse in question is the 'Chantrey Bequest' (1878), a collection of popular paintings donated by the sculptor Sir Francis Chantrey, funded by the Treasury, and for whom the Royal Academy of Art (RA) acted as a trustee. The acquisition gave the RA and the Treasury a foothold at Tate, and with it came significant power for the two institutions to determine the character of the nation's art collection. As a result, a battle over issues of taste raged within, and exterior to, the museum. The bequest came to represent a form of commercially successful popular art that was perceived by some at Tate to stand in opposition to the more 'high-brow' modernist works that the museum should apparently prioritise. The ensuing struggle to decide the nature of the national collection and the identity of Tate – played out between the RA, the Treasury, and Tate itself – 'formed a configuration of shifting institutional power caught up in cross-cutting ties of cultural interdependence which extended into the wider society' (Fyfe 1996:219). Tanner interprets this work as a way to address the 'class essentialism' of Bourdieu and DiMaggio (who both interpret museums as essential vehicles for the cultural dominance of the ruling classes) by giving greater prominence to the autonomy of the museum 'as an organisation in its own right', capable of 'playing off various constituencies' within it (Tanner 2003:152). Fyfe's study is significant for this research project because it allows for greater analysis of the importance of actions *within* the institution; it illustrates the ability of collections to create new dependencies, to become the catalysts for internal and external power struggles, and to bring new actors into organisational fields.

Critiques of the deep imperial and neoliberal ties of museums are accompanied by actions and theories for how to instigate change. Artists have long sought to disrupt, challenge and reform museums, most notably in the work of those whose practice

what can be broadly defined as institutional critique, such as Hans Haacke, Fred Wilson, Andrea Fraser, The Guerrilla Girls and Daniel Buren. Fraser's work in particular has been both informed and supported by Bourdieu, who has praised her critical practice as 'exposing the unseeable and unsayable in the social universe' by appropriating the language and aesthetics of museums in order to challenge and reveal how the museum, as an agent in the field of artistic production, perpetuates the cult of the artwork (Bourdieu 2005:xiv). Yet despite the canonisation of these artists in the history of contemporary art (all are represented in Tate's collection), there are no studies that definitively measure how museums might have changed as a result of their conceptual interventions and confrontations. Perhaps, then, there is scope to analyse how *artworks*, in their very materiality (or lack thereof) might disrupt the internal hierarchies and functioning of museums once they enter collections. Complex, unstable and unpredictable works that challenge traditional notions of ownership, authorship, preservation and professional skill are, to borrow Fyfe's analogy, the new Trojan Horses at Tate. With them come dependencies to new individuals and organisations – and as a result the identity and role of the museum professional becomes unstable. Such artworks might critique on an intellectual level, but they also have the ability to disrupt behind the scenes as their unfolding 'life' upends traditional forms of conservation, and by extension, brings new actors into both the museum as an institution and the fields in which the museum exerts influence.

In the context of the contemporary art museum, Marontate has argued that the demands of contemporary artworks – specifically those categorised as 'time-based media' – provide a new point of friction for the museum. The identity of the 'museum professional' is increasingly challenged through interdisciplinary collaboration with practitioners traditionally situated outside the art museum field (such as electricians, mechanical engineers and computer scientists), who have now become vital actors in the networks needed to maintain contemporary art collections (Marontate 2007:288). Furthermore, traditional roles of staff in collection care and conservation departments have augmented and complexified in accordance with the changing nature of collections, causing conservators to take on multiple identities including 'artist, scientist, mediator, educator, financial adviser, ethicist, and information manager' (see Marstine's introduction to Barker and Smithen 2006:85). In an echo

of DiMaggio's historic study of the generation of organisational fields and the birth of the museum professional, we thus see a new modulation in the identity of the professional and a struggle emerges as to who participates in the construction of knowledge within the museum – and by extension how (and whether) to communicate this to visitors. In the context of the contemporary art museum, changes are wrought at the level of both the cultural field (artistic production of new kinds of artworks; academy and institutional verification of such works as worthy of collection) and the organisational field (the inclusion of actors shaped by institutions previously less valued by museums). Marontate's observations, as well as van Saaze's (2013) ethnography of installation works suggests that the sprawling network of dependencies formed by contemporary artworks – managed (and felt most acutely) by collection care and conservation departments – is an acute disruption to the traditional functioning of the museum and a catalyst for new struggles at the levels of organisational and cultural fields.

4.2.3 Locating power in historic practices

Discussion of power and collecting in institutions would be remiss if it did not acknowledge the imperial roots of museums, and how the Western construction of knowledge (and relatedly, value) permeates the discourse and practices of collecting and conserving objects. The deep saturation of imperial practices may help to explain the often-ambivalent attitude of museums to structural change – a connection that has been brought into sharper focus by the current BLM movement (Ahmed et al. 2022). Ariella Azoulay provides a rich exploration of the violence that accompanies collecting, and the wielding of the classification *art* as a means to impose a closed field of expertise, a distinction between high and low culture, and a means to justify the privilege of some to handle, keep and display objects ahead of the communities that produced them (2019). Although the focus of her work is on those items that are looted, divorced from their makers and social context, and consequently misunderstood and misrepresented, her observations nevertheless hold significant value for the context of contemporary art museums. She reminds us that apparently neutral and 'standardized protocols for handling and salvaging art objects' are taste making activities derived from imperial definitions of value and

authenticity that have historically denied ‘the diverse political and cosmological formations’ that frame an object’s fabrication and original interpretation (Azoulay 2019:59). These processes go largely unquestioned and are invisible due to their perceived authority and neutrality (Ahmed et al. 2022:11). Large and long-established national museums such as Tate stand on the shoulders of this imperial culture of collecting and organising the world. Azoulay’s work calls on us to question the taken-for-granted practices and authority of the museum, to interrogate the ‘way things are’ as a product of Western epistemologies of ownership and order.

Brian Holmes has also approached the museum as the product of historic power structures, though in this instance through the lens of neoliberal global capital. The focus of his critique is Tate Modern, which he designates as a ‘tomb of the working class made into a glittering artwork’ and tourist attraction (2004:550).²⁸ Through its many corporate sponsors and New Labour backing (Holmes writes shortly after Tate’s founding in 2000) he positions the institution (and its collection) as tightly integrated with ‘the financial core of transnational state capitalism’ (Holmes 2004:551). Although Holmes is not concerned with fields, his argument nevertheless hints at the convergence of the national fields of power, class and culture that Bourdieu has outlined (1883), and the global art field theorised by Buchholz (2016). Like Fyfe’s analysis of the early iteration of Tate as the product of negotiating ties of interdependence to the state and arts sector, so the Tate Modern of Holme’s article emerges as a construct of multiple forces, with international corporations and governmental approval and funding exerting considerable influence over the operation of the museum.²⁹

4.3 Pierre Bourdieu: field, capital and habitus

The work of Pierre Bourdieu has been used by multiple researchers working across the sociological sciences, and not least those analysing the practices of museums and the relationships of these institutions to their audiences and society writ large.

²⁸ In this metaphor the tomb is the disused electric powerplant that forms the main architectural body of Tate Modern.

²⁹ A record of Tate’s current corporate partnerships can be found here: <https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/corporate-support/partnership> [accessed 21 August 2024].

Bourdieu's concern with class and capital has made his work particularly applicable to the task of analysing how museums might reproduce conditions of inequality, through their contribution to cultural value systems, educational practices, and the social forces that shape the experiences of those who visit museums. The concept of field in Bourdieu's work is closely entwined with the notions of habitus and capital, and as such I will first explain how the three interlink.

Bourdieu's tri-notion of field, capital and habitus emerged from the branch of field theory that emphasised the notion of organised striving (Martin 2003:20), and the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, which sought to marry Marxist modes of analysis with a renewed focus on the subjectivity of individuals (Hohenstein and Moussouri 2018:273). At their most succinct, the three concepts can be summarised thus: *fields* can be interpreted as 'self-contained realms of endeavour' (such as literature or art) (Martin 2003:23) or 'specialized practice' which 'have established a (relatively) autonomous logic' (Buchholz 2016:9). These fields of specialized practice (for example the field of cultural production) are in turn nested within the field of power, which is itself contained within the field of class relations (Bourdieu 1983:319) (Figure 4.1). No matter how independently a field may operate (with its own internal rules and logic), it is nevertheless 'affected by the laws of the field which encompasses it, those of economic and political profit' (Bourdieu 1983:320). Within fields a struggle plays out between actors for certain positions. These are determined by the accumulation of amounts of *capital* (i.e. the resources that are available to a person) that are pertinent to, and valued by, the field in question (Hohenstein & Moussouri 2018:274). This has implications for who can participate in a given field, and the amount of power they exert:

'in every field we shall find a struggle, the specific forms of which have to be looked for each time, between the newcomer who tries to break through the entry barrier and the dominant agent who will try to defend the monopoly and keep out competition'. (Bourdieu 1993:94)

Habitus, meanwhile, plays a vital role in describing a kind of 'cultural unconscious' (Martin 2003:23) made up of embodied and internalised experiences of the world that are inherently tied to class. It is through habitus, Zolberg explains, 'that individuals expend or manipulate the capital that comes their way or are hampered

from doing this effectively' (Zolberg 1992:198). Habitus enabled Bourdieu to explain how high-brow cultural practices were associated with certain social groups, which in turn could explain the reproduction of socio-cultural norms (Reeves 2016:117). Taken together, these concepts have allowed for analysis of the way that museums might function as mechanisms for the reproduction of social inequality.

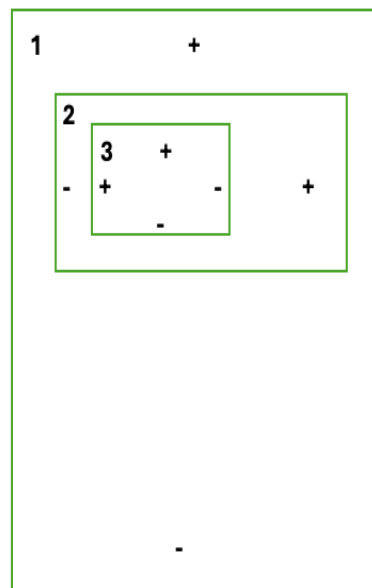


Figure 4.1 The interrelationship of the artistic field (3), field of power (2), and field of class relations (1) (adapted from Bourdieu 1983:319).³⁰

At the heart of much of Bourdieu's work is the thesis that social order is reproduced in part through the ritual of museum visiting. As such, a number of researchers have found Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and habitus to be a useful triumvirate through which to probe where, and why, barriers of exclusion are constructed (e.g. DiMaggio 1996 and Zolberg 1992). Studies have utilised and expanded Bourdieu's theories to analyse the establishment of art museums as classifying agencies (Fyfe 1999), the experience of minority communities and 'non-visitors' in museums spaces (Dawson 2017; Fyfe & Ross 1999), and artistic taste and the ability to 'see' (or

³⁰ Bourdieu describes this as 'the artistic field (3), contained within the field of power (2), which is itself situated within the field of class relations (1). '+' = positive pole, implying a dominant position; '-' = negative pole (dominated)' (Bourdieu 1983:319).

interpret) artworks (Zolberg 1992; Bennett 1997). In each instance, field and its interlinked concepts provide a way to theorise the museum as a social space where inequalities are embodied and played out, and thus the often knotty and complex connections between museums and wider power structures emerge.

4.3.1 Fields, power and the construction of cultural value

Bourdieu's theory of fields provides a foundation from which to consider how art is valued and designated as such by collecting institutions in the field of cultural production, which includes not only the direct producers of its material form (artists), but also many others who produce 'the meaning and value of the work' - such as critics, gallerists and publishers and, continuing this logic, collection care practitioners (Bourdieu 1983:318-319). The cultural field, in turn, 'refracts' the wider forces of class and power (Fyfe 1996:208). Bourdieu's concept of field encourages further investigation of who possesses the cultural capital to exert influence in the art museum, whose knowledge is valued more in the institution, and where boundaries of access to the field are drawn.

The impetus for museums to acquire an object, to plan and provide for its continued upkeep, is, at heart, determined by a system that designates the object as possessing a significant amount of cultural value. The designation of an object as *art* is both arbitrary and invisible: 'the work of art is an object which exists as such only by virtue of the (collective) belief which knows and acknowledges it as a work of art' (Bourdieu 1983:317).³¹ It is important to note that the apparatus that designates an object as *art* is more expansive and hierarchical than the social networks that comprise the 'life' of an artwork – particularly if we employ a relational approach that brings to the surface the many forms of often overlooked or traditionally less valued 'care' that takes place in relation to these objects (Star and Strauss 1999). This

³¹ This statement refers in part to Bourdieu's notion of a visitor's 'pure gaze' - the ability to 'experience the work of art as being immediately endowed with meaning and value' (Bourdieu, quoted in Bennett 1995:163). This gaze is (re)produced through the dual forces of cultured habitus and the artistic field (Ibid). In accordance with Shiach (1993), I find this notion problematic in its binary implication that there is a class or section of society who are unable to read or 'appreciate' art – or indeed that there is one way to read or encounter an artwork. As a result, I will not be using it to frame visitor experiences, instead it will be employed to critique what happens *within* the museum – namely how a collective construction of cultural value undergirds the museum's power to organise and catalogue what constitutes *art* (and culture) worthy of canonisation.

longitudinal approach to valuing and communicating the collaborative, discursive and social nature of collection care across the life of an artwork is set against the doggedly vertical power structure of museums, which remain 'strongly hierarchical institutions where technicians and hands-on conservators are ranked below conservation scientists and curators (who frequently have doctorates), and where directors and executive boards reign supreme' (Marontate 2007:288). Thus, the work of conservation and collection care (and their expanded networks) must be contextualised as a node within a larger structure of 'taste making' and museum hierarchies, which exert various degrees of control over the activities of these departments.

4.3.2 Critiques and expansions of Bourdieu's notion of field, capital and habitus

It should be noted, however, that all the examples mentioned above critique and refine Bourdieu's original theses. His work has been subject to continuous debate and some significant opposition, particularly in his analysis of how museums and educational institutions reproduce social order. Emily Pringle has argued that art museums, through a conscious effort to critically interrogate and change exclusive practices, have recently made significant progress to remedy what she sees as Bourdieu's 'bleak' diagnosis of the perpetuation of social inequality (Pringle 2020:7). This 'bleakness' has more forcefully been labelled as a form of 'covert determinism' by other critics (Fyfe 1999:204), leaving 'very little sense of possible alternatives to the cultural hierarchies which are so efficiently communicated and reproduced within educational institutions' (Shiach 1993:215). The result, Shiach contends, is a sort of dead end: 'a sense of enclosure' which offers little or no indication of how change might be instigated (Ibid). To combat this sense of determinism a growing body of research contends that museum visiting and experiences can be better explained through a combination of sociocultural *and* individual/personal (i.e. psychological) contexts (Stylianou-Lambert 2009; Hanquinet 2013; Falk and Dierking 2013). Stylianou-Lambert, for example, augments Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital with psychological approaches to self-identity in order to better understand how visitors make sense of museums through the context of their daily lives *and* their conception

of their own identity (2009:142). This merging of positions will be discussed further in chapter 6 with regards to the decoding aspect of this research.

Of further importance is Larissa Buchholz's observation that Bourdieu's concept of field is grounded in the national context (France and Algeria), and while this can be transposed from country to country, it requires rethinking to be applicable on an international scale (Buchholz 2016).³² This is pertinent to this research project as Tate is subject to the conditions of national fields (not least because it houses the nation's art collection), whilst also being an agent of international artistic and organisational fields. In the context of collection care and conservation this manifests itself in the acquisition of works that have multiple editions in various locations; artworks that are co-owned with other museums; artworks that are themselves the product of a global art field (e.g. critiquing global capital, the product of international collaboration, economic value and cultural capital accrued through exhibition on the biennial circuit, sales via an international art market); as well as Tate's many skill sharing endeavours with conservation departments across the globe. Buchholz's solution is to approach fields on the international scale as characterised as 'autonomous' – relations are ephemeral and in flux, the 'rules of the game' are subject to change- as opposed to 'settled' (defined by a robust social order, established 'rules of the game', consensus in membership criteria) (Buchholz 2016:9). She refines this further to identify two kinds of autonomy in the global art field functional in its distinctness from the economic field, and vertical to express its differentiation from national fields of art (Buchholz 2016:11). The result is 'an interdependent global space for cultural cross-border flows and competition in which the ultimate stakes and values of contemporary art have become redefined in global terms' (Buchholz 2016:13). Whilst the national context of Tate is of greater importance to this study – particularly when it comes to evaluating audience responses to making the invisible visible – it is nevertheless important to have an underlying sense of its global context, particularly as it pertains to Tate's actions behind the scenes, the development of the professional role of museum staff, its motivations for making visible, and the contexts of the artworks themselves.

³² DiMaggio's concept of field is similarly located in the national context (DiMaggio 1991).

4.3.3 Reflexivity

The presence of a 'field' enables the researcher to incorporate reflexivity into methodology and analysis. When we think in terms of fields, the researcher must accept that they too are 'part of the game' and subject to the field's rules of internal striving. This is especially pertinent in the context of this collaborative doctoral partnership, which was in part instigated by Tate – to respond to a need identified by the institution – and thus requires me to be embedded in the institution. I, too, am undertaking my own journey through the matrix of (in)visibility, moving from the position of visitor to a relative (but somewhat precariously positioned) insider, who navigates the ecology of the institution and its internal barriers according to my status in the museum and the conditions of my own 'habitus'. However, as both Barnard and Foley point out, Bourdieusian reflexivity is not achieved through first person accounts, or by inserting the researcher as an omnipresent narrator, but rather through 'subjecting the conditions of the observer to the same critical analysis as that of the constructed object at hand' (Barnard 1990:75). This is because 'to think in terms of fields is to think of the space of production as a system such that the characteristics of each of the intellectual producers are defined by their position in this system' (Bourdieu 1976:420, quoted in Barnard 1990:78). By this logic I must locate and be cognisant of my own position in the field, which in turn produces the 'structural conditions' of my interpretations in this study (Foley 2002:476).

4.4 Emotions and the institution

A final aspect that must be considered in the institutional context is the role of the individual within the work of the institution and how this relationship might be defined. This is especially important in this thesis, which takes as its primary source of data interviews with staff and young adults who work in and with Tate and acknowledges that it is the knowledge-making practices of collection care – and the network of people who undertake this work – that are invisible (Whitaker 2023; Star and Strauss 1999). Voronov and Vince argue for greater exploration of how individuals experience institutions as sites of devotion and conflict, stressing the need to incorporate an analytical framework that acknowledges work as encompassing rational interests as well as emotional attachments, passions and desires that are

expressed on an individual and/or collective level (2012:59). This combination of the rational and emotional explains the extent to which an individual might seek to change/disrupt or maintain/support institutional structures, depending on their combined levels of emotional and cognitive investment (Voronov and Vince 2012:68).

Central to their argument is incorporating the individual within wider systems of power and in this way, they augment Bourdieu's concepts of field and domination to present a model for how individuals are, paradoxically, 'embedded within the institutional milieu that, to a great extent, shapes his or her subjectivity yet is still potentially amenable to being affected by the agent' (Voronov and Vince 2012:60). Navigating fields, they argue, is emotional and traumatic work as individuals strive to pursue the capital of the field in which they are embedded (Voronov and Vince 2012:62-63). Furthermore, there must be a 'tacit belief that the game is worth playing'; that there is an ultimate purpose for participating in the work of the institution (Voronov and Vince 2012:65). This results in a state of tension whereby 'agents who are marginalized by the current institutional order often also retain their investment in it' (ibid).

This framing is productive when transposed to the context of museums, which are so often the sites of emotional encounters, both for staff and visitors. In the public areas of the museum emotional attachments between individuals and the institution can become visible in the form of protests. Herrero explores video documentation of Liberate Tate's protest performances at Tate through the lens of 'interaction rituals', locating the group's actions as dynamic sites of emotional energy and collective identity building (2020). Whilst Herrero problematises the effectiveness of online mediation, her discussion nevertheless demonstrates the ritualistic, embodied nature of participation in the physical political protests (ibid). In doing so Herrero also reveals the entanglement of Tate, and the arts sector more broadly, with corporate actors; it is the support of BP (Beyond Petroleum) that Liberate Tate object to (ibid). Whilst protest actions might be the site of emotional release and connection amongst participants, they can be interpreted as symptomatic of low emotional and cognitive investment in the status quo of the institution itself (Voronov and Vince 2012:71-72). According to Voronov and Vince such a state can cause agents to disrupt existing

institutions and try to create them anew (ibid). Indeed, in their excoriating accompaniment to their 2014 performance *Hidden Figures*, which followed a lengthy battle with Tate over making public the terms of the museum's sponsorship contract with BP, Liberate Tate reveal that they are driven to confront Tate in order to make it a 'better public institution':

If we understand the institution not only as a recuperative monolith governed from above, but as porous, composed also of other publics from below, the assertion 'we are the institution' presents other possibilities. (Liberate Tate 2015:79 and 82).

In Liberate Tate's statement we see clearly how institutions are loci of devotion and conflict and how Tate remains a scene of dominance and struggle between actors who compete to determine the core values and purpose of the museum (Fyfe 1996).

4.4.1 Object Love

Geoghegan and Hess have argued for the concept of 'object-love' as a way to characterise the drive to undertake curatorial and conservation work (2014). They describe the relationship between staff and objects as one of 'affective attachment', distinct from romantic love, but rather characterised by care, intimate knowledge, devotion, and respect (Geoghegan and Hess 2014:452). By extension storerooms become 'geographies of love' which enable and strengthen object love through the sensory experiences (smell, touch, social interactions) enabled by the intimate architecture of the space (ibid). Though their study of Blythe House fails to address the potential for other museum practitioners based in the storerooms - such as registrars, art handlers, security guards (who are often the most 'invisible') - to experience 'object love', they nevertheless, provide a compelling argument for incorporating ideas of emotional attachment between staff and (art) object within the wider analysis of how individuals work in museums and why they continue to 'play the game' of field relations.

4.4.2 Anxiety

As assemblages of people (Whitaker 2023), each with emotional ties to the objects (Geoghegan and Hess 2014) and the work of the institutional more broadly (Voronov and Vince 2012), it stands to reason that museums might also be 'subject to human patterns of feeling' (Walklate 2018:215). Jennifer Walklate argues that just as we live in an age of anxiety and uncertainty, so too do museums; so much so that it has become a fundamental institutional characteristic (ibid). Through two case studies of museum activism – one an exhibition, the other a protest organised by an external group - she builds an image of the various characteristics of anxiety in the museum, which she broadly attributes to a loss of status, authority and identity; a sense of guilt for involvement in societal problems; desiring utopian aims; meeting the demands of 'others' external to the museum; and the unknowable nature of the future of the museum (Walklate 2018). Taken together, she argues that anxiety is not just an observable institutional 'emotion', when acknowledged by the museum it also has the potential to be a productive force, allowing for radical critique in the service of creating a more inclusive institution.

Whilst Walklate embeds her interpretation in psychoanalytical theory in order to map the different triggers for museum anxiety, I turn to the work of Miceli and Castelfranchi, who consider the feeling from the perspective of the need for control (2005). This, I suggest, fits well with an investigation of communicating the hidden and obscured areas of museum work, particularly as it relates to issues of dashboard and radical transparency and the institutional discomfort related to this (Marstine 2013). Rather than activist activities I seek to examine the way the institution manages the particular parameters of visibility, and the narrative it creates of its own existence. To do this I need an understanding of anxiety that accounts for the perception of threat and risk and how this determines museum actions.

Anxiety is distinct from fear in its focus on an unknown future: 'anxiety focuses on the uncertainty about some event or state which implies a possible danger, rather than the danger per se' (emphasis in original, Miceli and Castelfranchi 2005:295). It is also characterised by the presence of hope: 'the anxious state of mind implies the belief that the outcome might be negative, but also the opposing (though often more feeble) belief that the outcome might be positive' (Miceli and Castelfranchi

2005:294). The example Miceli and Castelfranchi present is a student, whose anxiousness about the possibility of failure does not automatically imply a wish that the exam is cancelled. Transposed onto the context of the museum, we might hypothesise that whilst the unknown consequences of greater transparency might trouble the institution, this does not mean that the maintenance of 'invisibility' is preferred.

If anxiety is a product of 'future addressed thinking', then with it comes a fundamental need to control what will happen. Miceli and Castelfranchi propose two often concurrent categories of control. Pragmatic control concerns the urge to reduce or terminate the unknown threat. In this way it is characterised by a 'need for power over events so as to shape reality to one's own ends', leading to the calming illusion that 'one has power over reality' (Miceli and Castelfranchi 2005:296). Epistemic control, meanwhile, is the need to foresee, to predict, and to know, 'to the greatest degree of certainty' what the outcome will be. It manifests as a 'need to attain cognitive mastery of the casual structure of the environment' (ibid).

For the purposes of this research project, I propose that considering the museum as an anxious structure, and thus expanding the foundations laid by Walklate, offers a productive way to approach the task of understanding the institutional perception of risk that controls what is made visible and the meanings encoded into collection care focused content.

4.5 Summary and implications for the research

In this chapter I have presented a theoretical framework that can account for the ways that museums function in relation to society and power by considering actions and dependencies at an individual, institutional and societal level. Theorising the ebb and flow of relations across organisational fields that frame the action of making visible, as well as the emotional aspect of insitutional work enables me to understand the insitutional frame within which collection care and conservation practitioners operate. This approach is intended to lay the groundwork for exploring motivation and resistance to change.

This theory will shape my analytical approach: the presence of fields allows me to map the various forces, internal and external, that determine what is made visible and to whom. Accounting for emotional connections allows me to understand how conditions of (in)visibility might impact the way individuals relate to the museum and how the museum, as an inherently anxious structure, determines risk and benefit. This will enable me to answer research questions 1 (what are the perceived risks and benefits?) and 2 (what do museums believe they are providing audiences?).

5. Theoretical Framework 2: conservation practices in the institution and theories of learning

This chapter situates conservation practice within the institution and considers what collection care work entails and why it is hidden. It takes as its central concern how we might conceive of ‘visibility’ in relation to collection care practices, and then provides an approach to understanding the ways that those outside the museum read and find meaning in this information. This chapter is intended to provide a theoretical framing for the second phase of this research, which is driven by Research Question 3: ‘how do young adults respond to attempts to make visible the private and behind the scenes processes of the contemporary art museum?’

5.1 (In)visibility in the context of collection care and conservation work

This subsection presents a theoretical framework to define and understand the core concepts of ‘visibility’ and ‘invisibility’. It concerns itself with what is ‘seen’ and ‘unseen’ and the relationship between these states. Determining how to approach this is important for understanding the content of the programming, films and other materials produced by Tate, and consequently what is made visible or knowable to the young adults in the study.

Stepping back from the often ringfenced practitioner debates that characterise the literature on collection care visibility, I think more broadly about what it means for ‘work’ to become visible and to position the museum as a complex node of public and private spaces. Building on the discussion in my literature review (chapter 3.2), I further explore the distinct context of the contemporary art museum and its collections and argue that the practices associated with the care of contemporary artworks offer different models of communicating collection care.

This section will begin by positioning visibility and invisibility as interdependent states. I will assess the usefulness of black boxes, as conceived by Bruno Latour, as a metaphor for invisibility in conservation and collection care. I also turn to conservation theory to provide a model to think about collection care work as a networked and social practice before presenting an overview of the different ways

that theories of subject/object relationships have been used to articulate this work as a creative knowledge-making practice.

5.1.1 (In)visible work

The acknowledgement of invisible or hidden work and labour has been explored through various lenses, from feminist theory to science and technology studies, with each offering differing definitions of what is hidden and why (Hatton 2017). Often, issues of invisibility are tied to value and power (ibid) and what is defined by society as 'work' (Star and Strauss 1999). Hatton summarises the definitions of 'invisible work' as pertaining to that which is physically out of sight, ignored, socially marginalized, economically or culturally devalued, or legally unprotected (Hatton 2017:337). It is also work that has been 'overlooked by popular and scholarly accounts of work and employment' (ibid). Conservation and collection care work does not fit comfortably within these categories; conservation work in particular is highly technical and broadly valued by society (evident in the popularity of visible conservation programming (chapter 3.1)) and is carried out by practitioners who are more likely to be from white, middle-class backgrounds (see chapter 2.1). Yet it *is* nevertheless 'invisible': physically from museum visitors, and from the scholarly accounts of museum studies and the history of art more broadly, which privileges the position of the spectator in the exhibition space (Domínguez Rubio 2020:14). As Hatton asks, 'whose sight renders work invisible, and by whom is it ignored?' (2017:337).

5.1.2 (In)visibility and 'disembedding background work'

I have used the indicator (in)visibility in this section to express what Star and Strauss term the 'complex matrix' of the relation between visible and invisible work – a relation that is under constant negotiation (Star & Strauss 1999:24). 'No work is inherently either visible or invisible', they claim (Star & Strauss 1999:8). Rather, visibility is determined by a set of subtle indicators that are reliant on context and, furthermore, there can be no state of absolute visibility; due to the relational nature of the two states 'making visible can incur invisibilities; obscuring may itself become a visible activity' (Star & Strauss 1999:25).

Their vision of a matrix like and relational notion of visibility is useful for this project in that it is able to account for the range of hidden labour in collection care work. As indicated by the available literature, it is conservation work that more often rises to the surface, whilst other practices – such as registrar work, collections management, or art handling – remain invisible to outsiders. What emerges, then, is the presence of a spectrum of visibility, whereby the emphasis on certain forms of conservation work (e.g. sculpture or paintings conservation) through familiar narratives renders other ‘behind-the-scenes’ practices less visible within the public imagination.

In their exploration of the hidden nature of nursing work, Star and Strauss describe a model for ‘making visible’ that operates as a ‘disembedding’ of background work. This involves transforming ‘work previously embedded under a general rubric of “care,” and usually taken-for-granted into work that is legitimate, individuated and traceable across settings’ (Star and Strauss 1999:15). Whilst collection care work and nursing are markedly different professions, the action of care – and the invisibilities that this work entails and relies on - is common to both.

In the struggle for visibility ‘areas of ambiguity and discretion’ must still exist for care to take place effectively (Star and Strauss 1999:21); this maps closely onto the conditions of collection care practices. Conservation is a profession that has traditionally found value in being invisible, which often served as a measure of the discipline’s success (Miller 2020). Progressions in the ethics and theory of conservation from the latter half of the twentieth century stressed the need for a ‘minimal intervention’ approach that preserved the integrity of the object – thus necessitating the invisibility of conservators’ work (van Saaze 2013:44).

Furthermore, there remains a professional impulse to cordon-off the work of conservation (and the same might be said for collection care activities) due to its considerably high-risk nature. Van Saaze describes conservation controversies as resulting in:

‘...heated public debates, to devaluation of the monetary and felt value of artworks, and even to the expulsion from their profession of people held responsible for supposed mistakes. Given this perspective, it will come as no surprise that the fear of harmful rumours, controversies, scandals, loss of reputation and lawsuits discourages conservators from sharing their

uncertainties or supposed errors in decision-making and treatment. Moreover, it encourages the strand of concealment and secrecy in conservation. Legal agreements such as a Mutual Receipt Agreement or a Mutual Confidentiality Agreement are not uncommon in the conservation world. (Van Saaze 2013:43)

As van Saaze's account suggests, such private areas are crucial for providing conservation professionals the freedom to develop treatment and to be flexible in the face of uncertainties. To expose the work of these areas might provide greater access and acknowledgement of this labour, but it also exposes conservators to increased levels of scrutiny and accountability that may impede the development and refinement of new of practices (Star and Strauss 1999:20; Garforth 2012:276). Star and Strauss describe a similar threat in their observations, explaining how forced visibility might destroy 'naturally occurring information exchange, stories, and networks' (Star and Strauss 1999:24). With this in mind, an issue of trust emerges (ibid). How do we negotiate what is made visible and who has the agency to draw parameters and determine narratives about collection care practices? In this way making visible – 'disembedding' the background work of collection care – can be seen as a negotiation, with unavoidable trade-offs (ibid).

5.1.3 Black Boxes

When considering the necessity of *invisibility* within the practice of conservation, I propose that collection care work and its anxiety to mitigate risk can be expressed in its complexity through the notion of black boxes. The conservation studio can be compared to Latour's mysterious laboratory, which operates to obfuscate the processes that produce scientific facts and knowledge. In *Science in Action* Latour traces the origins of the term 'black box' to cyberneticians (1987). The word is used, he explains, 'Whenever a piece of machinery or a set of commands is too complex. In its place they draw a little black box about which they need to know nothing but its input and output' (Latour 1987:2-3). In their analysis of black boxes in work-place mathematics, Williams and Wake identify two branches of Latour's thinking on the subject (2007). First, is the proposal that the *roles* of objects, people and ideas in networks are subject to obscurity within black boxes (Williams & Wake 2007:321).

Latour uses the example of a Kodak camera, whose user is unaware of the network of actants that enable the object's functioning: 'when many elements are made to act as one, that is what I will now call a black box' (Latour 1987:131; Williams and Wake 2007:321). Second, Williams and Wake identify Latour's assertion that scientific and technical work 'is made invisible by its own success'; 'the more science and technology succeed, the more opaque and obscure they become' (Latour 1987:131; Williams and Wake 2007:321).

The concept of the black box expresses the tension between activities and information that is invisible because it does not need to be visible (i.e. too complex, or vital to the functioning of the task, or simply not interesting for onlookers), and that which is invisible because it is 'hidden' or unacknowledged – and therefore imbued with the potential to be made 'visible'. With this in mind, and in keeping with the interdependent state of (in)visibility outlined above, not every black box needs to be fully opened; the task is to identify those that can be. Indeed, some boxes must remain closed to preserve the integrity of collection care and conservation.

Museums are, by their very nature, places of 'making visible'; public spaces where collections are put on display, connections between objects made 'visible', and knowledge is rendered tangible - and thus seemingly accessible to those who choose, or are able, to visit. To extend Star and Strauss's analysis, museums should also be scrutinised as nodes of complex *invisibility*. Indeed, many museums only have the capacity to display a fraction of their holdings, raising ethical debates around the 'hoarding' of objects – particularly charged in the case of those with colonial histories – and thus undermining the claims of museums to be 'public institutions' with democratic ideals (Brusius and Singh 2017).³³ Conditions of (in)visibility are inseparable from structures of power (Star and Strauss 1999:24), which in the case of museums and galleries are 'skewed towards the collecting subject who makes decisions in relation to space, time, and visibility; in other words as to what may be viewed, how it should be seen, and when this is possible' (Hooper-Greenhill 1992:7). With this 'matrix'-like relationship in mind, investigating the so-called 'invisible' work of museums must be tackled through an analytical lens

³³ Brusius and Singh note that in larger museums 'as little as 2 per cent of the collection' is on display at any one time (2017:1).

that contends that visibility and invisibility are interdependent states, within and exterior to museums.

Mapping this theory onto how collection care practices operate in the museums implies that what is invisible – and therefore has the potential to be made visible – is collection care's role in the production of knowledge. As Domínguez Rubio argues, art museums act as 'machinery' that 'makes art possible' (2020:15). Doing this is an 'exceedingly complex and resource-intensive task involving a vast array of technologies, infrastructure and labour', of which collection care is the nexus (Domínguez Rubio 2020:9). It is this network of work – of people and objects – that 'acts as one' and is consequently 'black-boxed' (Latour 1987). I thus contend that it is the reality of collection care as an essential knowledge-making practice that drives the work of the museum which is 'invisible'.

5.1.4 Relationships between people and objects

This subsection concerns itself with the practice of conservation as increasingly concerned as much with the care of 'social networks and relationships as well as objects' (Geismar 2022:205). I present two ways that conservation researchers have described their practice as pertaining to the relationships between people and objects: through intersubjectivity (Muñoz Viñas 2005) and Epistemic Objects (Laurenson 2016, drawing on the work of Knorr Cetina 2000). I argue that considered in tandem, they have the potential to offer new ways to communicate collection care to the public as dynamic, permeable and accessible, and to change narratives from linear accounts of repair to reposition collection care work as continuously unfolding, creative, knowledge-making work (Brooks 2012).

5.1.5 Objective and intersubjective conservation

The relationship between objectivity, subjectivity, and authenticity needs to be unpicked if the work of conservation and collection care departments is to be properly understood as existing within an (in)visibility matrix. Recent struggles between objectivity and subjectivity in the field of conservation theory have resulted in a 'communicative turn', that acknowledges that the social value of objects should

be a guiding principle in conservation approaches (Muñoz Viñas 2005:147-153). This turn toward subjectivism has emerged from critiques of objectivist approaches to conservation work. Tracing this theoretical progression in conservation theory is pertinent to understanding how conditions of (in)visibility are affected by the development of ideas of shared ownership and responsibility to communities.

The objectivist approach can be summarised as conservation that is wholly 'performed for the object itself' (Muñoz Viñas 2005:155) which suggests there is an absolute truth (or authenticity) embedded in the materiality of such an object, which can thus be revealed through scientific analysis (Laurenson 2006:np). To position conservation as a search for, and response to, scientific objective truths is to elevate conservation decisions and ethics 'beyond discussion by untrained people', where the conservation laboratory becomes an 'experts only zone' (Muñoz Viñas 2005:154 & 157). To extend the analysis of Muñoz Viñas, cloaking the work of conservation under the logic of an absolute material, scientific truth inherent within an object, creates a condition of invisibility whereby the non-professional cannot contribute to or question conservation work. Such a condition creates a discrete boundary of exclusion that both safeguards the conservation process from critique, whilst affirming the elite status of the 'expert'. In the case of heritage collections (as distinct from art collections), Dean Sully argues that these boundaries are erected at the moment objects enter the museum; there is a break between the 'people who made and used them prior to collection' as the preservation of the object's materiality becomes the new imperative (Sully 2007:33). The non-conservator becomes a 'mere audience with no special authority' (Muñoz Viñas 2005:157) and the profession is consequently seen as 'a self-evidently valuable activity that needs no justification' (Brooks 2012:334).

The subjectivist turn in conservation thinking strives to position conservation as a social process and takes into account the various meanings of the object to multiple subjects; thus, the primary focus of conservation is 'no longer on the objects, but rather on the subjects' for whom such objects are significant (Muñoz Viñas 2005:147; Laurenson 2006:np). Muñoz Viñas positions 'intersubjectivity' as the most workable position on the objective/subjective continuum. It emerges as 'a consequence of agreements among the subjects for whom objects have meanings',

whereby heritage is seen as something that ‘belongs of *us* -not to me, not to *some* of us’ whilst at the same time acknowledging the need for the skilled work of conservators (Muñoz Viñas 2005:151-153). The work of decolonising conservation has helped to envision new forms of collaboration with communities beyond the boundaries of the museum (Saunders 2014:3). Attempts to collaborate with source communities - which position the conservator as just one of a number of actors responsible for the care of an object - is to enter into ‘a joint undertaking that embodies the human agency represented in the production of the object to that point’ (Sully 2007:40). This theoretical modulation is important as it provides justification for the exploration of ‘making visible’ conservation work and indicates what *could* be made visible to museum visitors. Here we might draw links with Bakhtin’s polyphonic novel, which, unlike the monologic novel, incorporates ‘a plurality of independent and unmerged voices’ that ‘combine but are not merged into the unity of an event’, suggesting that reality is constructed not through a single account but by many independent characters (Bakhtin 1984:6). Accepting that there is no-longer a single objective truth – one authoritative voice - in the conservation of objects, and that for an object to be considered worthy of conservation and the designation of the status of ‘heritage’ it must therefore be of significance to multiple people, is to initiate a process of acknowledging and inviting knowledge that takes a different form to the purely scientific.

Here we might pause and consider the open or transparent laboratory initiatives described in chapter 3. Whilst the approach of the conservators and conservation scientists could likely be guided by intersubjectivity in their everyday practice, the visual imagery of a laboratory, a specialist space populated by technical objects and the home of experts, gives the sense of objective - and therefore closed off - practice to a casual visitor.

5.1.6 Epistemic Objects

Laurenson has proposed that Karen Knorr Cetina’s concept of ‘epistemic objects’ offers a way to understand artworks as unfolding objects of continuous activity that form different loci of practice for conservators and artists (2016 np). Her theory attempts to characterise the ‘creative and constructive’ nature of practice in a way

that accounts for the 'engrossment and excitement – the emotional basis – of research work' (2000:184). Knorr Cetina develops the notion of 'epistemic objects' – objects of knowledge - as a way to explain the new subject-object relations that form when a stable, quotidian object becomes the subject of scientific exploration (Knorr Cetina 2000). This often happens when 'nonroutine problems' emerge (Knorr Cetina 2000:184). Recasting an object to be the focus of research changes its properties:

I want to characterize objects of knowledge ('epistemic objects') in terms of a lack in completeness of being that takes away much of the wholeness, solidity, and the thing-like character they have in our everyday conception. The everyday viewpoint, it would seem, looks at objects from the outside as one would look at tools or goods that are ready to hand or to be traded further. These objects have the character of closed boxes. In contrast, objects of knowledge appear to have the capacity to unfold indefinitely. They are more like open drawers filled with folders extending indefinitely into the depth of a dark closet. Since epistemic objects are always in the process of being materially defined, they continually acquire new properties and change the ones they have. But this also means that objects of knowledge can never be fully attained, that they are, if you wish, never quite themselves. (Knorr Cetina 2000:190)

As the objects undergo a fundamental change in character so too does the relationship between subject and object (Knorr Cetina 2000:184). What results is a 'dissociation' between the researcher and the object, allowing for moments of 'interruption and reflection' (ibid). With this in mind, some parallels can be drawn between Knorr Cetina's conception of objects of knowledge and artworks that become the subjects of conservation research. In the case of artworks, they no longer appear as discrete and whole entities, firmly positioned in the discourse of art history. Laurensen uses the example of Tate's vandalised Rothko painting which becomes the subject of the Tate produced film *Restoring Rothko* (2016 np).³⁴ In the film we see the work become the object of scientific research, inhabiting the foreign space of the laboratory. Reconsidered through its material properties, and as the vehicle for the development of cutting-edge conservation science techniques, the work is revealed to be more vulnerable and unstable than its art historical narrative

³⁴ This film plays a central role in the research project. Its significance will emerge in the findings section.

might suggest (2016). In a different way so-called unruly artworks, Laurenson argues, operate as epistemic objects for some artists, who envision their works to be 'open, question generating and complex' which in turn causes them to become epistemic objects for the conservators who must manage these characteristics within established museum systems of acquisition and display (Laurenson 2016 np). Contemporary artworks, she argues, can thus be seen to operate as different types of epistemic object for different actors – the curator, the conservator, and the artist (ibid). Both examples discussed by Laurenson occur when artworks, either through external events or innate complexity, present 'nonroutine problems' for those that encounter them as research objects.

Tony Bennett has used Knorr Cetina's work in dialogue with Latour to think about how museums, like laboratories, rearrange the relationships between people and objects (2006:524). Although he notes critiques of the over-application of the laboratory metaphor, he finds there to be productive points of comparison in the ways museums (and art museums) create 'museum objects'. Entering a collection detaches an object from its origins and opens up new relations; the museum is where 'meanings and functions of artefacts [can] be made more pliable' and where 'experiments' occur through exhibitions that engineer structured encounters between audiences and objects (Bennett 2006:527-528).

If museums can be seen as 'civic laboratories', then what might happen when we make the very real research work of museums, including the *actual* laboratories where this takes place, public (Bennett 2006)? In Bennett and Laurenson's application of Knorr Cetina's work there is a potential to bring together the various strands of theory discussed in this chapter; it provides a lens through which to recast artworks as epistemic objects that undergo a transformation (and transform the social relations around them) as they enter the conservation studio, which is itself a black box to outsiders. Partially opening this 'black box' to show artworks as the focus of research and knowledge work, to make visible the social 'worlds' within which they sit, and to therefore elevate hidden and undervalued practices in museums as essential to the work of the institution, may hold the potential to open up new routes into Tate. Adopting such a position might help to remedy what Miller has coined the 'epistemic invisibility' of the conservator, which denies the knowledge

generating work of practitioners due to entrenched hierarchies of epistemic value in museums (Miller 2020:202).

5.1.7 Summary

As the museum struggles to adapt to the novel and evolving needs of contemporary artworks, so too does communication of conservation and collection care. Brooks has described how the now established narratives of conservation as a domain of repair and fixing are unable to effectively articulate conservation as a meaning making process – resulting in a condition of ‘invisible creativity’ (Brooks 2012:335). Thus, what we find is that 1.) the social turn in conservation theory has enabled the *conditions* for opening black boxes in the conservation studio but that 2.) a new and somewhat different set of ‘*roles* of objects, people and ideas’ that emerge from this social turn - i.e. the new ethical concerns around authenticity and the increasingly networked nature of conservation – remain somewhat obscured, to both internal museum systems, which must grapple with the rate of change, and their visiting publics.

As Domínguez Rubio argues: ‘artworks cannot merely be seen as “outcomes” or “effects” of a prior set of social relations, or as the material “vehicles” of meaning, for this view tends to ignore their capacity to affect people and to create new social bonds, practices, and meanings’ (Domínguez Rubio 2014:620). In other words, the materiality of artworks, which has necessary implications for their conservation, is inherently bound with the social. Furthermore, as Knorr Cetina’s work suggests, these social relations take on a knowledge producing capacity when artworks become epistemic objects. Making visible conservation and collection work as a social practice has implications for both the design and analysis stages of the research project. From this ontological position, the materials I show to the young adults can be seen to embody, to differing degrees, the notion that conservation and collection care is a collective undertaking and it is this which I argue is ‘black-boxed’ in the service of presenting a stable and ordered frontstage of the museum.³⁵ In my analysis I will consider whether this, as one of the encoded meanings, is ‘read’ by

³⁵ It is this theory that shapes the meanings encoded by the Reshaping the Collectible project in their public output.

the young adult participants (Research Question 3) and whether this might have any impact on the potential development of inclusive and equitable practices (Overarching Research question).

5.2 Theories of learning

The second part of this chapter presents discussion of sociocultural learning theories, proposing this as a way to determine *how* the young adults make meaning from the materials they are shown and what this might offer them. It is important to note at the outset that whilst there is a plethora of material and perspectives on the role of learning in museums (see Hohenstein and Moussouri 2018 for an in depth overview of approaches), the great majority concern the visiting experience, from pre-conceptions of the museum (e.g. motivation) through to experiences in the galleries (as individuals or various group constellations, structured or unstructured) and then memories of the encounter (Falk and Dierking 2013). Yet there is little analysis of the experiences of those on the periphery of the museum, who occupy a role that falls somewhere between visitor and staff member, and how this partial access impacts meaning making. By combining these two strands of learning theories I hope to understand how the individual participants in this study directly interpret the materials I show them through the prism of their lives and experiences, whilst also accounting for their relationship with Tate as shaped by the undertaking of apprentice-like activities.

5.2.1 Social Constructivism

Before considering the core ideas of social constructivism it is necessary to provide a brief overview of what constructivist learning theories entail. At its core, constructivism holds that learning is driven by the individual and requires active participation (Hohenstein and Moussouri 2018:23; Hein 1998:34). Originating in the work of John Dewey and Jean Piaget, it emphasises that learners must be 'ready to learn' and that understanding is developed through experience (Hohenstein and Moussouri 2018:23). To summarise Hein, learning only happens with the active participation of the learner, meaning that the conclusions the individual comes to are

not judged via adherence to 'objective truths' but rather whether the information makes sense within the 'constructed reality' of the individual (Hein 1998:34). In other words, there can be no 'misconceptions', only 'personal, naïve or private conceptions' (Hein 1998:34). Taken to its most extreme the constructivist position might argue that 'knowledge resides only in the mind of individual learners' (ibid).

Social constructivism is one of many subsequent interpretations of constructivist theory. It continues to place emphasis on the individual but also incorporates 'the way that the social environment can influence the direction that a learning experience can take', with particular emphasis on the role that interactions play in the process of learning (Hohenstein and Moussouri 2018:26). In this way it allows for incorporation of the social and the cultural as factors that impact how learners make meaning.

Social constructivism shares with sociocultural learning theories a basis in the work of Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Drawing on Marx's theories of material production and collectivism, Vygotsky worked in the 1920s and 1930s to develop a new approach to psychology that broke away from previously ingrained practices that separated subjects from their environment by taking activity (which *situated* a subject's actions within their environment) as a unit of analysis. The human mind, he posited, is formed through internalisation whereby 'communicative language is transformed into inner speech'; in essence, development happens through interaction with the external world (John-Steiner and Mahn 1996:196). In Vygotsky's proposal human activities happen in cultural contexts (John-Steiner and Mahn 1996:191) and it is these actions, mediated by tools such as language and symbols, that result in psychic development (Yamagata-Lynch 2010:15; Langemeyer and Nissen 2004:21). This radical unification of subject and environment served to recognise 'the essential relationship between an individual's mental processes and that individual's interaction with cultural, historical, and institutional settings' (Yamagata-Lynch 2010:15-16). A core Vygotskian concept 'zone of proximal development', which accounts for the activity of learning from others, whereby cognitive development as a child is facilitated first by social interaction with a more experienced other, and then, following internalization, results in the ability to undertake their own learning, leading to participation in social groups (John-Steiner

and Mahn 1996:192; Vygotsky 1978). This notion of participation is pertinent to the development of Lave and Wenger's theories of participation outlined in section 5.2.3.

For the social constructivist perspective, this emphasis on social participation as conduit for individual development and meaning making. Hohenstein and Moussouri explain that research that takes a social constructivist framing might employ the concept of co-construction of knowledge through activities (2018:63). Falk et al have applied this to the development of the Personal Meaning Mapping methodology in to capture the unique experiences of each learner. This is because every individual

... brings varied prior experiences and knowledge into a learning situation and that these shape how that individual perceives and processes what he or she experiences. The combination of prior experience and the new experience result in learning, but the resulting learning is unique for each individual, situated within the context in which it was learned. (Falk et al. 1998:np).

Although I do not observe learning in visits or activities, I do consider the way that a small sample of individuals make meaning from given materials. For the purposes of this study, such a positioning allows for some reflection on the discursive nature of the interview as conduit for reflection on the mediational materials shown to the participants. As I am not observing a visit, or working with groups, the focus is on the interpretations of the individual participant as prompted by my questions; it cannot be ignored that the very act of discussion and prompted reflection (I will not be observing the participants in real time) shapes the participant's meaning making process.

5.2.2 Sociocultural learning theories: situated learning and Legitimate Peripheral Participation

Lave and Wenger's work is more firmly situated in the sociocultural branch of learning theory, which takes the group, rather than the individual, as unit of analysis. The origins of their theory are similarly embedded in the work of Vygotsky but place greater emphasis on the social process of learning as described by the learner's progression through the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978; Hohenstein

and Moussouri 2018:105). In their description of situated learning, Lave and Wenger move away from a view of the social as the backdrop of internalisation, but rather consider the broader issue of social world analysis and social transformation (Lave and Wenger 2003:48-49). To do this they focus on the relationship between the experienced and the newcomer and the transformations that occur as practices are shared and relations changed (ibid).

Lave and Wenger's concept of legitimate peripheral participation explains how novices become members of a community through situated learning – that is, by learning practices through undertaking socially organised activities (Lave and Wenger 2003; Hohenstein and Moussouri 2018:106). It explains the process of apprenticeship as a dynamic field of changing relationships rather than a simple teacher/student dichotomy: newcomers become experienced and then take on the role of educating newcomers themselves, whilst learning is expansive, involving not just the acquisition of a particular skill but the implicit learning of the various forms of belonging and membership of the community (Lave and Wenger 2003:56).

5.2.3 Communities of Practice

Legitimate Peripheral Participation is intertwined with Wenger's theory of Communities of Practice (CoP), which defines the social groups that newcomers become part of. In essence, communities of practice are 'groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis' (Wenger et al. 2002:4). Taking these social communities as units of exploration, Wenger's position is firmly rooted in the sociocultural tradition. According to Wenger they can be found everywhere due to their often informal nature (mirrored by the tacit and often nonstructured nature of the learning that takes place) and as a result we each belong to many CoPs simultaneously (Wenger 2008:6-7). It is through social participation, he posits, that individuals learn, refine practices, and ensure the continued growth and evolution of the community (ibid). This in turn is directly linked to identity formation, as individuals construct a sense of self in relation to their CoP membership (Wenger 2008:4).

Wenger's theory also explicitly addresses organisational contexts, suggesting that CoPs exist within organisations but not necessarily along departmental or official organisational lines. Instead, they 'negotiate their own enterprise', and it is through interconnected CoPs that organisational knowledge flows and is learned and shared; cultivating the growth of CoPs helps organisations retain knowledge and become more 'effective and valuable' (Wenger 2008; Wenger et al. 2002:12). CoP's explanation of organisational (and insitutional) knowledge structures is both useful for this research and somewhat problematic. In its latter development, CoPs have become a tool to help organisations improve functionality (Wenger et al. 2002) but in doing so, the theory does not provide an adequate structure for understanding power struggles and conflict between communities – a theme within this research project (Contu 2014). Contu, in her study of power relations and difference in creative work, calls for a reactivation of the relational and critical aspects of CoPs (ibid). She finds that CoP theory *can* be applied to an analysis of power dynamics through the application of its concept of boundaries, which she combines with site ontology. The concept of boundaries is fruitful for this study too, although in this instance I propose to use it in tandem with Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and field, and Voronov and Vince's theory of embedded emotions in insitutional work.

Boundaries

I argue that Wenger's notion of boundaries is a fruitful concept for understanding the *practices* that unfold at the peripheries of institutions and how *learning* might take place. When combined with Bourdieu's notion of striving for cultural capital and the exploration of emotional investment in institutions, this adds the missing dimension of power relationships that Contu observes. In the context of this project, it could help explain the experience of young adults at the periphery of Tate and the flows and blockages of access they might experience as they endeavour to learn about museum work. For Wenger, boundaries are fundamental to CoPs, they are 'the 'edges' of communities of practice' and are 'points of contact with the rest of the world' (Wenger 2008:119). Crucially for this project, which focuses on inclusion and equity, they also refer to 'discontinuities, to lines of distinction between inside and outside, membership and nonmembership, inclusion and exclusion' (Wenger 2008:120).

At boundaries, various actions take place, one of which is 'brokering'. This Wenger describes as connections made by people who are able to introduce the practices of one group to another (Wenger 2008:105-106). Brokering requires individuals to operate as translators and coordinators between different perspectives, enabling the linkage of practices (Wenger 2008:109). In museums, then, we might find individuals who enable access to outsiders – in the context of young adults, these might be the facilitators of programmes or mentor figures who share knowledge of their practice. The presence of boundaries also implies the existence of encounters, peripheries and crossings. These, Wenger suggests, can take the form of one-to-one meetings, immersion in one group's practice, or 'delegations' that involve exchange between members of different CoPs (Wenger 2008:112-113). When these encounters continue over a period of time, they become practices (ibid). We might view the Tate Collective Producers programme in this way.

Practices can subsequently turn into peripheries. Wenger writes that 'communities of practice can connect with the rest of the world by providing peripheral experiences' to outsiders 'who are not on the trajectory of becoming full members' – this offers a kind of 'casual access' (Wenger 2008:117). This might help understand the subsequent relationship between the young adults in this study and collection care practices.

5.2.4 Summary and implications for the research

In this subsection I have discussed two branches of learning theories: social constructivism, which helps explain how individuals make meaning through the interactions with the social world, and sociocultural learning theories that look to the significance of larger communities of learners.

I argue the former helps structure how the young adult participants bring their individual contexts to the decoding of the materials I present to them and help me to explain my own role in the co-construction of their readings through the interview process.

I also traced the development of a particular branch of sociocultural learning theory: Lave and Wenger's notion of Legitimate Peripheral Participation and the notion of

boundary used in Community of Practice theory. Both help explain how the participants, situated at the boundary of the museum, might experience feelings of belonging or impasse (Wenger 1998:120-121). This area of theory ties in with the strand of this project that deals with an individual's relationship with an institution and the ebbs and flows of cognitive and emotional attachment that occur (Voronov and Vince 2012).

This thesis focuses on the specific context of a group of young adults who want to work in the arts and are part of Tate's programmes to encourage skill development and work experience (Tate Collective Producers). We might consider these programmes as a way of the museum attempting to encourage the development of communities of practice, and, importantly the existence of CoPs, like the Reshaping the Collectible project, as places to encourage the opening up of peripheries where learning and practice development might take place. I argue that whilst CoP theory is not appropriate in whole for this project, the concept of *boundaries* is. In the process of communicating collection care, is it possible to create peripheral experiences for young adults to better understand the knowledge making practices of collection care work? And how might boundaries map with the reality of the visible and invisible – can peripheral experiences create visibility that benefits both museum practitioners and young adults?

6. Organising the research: encoding/decoding theory

In the previous chapters I explored four key themes that have shaped my thinking around making the invisible visible in the contemporary art museum. The following strands of investigation emerged, with the potential to be more tightly interlinked:

- The importance of inclusive practices to the future of museums.
- The pressing need to make museums engaging and accessible resources for young adults and places that might offer them career enhancing skills.
- The need for greater and more meaningful ‘transparency’ in order to create a more equitable relationship with audiences.
- The growing call from practitioners to raise the public profile of collection care disciplines.
- New developments and challenges for art museums in the collection, preservation and exhibition of contemporary artworks.

I propose that investigating the interrelationship of these themes, and tying together the theoretical positions outlined in chapters 4 and 5, is best served by a theoretical framework that allows for the evaluation of the *process* of making the invisible visible (Figure 6.1):

- Identifying the conditions that determine what the museum and its practitioners ‘make visible’
- Analysing the materials or action produced
- Evaluating how this is received by young adults

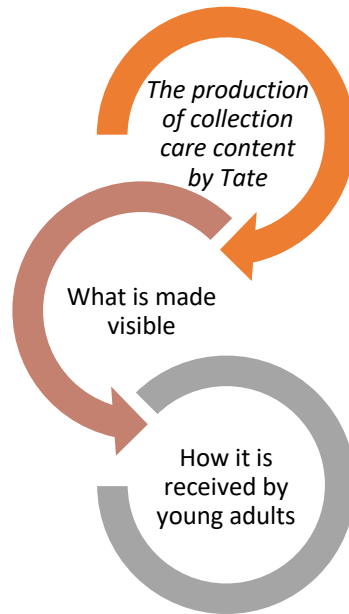


Figure 6.1 The relationship between areas of investigation in the research.

Furthermore, it needs to allow for the exploration of *why* certain messages are chosen and the forms they take, and what conditions and relationships determine the way young adult's make meaning from them. More specifically, this will be used to understand how the practices made visible either confirm to young adult's expectations or challenge any taken-for-granted assumptions they may already have. As such, I have found Stuart Hall's theory of encoding/decoding, which presents a cyclical communication structure to explain how certain messages are encoded into media and decoded by viewers, to provide an essential umbrella theory under which to organise both the scope and methodology of the project. A review of this theory and it's uses, and an outline for modification of it to the task of 'making the invisible visible', is discussed in this chapter.

6.1 Stuart Hall and the development of British Cultural Studies

Stuart Hall's work must be understood in the context of the development of the school of British Cultural Studies in the 1950s and 60s, the locus of which emerged at Birmingham University. The underlying ideas are complex, and utilised and interpreted in many subtly different ways by researchers and theorists working within the field. As a result, this summary aims to highlight only the core ideas and those which are particularly applicable to achieving the aims of this research project.

Turner explains that cultural studies as a discipline stems from the application of literary criticism by Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams as a means to 'read' different types of popular cultural in order to understand their form and significance (Turner 2002:10). Yet there was a growing need to explain the connection between 'texts' (cultural forms) and society, necessitating a way to conceive of culture as an overarching whole and how the individuals that produce and consume texts operate within this (ibid). The result was the development of an interdisciplinary field that aligned itself with structuralist modes of thought that placed emphasis on 'the systems, the sets of relationships, the formal structures that frame and enable the production of meaning' (ibid). This resulted in a focus on language as a representational system that produces signs and symbols through which meaning is produced and exchanged (Hall 1997:1). This in turn creates a model through which to understand the production and existence of cultural systems (Turner 2002:10).

Also key was an emphasis on ideology and power as determining factors that shape the production and reception of meaning. For Hall this was paramount: cultural studies, he emphasises, was 'born as a political project, as a way of analysing postwar advanced capitalist culture' (Hall 2016:7). As a result, strands of Marxist theory, and in particular Louis Althusser's concept of ideology as a force that 'shapes our consciousness of reality', is threaded through the development of cultural studies (Turner 2002:19; Hall 2016:127-154). Situating culture as inherently shaped by ideology, which 'saturates language' and is made material in the institutions and practices that determine how society is structured, subsequently allows for a focus on the production and content of media forms, how these media 'represent' some and not others (with implications on the formation of identity), and how they produce meanings that are encoded and then decoded in different ways by individuals (Turner 2002; Hall 1997). The result is a cyclical process of the production and reception of meaning through language and texts (Hall 1997:1). It is on this foundation that Hall's theory of encoding and decoding is built.

6.2 Encoding and Decoding

Hall's theory of encoding and decoding became a seminal text in the field of media studies after its presentation at a conference held at the University of Leicester in

1973. In it, Hall lays out a model for understanding the language of television programmes within a cultural analysis framework. His approach is distinct in that it simultaneously holds ‘the interconnection of societal structures and processes’ alongside the ‘formal or symbolic structures’ of meaning (Hall 1973:1). It is a concerted attempt to challenge the dominant sociological approach at the time (particularly in America) which cast audiences as ‘passive consumers of mass culture’ (Turner 2002:72). In order to do this, his concern is the whole mass communication *process*, which, he argues, begins with ‘elites’ in broadcasting creating television programmes that contain encoded messages to then be decoded by audiences, who often interpret them in distorted ways (ibid). The process becomes cyclical when the message is ‘translated’ into societal structures which subsequently determine the future production of programmes (Hall 1973:2). The process is expressed by Hall through the diagram below (Figure 6.2).

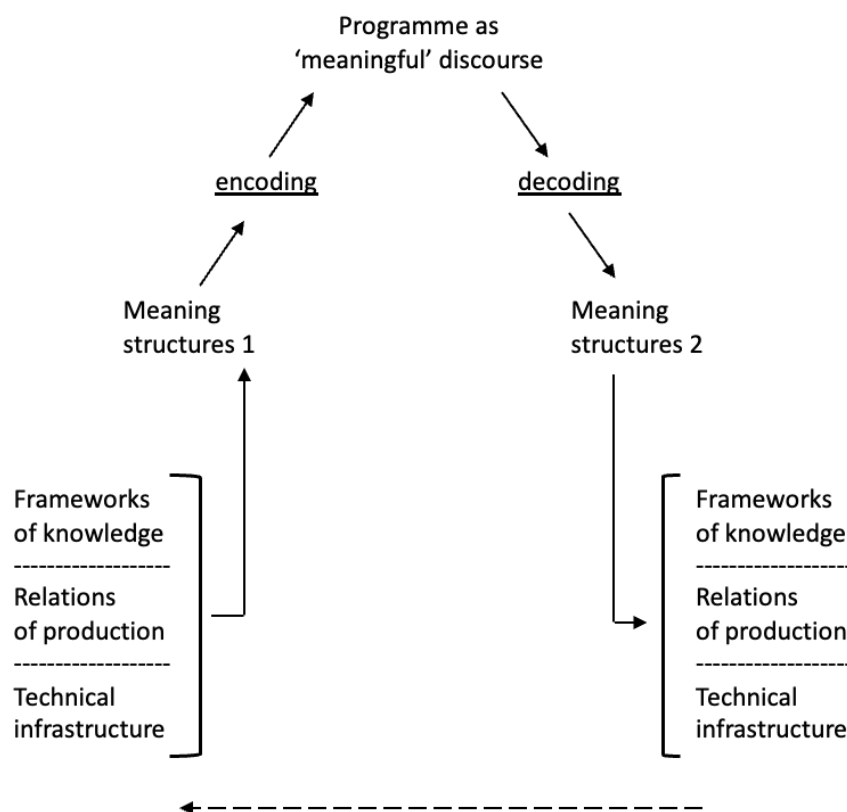


Figure 6.2 Hall’s model of encoding/decoding (Adapted from Hall 1975).

Broken down, Hall’s theory comprises the following key elements, which I have broadly mapped onto the process of ‘making the invisible visible’:

Encoding

Encoding describes the process whereby a message is constructed and sent through the production a television programme (text). These meanings are determined by the broadcasters and shaped by three elements: 'frameworks of knowledge', which include but are not limited to forms of institutional knowledge, professional ideologies, technical skills, and assumptions about the audience; 'relations of production', i.e. the organised relations between people that work together to produce a programme; and the 'technical infrastructure' which concerns tools of production and the form of the text (i.e. made for and screened on a television) (Hall 1980:118-119).

Applied to this project and the process of communicating collection care, it is the museum that acts as the encoder to any form of content that communicates hidden work. How it produces this moment of visibility is determined by the impact of stakeholders (relations of production), how staff and departments work together and the relationship between individuals and museum (including how they conceive of the mission and purpose of their work and the publics they are communicating with), as well as the values and rules followed by the institution (frameworks of knowledge), and the medium through which the invisible is made visible (such as a social media post, exhibition, or film; this is the technical infrastructure).

Meaning

What is encoded is a series of meanings that operate on different levels. There is the denotative code – the literal meaning – and connotative codes, which are the multiple associative meanings (Hall 1980:122). Hall urges us to pay attention to these latent connotative codes; this is where the 'deep semantic structures of culture' can be found, leaving ideological traces (Hall 1973:12).

Meaning, Hall would later explain, is never fixed and 'it does not survive intact the passage through representation' (Hall 1997:9). Yet when a programme is encoded with a meaning there is nevertheless a dominant or *preferred* way of reading it – preferred, that is, because it is never predetermined that audiences will interpret it in the desired way. As Turner explains, in the case of the television producer, their job is to 'convince the viewer to construct the same reading as the producer', and to do

this familiar systems of representation are used – like dramatic music, familiar imagery, camera angles, and editing techniques (Turner 2002:75). Readings are preferred, Hall explains, when they have ‘the institutional/political/ideological order imprinted in them and have themselves become institutionalised’ (Hall 1973:13).

It follows, then, that materials and events produced by museums to communicate collection care are intended to be the vehicle for multiple messages that the museum wants to communicate to audiences. These could be about certain collection care techniques or the properties of an object, or perhaps about the mission and values of the institution itself. For example, in conservation films and displays we often find ‘before and after’ narratives, utilising a lexicon of familiar signs that connote a doctor/patient relationship between conservator and object (Brooks 2012). Such tropes appear as familiar signs used to encourage ‘preferred’ readings by the museum – perhaps intended to increase trust in the institution, to express the ways the museum cares for its collection, to garner the support of funders and stakeholders, or to communicate messages about authenticity and stability related to the object.

Decoding

Decoding pertains to the way an audience ‘reads’ a television programme and it is Hall’s chief concern in his encoding/decoding model. As established already, people interpret meanings from texts in a plethora of ways that are often not aligned with the intended messages of the encoder. This is because of the ‘range of different decoding strategies and competences in the audience’ (Morely 1992:80). Hall posits that the way audiences decode a text is through one of three hypothetical positions. The ‘dominant hegemonic position’ is taken when the viewer decodes the message ‘straight’, as intended by the encoder - although this rarely occurs (Turner 2002:75). Far more common is the ‘negotiated position’, which describes the instances where the viewer broadly interprets the preferred reading but makes a ‘negotiated application to local conditions’ (Hall 1980:127). As Butsch explains, ‘negotiated readings are based on incongruities between preferred reading and personal experience’, and in this way they often contain contradictions (2011:165). The final position is ‘oppositional’, in which the viewer understands the preferred reading but takes a stance against it; Turner’s example is the political broadcast from a party one

usually votes against (Turner 2002:76). It is in oppositional readings, Hall argues, that 'the most significant political moments' occur (Hall 1980:127).

Within the context of this research, the notion of decoding – and its various reading positions – allow for a deeper exploration of what young adults read in materials that 'make the invisible visible' and, crucially, *how* they come to interpret the materials in these ways. Adopting a decoding model allows exploration of how young adults make meaning of the materials through their individual frameworks of interpretation which include both their definitions of 'culture' and their relationship with the museum.

It is also important to pause and note critiques of this structure. Morley, for example, has noted that Hall might be accused of an over emphasis on the role of class in the process of decoding, at the expense of reducing the importance of other social considerations (Morley 1992:10-11). Morley also posits that it might encourage a 'conveyor belt' approach to media, and an assumption that television is consumed by one individual in front of a screen (when in fact this is often a communal, discursive activity) (Morley 1992:112-114). These critiques are helpful in shaping my application of Hall's theory; whilst class is a factor, a review of the literature around young adults suggests that there are indeed many other reasons they experience museums as disinteresting and unwelcoming places; these include alternative definitions of culture, modes of media consumption, and more complex relationships with the ways museums have traditionally upheld interconnected systems of exclusion (see section 2.2). Here Hall's other writings on representation and difference might augment his earlier theory of encoding/decoding (Hall 1997). Similarly, the issue of the lone viewer is also important to address. By taking a qualitative approach that relies primarily on data gleaned through semi-structured interviews, it is unavoidable that the process of describing their interpretations in a discursive format will influence the way the young adults make meaning from the materials they come into contact with. Understanding this is vital within a reflexive research framework, and I will directly address my role in the decoding process - as interviewer and facilitator of access to the materials – in the discussion section of this thesis.

6.3 Use in Museum Studies

The notions of encoding and decoding, alongside other frameworks from media and communication studies, have been successfully adopted into the theoretical and methodological toolkit of museum and visitor studies (Hooper-Greenhill 2013:6). Whilst few studies choose to tackle the museum as an expanded communication system (with a key exception by Macdonald, discussed in more detail later), the notion that communication is a cyclical, active and relational process nevertheless underpins much research that takes encoding or decoding as its main focus. Below I select some of the core ways the theory has been translated into museum studies and how this informs the structure of this research project.

6.3.1 Museum as medium, exhibition as text

‘Encoding’ has become a way to think about museum as part of the ‘mass communication’ apparatus of society and situate exhibitions and other forms of programming as texts imbued with meanings (e.g. Silverstone 1988; Hooper-Greenhill 2013). Silverstone’s argument for thinking of museums as medium for communication is borne out of his research into how science is communicated to the public through mass media, museums and schools (Silverstone 1994; Silverstone 1991). Although writing in the 1990s, and therefore before the widespread adoption of the many forms of digital technology that have come to structure the ways we now make and consume information and organise our social lives, his observations remain pertinent. Museums, he argues, are ‘agents of representation’ in the ‘communication business’ and as such they compete with other forms of media for our attention, which necessitates their adoption of some of the forms and techniques of the mass media and results in a state of interdependence (Silverstone 1998:213). Exhibitions should thus be considered as ‘texts’: ‘structurally discrete, narratively coherent and culturally and historically embedded’ (ibid).

Silverstone’s work is applicable to the issue of ‘making the invisible visible’ in important ways. Central to his argument is that museums are ‘communicating environments’ organised by various logics, created as a result of institutional and individual forces (Silverstone 1994:166). Exhibitions (‘texts’) are thus constructed within these conditions and deploy narratives, tropes and rhetorical strategies to

present 'reality' (Ibid; Silverstone 1988:234). Here, with further attention, we might learn something about the museum itself. And, as this project is limited mostly to an exploration of film and audio content produced by Tate (an unavoidable consequence of the pandemic), thus Silverstone's vision of museum as medium operating in ways akin to television production is particularly useful. Exhibitions are designed to both appeal to visitors, represent the world *and* 'sustain narratives of the museum's own legitimization' (Silverstone 1988:234). When applied to the subject of communicating collection care, these initiatives appear as a way of revealing hidden 'truths', be it about the object and its history or the way the museum operates. Efforts to communicate collection care should be treated as 1.) discrete texts with a devised narrative structure that 2.) are produced in the context of the museum as a communication environment, concerned with educating, entertaining and including its visitors, alongside the replication of its own status as arbiter of authenticity, accuracy and truth. In essence, showing the spaces, processes, tools, and concepts of care utilised by the museum means exhibiting the museum itself, and this is a tightly controlled task.

A point of disjuncture, however, can be found in Silverstone's focus on curators as the primary authors of exhibitions and the key influence in systems of classification. He is not alone in this assumption; most literature tends to focus on curatorial intellectual labour as the engine of the museum. Efforts to communicate collection care, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, are often instigated and led by collection care practitioners themselves and involve collaborative efforts with other departments including but certainly not limited to curatorial, education, digital and public programmes. This is in addition to the nature of conservation and collection care work itself – i.e. what is made visible - as a collaborative meaning making practice at the heart of the museum (explored further in chapter 5). Focusing on the production of 'texts' as purely authored by curators working within the museum is to present a fragmented view of the whole and to deny the agency of collection care staff and their concerns as active participants that shape their own representation.

6.3.2 Decoding museums

The notion of decoding, meanwhile, has enabled museum visitors to be acknowledged as active participants in meaning making, deconstructing messages in ways the museum can't control and making sense of them through the conditions of their own lived experiences (Hooper Greenhill 2013; Fyfe and Ross 1996; Macdonald 2002). Hooper-Greenhill acknowledges that visitor studies can learn much from media studies, not least the way it rejects the notion of singular meanings and a linear model of communication (2013:9). Acknowledging the possibility of multiple meanings constructed by the viewer, enables visitor studies to move its attention from the exhibition to audience perspective. Before the embrace of decoding as a concept, she notes that there had been few examples of ethnographic studies of museum visitors. Such a methodological approach is crucial if we are to find out *what* visitors find meaningful and *why*. Here 'culture' enters the equation: participating in a culture 'gives meaning to people, objects and events' and meaning then 'gives us a sense of our own identity, of who we are and with whom we belong' (Hall 1997:3). For Hall, then culture is part of a cyclical process of representation, and it is through participation in a culture that decoding of meaning takes place. Hooper-Greenhill, building on this, argues that 'culture constructs society, through the images it creates of social possibilities and the stories it tells of social achievement' and museums, in determining what is made visible and what is hidden, are where these stories find form (2005:13). Museums, then, are a crucial part of a constitutive cycle of the production and reception of culture.

Researchers must, Hooper-Greenhill urges, work in more reflexive ways with audiences, in order to 'allow their descriptions of what museums mean to them to emerge during the research process' (Ibid). The ability of the decoding model to shed light on the relationship between audiences and the museum is important in the context of this project's interest in young adults, whose ambivalent relationship with art museums remains under explored. Fyfe and Ross provide one such exploration, considering the place local museums play to their surrounding communities and their development of a sense of place, identity and belonging (1996). Their study of local people's relationships with museums in the Midlands is notable for its focus on class and social relationships as a determining factor in museum visiting. To do this they carried out long form, semi-structured interviews with local households, gathering

context as to how they live their lives and consume culture whilst allowing the participants to introduce museum visiting as a topic, thus revealing the significance of museum visiting to their lives (Fyfe and Ross 1996:132). Bourdieu's notion of habitus, 'as the frame of reference, the underlying dispositions, grammar or mental schema' is used to understand the participants' 'disposition to look'; the action of decoding allows for the investigation of how this impacts the way the participants make meaning from museums (Fyfe and Ross 1996:133). Fyfe and Ross' study also demonstrates the flexibility of the decoding model to incorporate theories that help understand the ways audiences form relationships with museums and how these are shaped by their prior experiences and definitions of culture.

6.3.3 Seeing the whole system: *Behind the Scenes at the Science Museum*

Sharon Macdonald's study of the production and reception of an exhibition at the Science Museum in London remains the most comprehensive example of qualitative research that goes 'behind the scenes' of the museum in order to understand how science is constructed for public display (2002). Like this research project, Macdonald also benefitted from the unusual opportunity to be embedded with a team in a large institution, all the while retaining the freedom to experience the museum through critical eyes, shifting between insider and outsider as required. Her ethnographic approach is informed by actor-network theory's proposition that nonhuman actors also exert agency over the formation of social networks, and a broad application of encoding/decoding theory. The former is used to guide the parameters of her exploration behind the scenes; she follows the 'actors' who contributed to the production of the exhibition, creating an account that considers the myriad actors both within and external to the museum that shape the way knowledge is produced (Macdonald 2002:7). The notion of decoding is used to then understand how visitors derive meaning from the subsequent exhibition. Less concerned with the categories of preferred, negotiated or oppositional reading, Macdonald develops the idea of 'cultural lists' as a way to explain people's motivation for visiting the exhibition and how they then make sense of it 'in relation to their own lives and interests' (Macdonald 2002:239).

Macdonald's approach has informed the design of this research project in a number of ways, although there are distinct differences in our methodology and the focus of our enquiry. First, her positionality is important. This project, like Macdonald's, is as much a process of making the mechanisms of the institution visible to the researcher – and the reader – as the materials used to communicate collection care themselves. Adopting a reflexive approach, is vital. Perhaps most important, though, is the general structure of her study which considers the museum and its visitors as a part of a *whole* process of communication situated within wider historic contexts and societal structures and in this way, it can be thought of as a modulation of the encoding/decoding model. It provides a successful example of how the fundamentals of the structure can be adapted to think about the museum as part of a system of communication that begins not in the gallery space but in the offices behind the scenes, through the coming together of human actors – each of whom are shaped by their own experiences and interests – and myriad nonhuman actors that shape how 'science' is visualised in the museum. Thus, Macdonald's research is also remarkable in the scope of her explorations of the encoding process. Her acknowledgement of the expanded landscape of people, objects, and ideologies that collectively influence the process of creating an exhibition gives an example of the depth of enquiry needed to explain how meaning is made.

6.4 Summary and implications for the research

In this chapter I have presented how Hall's theory of encoding and decoding can act as an umbrella theory to structure my approach to the topic of communicating collection care in the contemporary art museum. 'Making the invisible visible' will thus be treated as an issue of encoding and decoding, whereby invisible work is packaged into a discrete moment of visibility ('text') that carries meanings encoded by the museum to then be decoded by audiences. In this way it naturally splits the research into two phases that will be detailed in the next chapter.

7. Methods and methodological approach

This chapter outlines the design of the research project. It details how a two-phased approach to data collection will correspond with the overall scope of the project to consider the issue of making the invisible visible from a museum and visitor perspective. I present here the research questions, design and methodology and then further explanation of the methods of data collection deployed during each phase of the research. I also consider the unavoidable impact of the covid-19 pandemic, my own positionality as an embedded researcher, and the ethical considerations that shaped the project. I end with discussion of how I analysed the data.

7.1 Research questions

My methodological approach was determined by my research questions. The overarching research question for the project was drafted as part in the initial planning of the collaborative doctoral award (CDP), before I became involved in the project. This is:

To what extent might greater visibility of behind-the-scenes work create opportunities for the development of inclusive practices in the contemporary art museum?

I then crafted my own additional research questions, which I considered to be core areas of further exploration. These are:

- 1. What are the perceived risks and/or benefits for the museum in making the private and behind the scenes processes visible?*
- 2. What do museums believe that they are providing audiences by making behind the scenes processes visible?*
- 3. How do young adults respond to attempts to make visible the private and behind the scenes processes of the contemporary art museum?*

7.2 Research objectives

The objectives of the research are:

- To understand the institutional mechanisms that produce states of (in)visibility in the museum.
- To ascertain what purpose degrees of ‘visibility’ and ‘invisibility’ serve to museums.
- To determine whether the contemporary art museum generates its own specific conditions of (in)visibility.
- To compare what the museum believes it is providing young adults with the reality of those young adults’ experiences.
- To evaluate the relationship between increased access to behind-the-scenes processes and inclusivity. Do young adults associate greater access to the private areas of the museum with feeling more included in the work of Tate – or might the inverse be true?
- To understand which aspect of the mediational activity (e.g. ethical decisions and problem solving, concept of an artwork’s ‘life’, the creativity of behind-the-scenes work) might resonate most with young adults and whether this impacts the degree of inclusivity (or exclusivity) felt by the participants.
- To provide a greater understanding of the relationship between young adults and art museums, and what the latter expect from these institutions.

7.3 Impact of Covid-19

I begin by describing the impact of the covid-19 pandemic, which fundamentally shaped the design of the research and imposed unavoidable restrictions that determined the scope, methods and methodological approach of the project.

The biggest hurdle I faced was how to conduct research under the conditions of a national lockdown that closed all of Tate’s sites and prohibited or restrained in-person contact. For Tate, as with many museums, its physical spaces are the locus

of the institution's activities, with visitor numbers, public programmes participation, and ticket sales being key measures of success. As a result, the institution's working practices, relationship with the public, and identity were upended overnight and any initial intentions I had of carrying out observation in the galleries, working directly with young adults, or acting as a participant observer in the workplace were stymied.

Although I was able to rely on some early reflections in my research diary before the closure of Tate, the majority of data had to be collected remotely online. This meant that all interviews were carried out over Microsoft Teams, and I was unavoidably forced to rely on mostly digital forms of 'making visible' as mediating materials for the young adult participants. Travel was also affected, so I decided to focus my investigation on Tate's London sites (Tate Britain, Tate Modern and Tate Stores), where I was initially based with Reshaping the Collectible before the pandemic broke out. I already had first-hand experience of how the gallery and office spaces were organised and a good sense of the departments and staff members located between the sites.

The turbulence created by the pandemic also impacted my ability to recruit participants. The precarity and uncertainty of the situation created immense emotional and financial strain on those working in the cultural sector (Walmsley et al 2022).³⁶ Many members of Tate staff were placed on furlough and had reduced contact hours, and as the impact of the pandemic worsened a process of restructuring began, leading to voluntary and later involuntary redundancies. Young adults, too, were similarly affected by the pandemic with adolescents in particular experiencing higher rates of mental health difficulties.³⁷ Indeed, Young People's Programmes at Tate had to adapt to online events and the TCPs who participated in this research lamented the way the pandemic had constrained their ability to fully utilise the opportunities the scheme would normally offer. Against this backdrop I needed to remain sensitive to the pressures on participants' time and avoid overwhelming them with requests for interviews. In some instances, interviews were

³⁶ 'The constant need for adaptation coupled with uncertainty (heightened by the numerous local lockdowns and the introduction of the tier system) was draining for staff, with reports of increasing exhaustion and illness. Mental health and wellbeing remained a significant concern' (Walmsley et al. 2022:31).

³⁷ See, for example, Oxford University, 'Young people's mental health deteriorated at greater rate during the pandemic – major new study', Available at <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2023-09-21-young-people-s-mental-health-deteriorated-greater-rate-during-pandemic-major-new>.

reduced to 30 minutes instead of a full hour or split across two sessions.³⁸ Inevitably discussion of the impact of the pandemic was present in all interviews, particularly in relation to how their work had changed in both productive and inhibitive ways.

Mediational events that I hoped to attend or shadow were cancelled and so my focus turned to past projects and particularly films and other digital outputs, which became Tate's primary means of connecting with audiences whilst its physical premises were closed. This was further reflected in the interviews (particularly those carried out in 2020) as a number of staff participants were involved in recent or concurrent digital efforts to communicate collection care work; past in-person events were thus referenced less frequently, and it became clear that I should narrow my focus to consider only those materials that I could share safely with the young adults. As a result, this impacted the design of phase two of the data collection. These interviews were also required to take place remotely, so digital outputs became the main mediational materials for participants to reflect upon. One exception came in the *Lives of Artworks* display at Tate Britain, which formed part of the Reshaping the Collectible Project and to which I contributed. Whilst I was not able to meet the young adult participants in person (due to the conditions of my ethical approval, which prohibited this), I did enquire as to whether they had seen the displays during days that they were at Tate and in this way, we were able to weave it into our discussions.³⁹

Ultimately, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to assess the impact of the pandemic, but its affects can be traced through the project in numerous ways. The research design, which I discuss next, is thus a product of these conditions and necessarily contains compromises.

³⁸ I am immensely grateful to everyone who made time in this destabilising period to engage with the research project.

³⁹ Two of the participants informed me that they would be visiting Tate Britain during the research period. Due to the conditions of my ethical approval, I was not able to accompany them, but I did ask them, if they were able, to view the *Lives of Artworks* display during their visit. We then discussed their reflections in the second interview.

7.4 Qualitative approach

In order to address the research questions and objectives I have applied a qualitative, case study methodology. Silverman argues that qualitative research ‘can provide a ‘deeper’ understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from a purely quantitative methodology’ (Silverman 2006:56). In the context of this doctoral research project, a qualitative methodology enables me to explore with depth and nuance the subjective experience of museum staff as well as individual young adults as they encounter the hidden processes of the museum. Such an objective correlates with Erickson’s assertion that ‘qualitative enquiry seeks to describe narratively what particular people do in their everyday lives and what their actions mean to them’ (2018:36).

A single case study approach was deemed most suitable due to my theoretical framing and the subject of enquiry itself. Simons defines a case study as ‘an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme, or system in a real-life context’ (Simons 2009:21, quoted in Schwandt and Gates 2018:343). Focusing on Tate, and specifically how collection care work is made visible by the institution, fits this methodology well. Yin describes five rationales for selecting a single case study: critical, unusual, common, revelatory, or longitudinal (Yin 2018:49-50). In this instance the justification is critical; structured around the encoding/decoding theory and incorporating aspects of theories that seek to explain the relationship between objects, people and institutions, providing a thorough and multifaceted account of a single institution becomes a way to build and develop new theories. Because of the unusual subject of enquiry this case study also has a descriptive purpose; as there are no prior in-depth qualitative studies of communicating collection care in art museums, part of the value of this investigation lies in its contribution to building a knowledge base to which future cases might compare (Schwandt and Gates 2018:246-247).

7.5 Research design and methods

The research design and methods were determined by the scope of the research questions, my theoretical framework, and the case study methodology. As detailed in

my introduction, this project derives its value in its attempt to address the topic of communicating collection care work from both a museum and audience perspective. This required me to design a data collection approach that operated in two phases, from which a dialectical analysis could then be conducted. Hall's cyclical communication model of encoding/decoding in televisual discourse provided the theoretical scaffolding for both the research design and interpretation of the data (Hall 1973). Originally applied to the production of television programmes, Hall's theory of understanding the encoded meaning and reception of media produced by institutions fits well with the scope of the project – moving from museum to audiences – as well as the film and audio sources that Tate primarily used to communicate with audiences during the pandemic. My application of this umbrella theory to the design of the research is expressed in Figure 7.1, which shows how the theory naturally lends itself to a two-step approach.

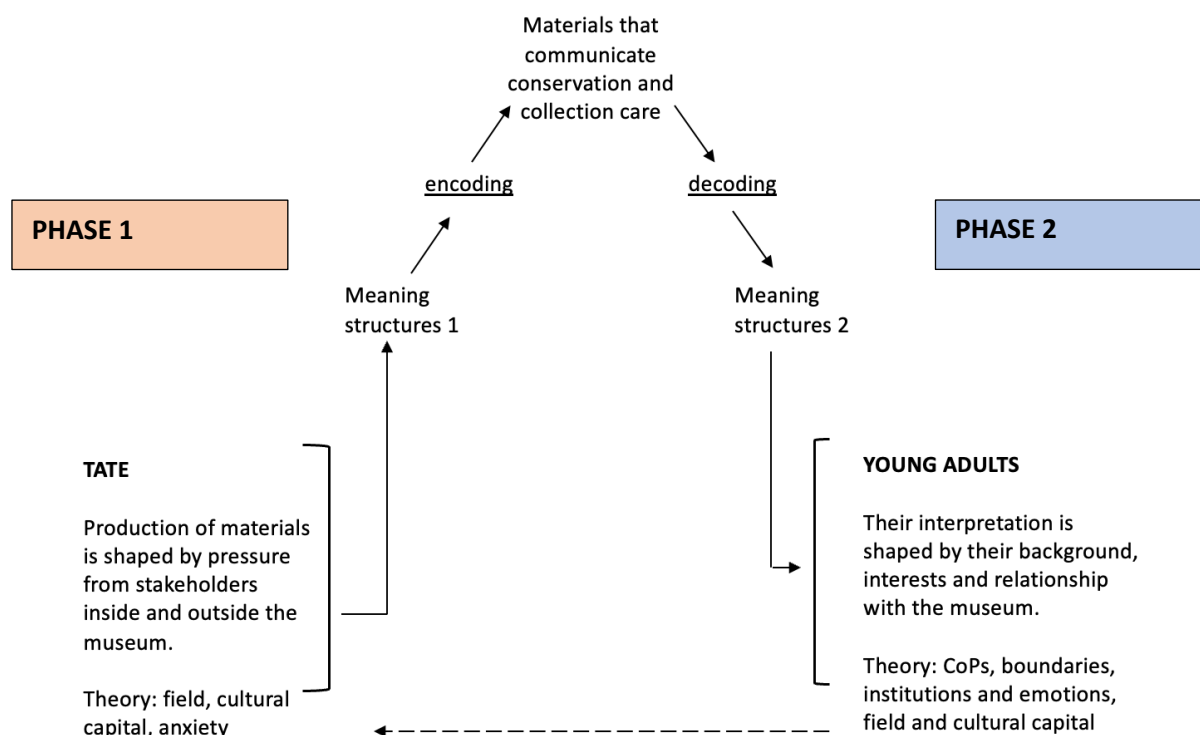


Figure 7.1 Phases of the research project (Hall 1975).

Within this framework I used three methods of data collection: semi-structured interviews which were the primary source of data, backed up by documents and my

own notes and reflections collected in a research diary, which were used as secondary contextual sources. Yin argues that case studies, by the nature of the enquiry into a complex reality, should adopt a mixed-methods approach (Yin 2018:127). Whilst interviews provide a particularly rich source of data about individuals, contextual and historic evidence can be added through the incorporation of other methods such as documents and fieldnotes (Ibid). In this way ‘triangulation’ can take place, whereby the lines of enquiry from different sources of evidence converge to provide a more thorough rendering of the phenomena studied (Yin 2018:127–129). In the context of a single case explored by one researcher, triangulating varied sources of data helps to add reliability and trustworthiness to the account. The application of these methods to each stage of the research, and their relation to the research questions, is presented in Table 2, below.

Phase of collection	Materials	Weighting of data in analysis
Phase 1: Encoding: Institutional perspective RQs 1 & 2 and overarching RQ	Analysis of secondary sources and documents	Secondary
	Research diary reflecting on involvement with Reshaping the Collectible	Secondary
	Interviews with Tate staff	Primary
	Mediational materials – videos, audio content, <i>Lives of Artworks</i> exhibition	Secondary
Phase 2: Decoding: Young adult perspective RQ 3 and overarching RQ	Interviews pre access to ‘invisible’ processes via media materials	Primary
	Interviews post-access	Primary

Table 2. Breakdown of data collection phases and methods.

7.6 Timeline of research

Data collection was undertaken between March 2020 and December 2022 and roughly adhered to the two-phase structure described below (with some overlaps).

The first phase of data collection was concerned with research questions one and two (RQs 1 & 2) and the overarching research question. I used this phase as a way to understand how the mediational materials created by Tate are the product of actions that take place on an individual, practice based and insitutional level, with particular focus on the influence of various stakeholders. Documentary analysis began in April 2020 during the pandemic lockdown. Interviews with Tate staff were carried out over an 18-month period from December 2020 – August 2022. I continued compiling notes and reflections in my research diary for the duration of the research period, spanning my first meetings with the Reshaping the Collectible project in early 2019, through the planning and making of the *Lives of Artworks* display (2021-2022), and into the writing-up period in 2023.

Phase 2 was concerned with how the young adults decoded and made meaning from the materials and thus provided evidence to help answer RQ3 and the overarching RQ. I used the data gathered at this stage to understand how the ‘young adults’ responses might align or oppose Tate’s intentions, and how these positions might be connected to their experiences at the boundary of the institution. Interviews with young adults were carried out from December 2022 to December 2023, with each participant interviewed three times during that period.

7.7 Identifying participants and selecting documents

7.7.1 Identifying documentary materials

During the early months of the pandemic the public facing actions of Tate ground to a halt and the operations of the institution were thrown into disarray. A furlough scheme was introduced that saw staff I hoped to interview reduce their working hours and projects that I hoped to shadow were put on pause. Whilst in a state of stasis I turned my attention to gathering documents that would provide contextual information to help me begin to understand who or what is most commonly ‘made

visible', the institutional rules and systems that determine this, and the core relationships.

I gathered webpages relating to four conservation research projects, financial reports from the board of trustees, annual and biannual reports, event listings and descriptions from the Tate website, Tate's 2020-2025 vision, Tate management statement and financial memorandum, and Tate's collection care policy (Appendix I).⁴⁰ The event listings were selected to provide historical context of Tate's past activities, how these were marketed and who these were aimed at. Tate's Management Statement and Financial Memorandum, annual reports and reports from the Board of Trustees were selected to provide further insight into Tate's relationships with stakeholders, ranging from the general public (annual reports) to the field of power (Board of Trustees reports). The Collection Care Policy Document gave further context to how the department was situated within the wider structure and functioning of the museum and the 2020-2025 vision gave insight into the values that guide Tate and its self-perception. All of the documents selected were public facing to prevent risk to the institution and participants.

7.7.2 Identifying staff

My selection criteria were informed by the initial phase of documentary analysis and the embedded nature of my position as a researcher at Tate. Initially I identified members of staff who I felt fit into three defined categories: collection care practitioners, visibility mediators, and decision makers, although it soon became apparent that participants sometimes shifted between categories depending on the different tasks they took on.⁴¹ I began by contacting members of staff that I had built a relationship with or who were familiar with my research. In the process of reflection and transcription – and as I came to understand the flows and blockages in the museum ecosystem - I was able to identify further actors that shaped (in)visibility (departments involved in the processes of communicating collection care, individuals who were regularly referred to), who I then invited to interview. In total 17 interviews

⁴⁰ Event listings and descriptions from the Tate website were compiled in collaboration with Kit Webb, a member of the RTC team. I am grateful for his permission to use this dataset in my research.

⁴¹

were conducted with individuals from the Collection Care division (Art Handling, Conservation, Conservation Science), Public Programmes, Interpretation, Research, Digital, Social Media, Young People’s Programmes, Curatorial, Directors Group and Executive Office. Participants are identified in the research through their departmental affiliation only. This information was retained in order to better understand the ways different departments in the museum interact and how their roles might influence their relationship with invisibility. The range of participants interviewed is presented below.

Category	Department represented
Collection Care practitioners	Conservation, Time-Based Media (x 3 participants) Conservation, Sculpture and Installation (x 2 participants) Conservation Science Art Handling Collection Care Research
Visibility mediators	Digital (x 2 participants: Production, Social Media) Learning (x 2 participants: Public Programmes, Young People’s Programmes) Curatorial (Interpretation)
Decision makers	Directors Group (x 2 participants: Curatorial, Collection Care) Executive Group (x2 participants)

Table 3. Staff participants in the research.

7.7.3 Identifying mediational materials

Selecting the right range mediational materials was vital as this is the content that carries the meaning in the encoding/decoding model. As outlined above, due to the pandemic I was mostly restricted to digital materials, with the *Lives of Artworks*

display an additional option for participants who could visit the exhibition independently.

In order to best understand the whole decoding process, I selected the videos and materials that were most commonly referred to by staff as this gave me a more nuanced insight into their production and therefore the 'encoding' process. Similarly, I included the videos, audio content and the physical display that were produced during my attachment to the Reshaping the Collectible project, as I was uniquely placed to understand the ontological and epistemological framing deployed in their conception and creation. I also made sure I had a range of content, showing different collection care practices and types of artworks – although this was satisfied naturally by the range of examples mentioned by Tate staff. The final selection is listed below, with illustrations included in Appendix II

- *Restoring Rothko*, 2014, film, 17:26
- *Conserving Whaam!* 2018, film, 6:56
- *Caring for Art During Covid*, 2020, film, 11:50
- *Reframing Constable*, 2018, film, 6:16
- *Tony Conrad – Keeping an Artwork Alive* 2020, film, 9:01
- *Art in Focus | Life of an Artwork: Quadrille by Rose English*, 2022, film, 5:36
- *What are Internet Artworks and how do we care for them?*, 2022, film, 8:38
- *The Lives of Artworks*, 1 February 2021 – 10 July 2022, display, Tate Britain
- *Audio Highlight Tour: The Lives of Artworks*, assorted audio clips, each c. 1:30

These materials were then sent to the young adult participants to view prior to our second interview.

7.7.4 Identifying Young Adults

Selection criteria was drawn from my literature review and the theoretical framing of the project, which seeks to better understand the experiences of young adults who

want to work in museums. Guided by the concepts of participation (Lave and Wenger 2003) and boundary work (Wenger 1998) and the broader interest in understanding people's relationships with museums, I sought to recruit participants who were involved in Tate's learning and participation programmes. I devised the following criteria:

- Has worked with Tate as a TCP or in a work experience/mentorship capacity
- Has not been permanently employed by Tate
- Has an interest or curiosity in any aspect of collection care work
- Has no professional experience of collection care work
- Has not worked with Tate's collection care department

Crucially, I had to find participants who operated at the boundary of the museum with the desire to forge a career in the museum sector, but who were also relatively unfamiliar with collection care work, in order for the materials to be truly 'making the invisible visible'.

Initially, I reached out to young adults through the Tate Collective Producers scheme. I sent out a call for contributions in the TCP e-newsletter, where news and opportunities are sent to members on a weekly basis (see Appendix III). The call out only garnered two responses and I undertook an initial screening interview with the respondents to check they met the above criteria.

Despite extending the deadline for the call out period, I found it hard to recruit participants this way.⁴² Instead I turned to snowball sampling, a method often used to find participants in hard-to reach groups (Parker et al 2019:np). Snowball sampling relies on 'networks and referral', whereby the researcher asks participants to recommend further contacts who fit the criteria of the study, creating a snowballing effect (ibid). Despite asking the TCPs, it was through Tate staff that I found the third and fourth participants in the study. These individuals were recommended by staff participants, and, through their enrolment on the work experience and mentorship schemes respectively, I determined that they fit the research criteria.

⁴² This was apparently not unusual. Tate staff told me prior to publishing my research call that there had been a low response rate during the pandemic.

7.8 Interview design

Interviews are particularly important for a case study methodology due to their ability to offer varied and nuanced perspectives on the object of investigation (Yin 2018:118). My interviews with staff and young adults took a semi-structured form, with guiding themes and opening questions derived from the theory and literature. The benefit of such an approach is the combined ability to harness the ‘knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues’ (Brinkmann 2018:579) in order to garner ‘rich talk’ (Magnusson and Marecek 2015:48) that captures the lifeworld of participants whilst still allowing the researcher to sculpt the conversation around topics pertinent to the research questions (Brinkman 2018:579-580). Of additional value to this project is the ability of semi-structured interviews to make visible the presence of the researcher in the data, which forms an important part of the reflexive nature of this project.

7.8.1 Interview design for staff

Interview themes emerged from a combination of my theoretical framework and the research questions, which require focus on ideas of risk and benefit and the perceived impacts on audiences and practitioners of making collection care work visible. Themes were organised to move from the micro to the macro and moving from inside the museum to outside. Nested within these themes were open-ended questions, modified slightly depending on the participant’s positioning within the network (e.g. mediator, collection care practitioner, decision maker)⁴³, which were designed to open out avenues of conversation, with subsequent avenues of enquiry guided by the responses of the interviewees (Table 4). A more detailed version, explaining the connection between the themes and the RQs can be found in Appendix IV.

⁴³ For example, collection care practitioners were asked to talk about an instance where their work was made visible, whereas mediators were asked how they approached the task of making collection care visible.

Theme	Example questions
Context and routes into the art museum	• Tell me a bit about your background and what drew you to working at Tate?
Inside the museum: museum infrastructure and networks of collaboration	• What does a typical day look like for you? And an atypical day? • Which departments do you work with most often?
Encoding and decoding	• How do you think audiences conceive of your role? • How would you describe your work to someone who isn't familiar with collection care processes in art museums? (<i>Collection care staff only</i>) • Can you talk to me about any projects you have been involved in that have made collection care and/or conservation work visible? • Can you tell me about a time that you tried to tell a member of the public about your job? (<i>Collection care staff only</i>) • Do you think there is a place for more collection care or behind the scenes focused programming at Tate?
Risk, benefit and anxiety	• What do you feel is at stake for the museum in making Collection Management and Collection care work more visible?
(In)visibility	• What would a more transparent art museum look like? • Where do you think the lines of visibility are drawn at Tate

Table 4. Themes guiding the semi-structured interviews with Tate staff.

7.8.2 Interview design for Young Adults

Over the course of a year, I carried out three interviews with the young adult participants. The first interview was intended to gather contextual information so as to better understand the participants' relationship with the museum and their preconceptions about what collection care is.

I then sent participants a list of links to mediational materials that included videos and audio content, asking them to choose to engage with as many as they wanted or felt interested in. The second interview was then structured around their responses to the materials they chose to view. I asked broad questions about what they found

interesting, what was new to them and what they thought the content was about, allowing their observations to guide the rest of conversation.

In our final interview we recapped what I thought were the most prominent ideas and themes that emerged in our previous interviews, and I asked the participants to provide feedback, determining which was most important to them and whether I had correctly interpreted their words. This final step was developed to make sure I stayed true to the voice of the participants in my subsequent analysis and represented them accurately; to make sure that my findings would be both relevant and useful to them (a key tenet of grounded theory methodologies (Piggott 2010)); and to ensure that they were not ‘sources of data’ but rather active contributors and collaborators in the knowledge making process. I also included the questions pertaining to (in)visibility that aligned with the theme I explored with Tate staff, enabling comparison in attitudes (Table 5).

Theme	Example questions
Interview 1	
Introduction	• Can you tell me your motivations for being part of this research project?
Background and cultural consumption	• Can you tell me about you work outside your TCP role? ○ How did you get into this? • What kind of arts events do you attend? ○ Do you visit art museums often? ○ Recent exhibitions you saw/recent events you went to?
Relationship with Tate and routes into the museum	• Can you tell me why you decided to become a TCP/mentee/undertake work experience at Tate? • How would describe your role at Tate? • Can you tell me about a recent project you worked on? ○ Who did you work with? ○ How did you decide what to present/include? ○ What was the response? • What are you currently working on? • What do you think is the most important aspect of the work that the TCPs do? (<i>TCPs only</i>) ○ How do you want to use your role in the future?

Collection care work	• What are your perceptions of collection care work? ◦ Have you been to any events that focused on this kind of work?
Interview 2	
Decoding: message	• What materials did you choose to watch? ◦ Why? • Describe what the material was about in your own words ◦ What do you think the key point was? • What was the most interesting thing about the material? ◦ What was new to you?
Decoding: medium	• What did you think of the medium? ◦ Have you watched other Tate films or digital media? • How would you change it if you were given the same brief? ◦ What would you emphasise as the most important point?
Collection care work	• When we spoke before you said you felt unfamiliar with the work of collection care and conservation. How do you feel about that now?
Relationship with Tate	• How does it compare to what you've seen behind the scenes of Tate as a TCP? • Has it changed your perceptions of the work of Tate? ◦ Has it changed how you think of the work of art museums? • Do you think of the art differently? Or the collection differently?
Interview 3	
Reflections on first pass coding themes	• I've relistened to our interviews and I wanted to pull out some of the themes we discussed and get your feedback on how you feel about those ideas. <i>Present theme/ quotations and follow-up discussion</i>
Reflections on the research	• Thinking back to the discussions we've had, what are your thoughts on the research project now? • What was the most memorable of interesting thing that we've talked about? • How would you describe the work of collection care now? • What other content would you like to see that engages with hidden work at Tate?
(in)visibility	• Where do you think the lines of visibility are drawn at Tate? ◦ What is seen and who sees it? • Do you think it's important for museums to be more transparent? ◦ What would a more transparent museum look like?
End	• Are there any final thoughts you'd like to add? Anything that you think is important that we haven't discussed?

Table 5. Themes guiding the semi-structured interviews with young adults

7.9 Positionality and reflexivity

Before further discussion it is vital to reflect upon my own positionality as an embedded researcher in Tate. Charmaz, Thornberg and Keane identify this a crucial process in research that takes a Grounded Theory approach to data analysis (2018:421-422). This is because researchers 'bring their histories, social standing, and cultural background with them to all their involvements, including the research process' which in turn may influence the power dynamic between researcher and participant (Rhoads 1997, referenced in Charmaz et al. 2018:421). As a new PhD researcher, with professional experience working in the art world, I brought my own set of assumptions about Tate to the project: I was motivated to apply partly because of Tate's international reputation as a leading art institution and my own positive experiences as a visitor. Over the course of my three years at Tate I would learn the vast amount of labour that goes into maintaining such a reputation and how the act of making invisible processes visible can both trouble and reinforce Tate's image of itself. When I began this project, I was unaware of the work carried out beyond the public spaces of Tate: this research is as much a legacy of the 'invisible becoming visible' to the researcher as it is to the communication of hidden work to museum audiences. In Sharon Macdonald's book *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* she too undergoes a similar transformation, describing her ascent up what felt like a 'secret' staircase into the offices of the museum on her first day of fieldwork (Macdonald 2002:4). Her task, she writes, 'was to enter the behind-the-scenes world of the Science Museum, to find out how it works, what kind of passions and ideas motivate practice, and whether and how this percolates into the science that is put on public display' (Macdonald 2002:5).

During the research I too entered the unknown terrain of the 'behind-the scenes': through offices, staffrooms and storage spaces as well as the digital infrastructure of emails, shared files and intranet noticeboards. Yet I remained to some extent an outsider, occupying a liminal position between the university and the museum. It also became clear that the Reshaping the Collectible project was itself an unusual space within the institution. A number of the staff interviewed noted how the research group was anomalous as a space that brought together practitioners from across the museum to collectively reflect on their practices in an open and discursive environment. These accounts stood in stark contrast to the ubiquitous references to

‘atomisation’ and ‘siloining’ and the hierarchical structure of interactions that seemed to define the day-to-day work of practitioners outside the project. It is important to note that being attached to this project likely affected the decision of staff members to be involved (or not) in my research.

7.10 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the project was granted by the UCL Research Ethics Committee and as such it follows the guidelines set by the university. Adopting a reflexive approach to qualitative research necessitates close attention to the ethical implications of the research methodology (Davies 2008). Whilst there were overarching ethical considerations that spanned the general scope and subject of the project, there were also separate concerns for the two participant groups (staff and young adults).

For staff, a core issue was the protection of reputations – both for the individuals themselves but also those of the artists and others they might work with. This project looks closely at the work of different kinds of professional practice and the way the museum functions as an interconnected workplace and as such I wanted to retain information on departments. This resulted in the adoption of a process of pseudonymisation, although for members of staff in smaller departments there was nevertheless a small risk that they could be identified. Participants were given a research information sheet explaining how they would be represented and pseudonymised in the research and a consent form to sign. In addition, I sent participants any direct quotations I used along with my interpretation. Staff were then given a period in which to correct factual errors and/or delete any comments they wished to withdraw.

Ethical issues that arose through my decision to interview young adults were predominantly related to power imbalances – between the museum and the participants, as well as my own relationship with them. Who has access to the behind-the-scenes world (the processes, areas, and decisions), is a highly charged topic underscored by issues of privilege, exclusion and power and I had to be mindful not to ‘mine’ the participants for information that might contribute to upholding the very structures and conditions that excluded them. Because of this I

submitted an amendment to my ethical approval to seek permission to pay the young adult participants.⁴⁴ Although this is not standard practice in social research, Tate mandates that its Tate Collective Producers must be paid the hourly London Living Wage, with a minimum half-daily rate regardless of the length of the interview (4 hours).⁴⁵ Furthermore, paying them for their contributions represented the value of their time and knowledge, and placed it on a par with Tate staff, whose interviews took place during their working (and therefore compensated) hours. Indeed, Davies writes that 'informants should not be exploited, and a fair return should be made for their assistance' (2008:59). In a project that explores themes of inclusivity and equity, it seemed remiss not to compensate the young adults for their intellectual labour.

More broadly, there were ethical issues around what could and couldn't be made public and whether this would risk the reputational damage of Tate, its workers and the artists in its collection. This was managed by only using public facing documents, checking interview extracts with participants, and making sure that no processes, spaces or information were made public without the knowledge, consent and guidance of Tate staff. All participants were assured that the study was not an audit of their work or a test of their knowledge and were given the assurance that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

7.11 Data analysis

My data analysis is broadly informed by an interpretivist application of grounded theory. A grounded theory approach calls for 'simultaneous data collection and analysis, relies on comparative methods, explicitly focuses on analysis and theory construction, provides tools to study action and process, and contains strategies for developing, checking, and strengthening an original analysis' (Charmaz et al. 2018:412). This analytical approach seeks to provide an interpretation of reality in all its complexity through the detailed and systemic analysing of data, of 'organising the many ideas' that emerge through the continual 'doubling back-and-forth' between

⁴⁴ These payments came from the Reshaping the Collectible budget, provided by the Mellon Foundation. I am eternally grateful to the team for contributing this financial support for the project.

⁴⁵ At the time of data collection, the London Living Wage was £10.85/hour.

collecting data, coding, and writing (Strauss 2010:19 and 22). Furthermore Charmaz, Thornberg and Keane have argued that grounded theory is particularly suited to projects that seek to understand conditions of power and inequality (Charmaz et al. 2018:411). This is because it brings 'micro and meso analyses to the foreground' in order to 'show their connections to institutionalized macro structures and processes' (ibid). My analysis of the datasets was guided by these principles but there were some slight differences between the two phases. This will be explained below.

Phase 1: Staff interviews and documents

My first approach to the datasets was to undertake an initial round of coding, working close to the data, line by line, to get a deep understanding of the nuance of the participants' accounts (Charmaz 2006:42). This was mostly done on hard copies of the interview transcripts and documents, using different coloured pens to mark out emerging concepts and ideas. During the first round of coding, I created inductive codes that took the form of gerund statements. Thinking through 'actions' rather than applying purely descriptive coding at this stage helped me to 'make individual or collective action and process visible and tangible' in order to understand how conditions of (in)visibility are actively created, maintained and challenged by the participants and other actors that emerged in the data (Charmaz et al. 2018:425). I also combined this with *in vivo* coding (using a word or phrase used by the participant), which enabled me to honour their 'voices' and note their feelings, opinions and relationships to other actors. *In vivo* coding was also vital in mapping participants perceptions of the work of Tate as an organisation, which emerged as a key factor in understanding risks and benefits (RQ1). For example, this combined method of coding enabled me to document the words used by staff as they described the conditions of (in)visibility at Tate ('making visible as healthy for the institution') and, relatedly, how they characterised the purpose, structure and ethos of the institution ('PR machine', 'big animal', 'complex', 'a little bit autocratic', 'atomised'). These early codes would later be grouped and refined as themes began to emerge.

In the next stage of focused coding, I transferred the files to NVivo. I primarily used this software as a means of storing the data and more clearly organising the

emerging thematic categories. It had practical advantages: it allowed me to quickly navigate between documents, attach memos to files, and delete, merge or hierarchise codes. NVivo also helped me navigate the documents, enabling me to search for key words.

During the second round of coding, I brought in deductive codes to test themes that emerged in the literature and theory and to help organise the extensive collection of codes I had already amassed. In the documents and my fieldnotes I mapped evidence of 'Actors affecting the conditions of (in)visibility' and different types of visibility ('Radical Transparency' and 'Dashboard Transparency'). This provided contextual information. I applied these same deductive codes to the interviews, alongside the categories of 'Anxiety' and 'Perceived Benefit'. As I became more familiar with the data I moved back and forth between my deductive and inductive codes; merging, expanding and combining categories to create a more nuanced understanding of how the data could contribute to the development of theory. As I began to nest categories under the overarching themes Anxiety and Perceived Benefits, it became clear during this process that further distinctions could be made, with phenomena occurring on an Individual, Practice and Institutional level. A coding table for this phase of the research can be found in Appendix V.

Phase 2: Decoding - young adults

The process of data analysis for my interviews with young adults was rooted in the same principles of grounded theory and for my first pass of coding I similarly took an inductive approach. Beyond this, however, I adopted a different strategy that adhered to my theoretical framing of social constructivist learning theories. Analysis for this phase thus unfolded in a series of stages, in dialogue with the young adults. Social constructivism emphasises the individual contexts and experiences of each participant as vital to the ways they learn and make meaning. As such, I presented initial themes and observations, unique to each participant, from the first round of coding during our third and final interview (see Table 7.2, p.139). This enabled the young adults to give their feedback, take an active role in the research, and identify the issues that were most important to them. This stage ensured that I stayed close to my aims to create an inclusive research project that did not extract information

from the young adults but rather worked with them to ensure that they are accurately represented in the research. Appendix VI shows the mind maps I created as part of my research diary at this stage in the project.

Taking into account their feedback, I returned to the data for a second round of coding. This time I incorporated the themes I had constructed with the participants with my own further observations and generated broader analytical categories that identified commonalities in their accounts. I next sorted the analytical categories by the types of readings they emerged from as negotiated or oppositional. Figure 12 gives a clear breakdown of this process. See Appendix VII for the final coding table.

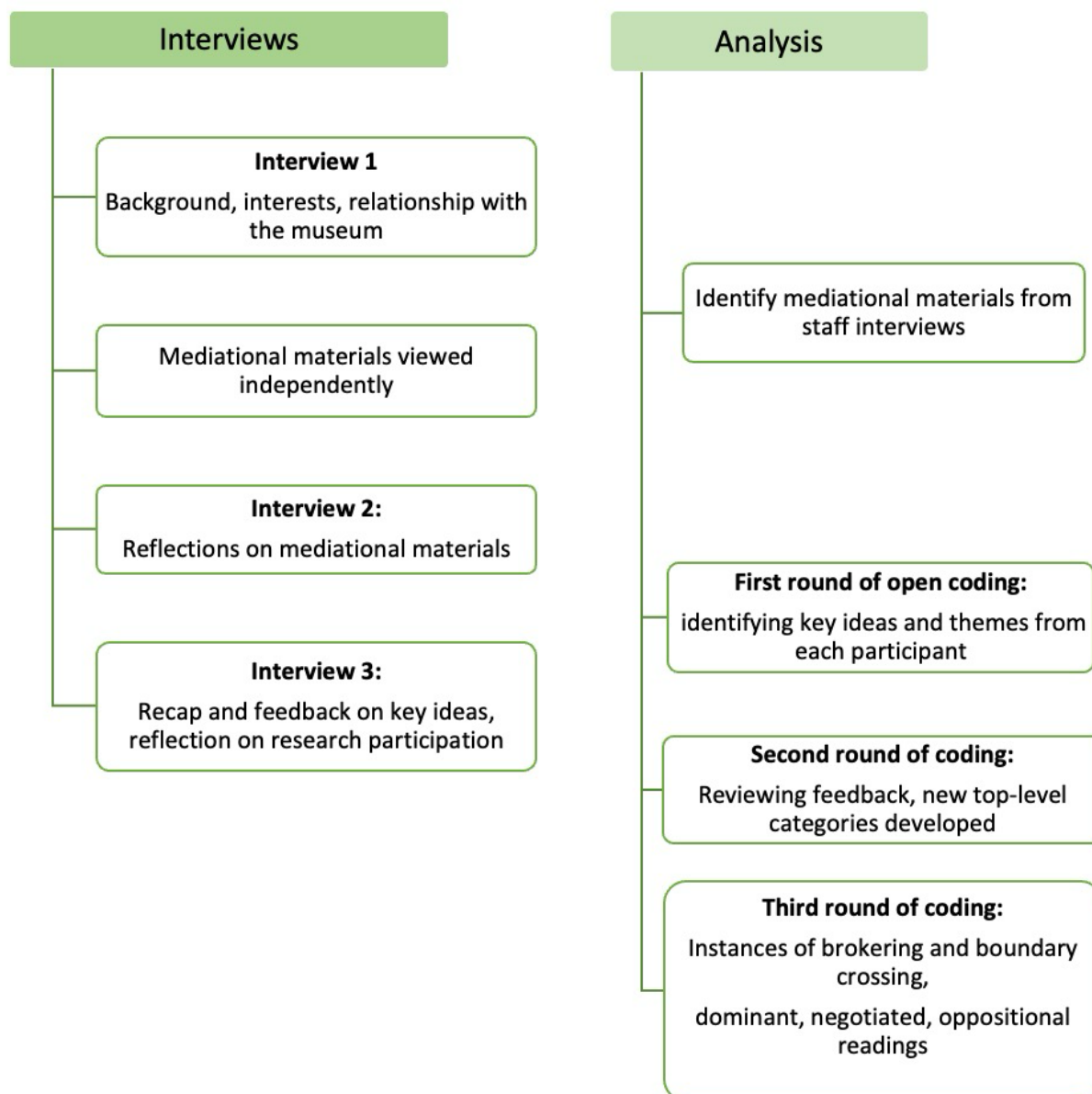


Figure 7.2 The process of data collection and analysis in Phase 2 of the research.

7.12 Summary

In this section I have presented the methods I will use to collect data and my methodological approach. I explained how the decisions I made about the design of the project were determined by the research questions and my umbrella theory of encoding/decoding. To reflect this, and to add structure to the project, I have organised the data collection and analysis into two distinct phases. Guided by my interest in the relationship between individuals and the museum and wider theoretical framework of encoding/decoding, I decided to adopt a mixed-method

qualitative and reflexive approach. I argued that this was the best way to understand the experiences of my participants whilst acknowledging my own role in shaping and interpreting the data.

8. Phase 1: The perceived benefits and anxieties of making collection care work visible for individuals and practice

This chapter primarily responds to research question one (RQ1): *What are the perceived risks and/or benefits for the museum in making the private and behind the scenes processes visible?* To investigate this I developed the deductive thematic codes of Anxiety and Perceived Benefits, which are drawn from the research question and are further shaped by three theoretical strands: Voronov & Vince's interest in the relationship between the individual and an organisation (or institution) (2012), Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and habitus (Bourdieu 1983), and Miceli and Castelfranchi's understanding of anxiety as an emotion characterised by uncertainty and a desire for control (2005).

I developed the category of Anxiety prior to approaching the data as a way to understand how notions of risk in the museum are interlinked with structures of power, and in particular the sedimented practices of knowledge production that work to uphold established hierarchies in the museum (Azoulay 2019) (see chapter 4). Understanding risk through the prism of anxiety enabled me to think beyond simply identifying instances of perceived jeopardy to consider how Tate, its staff and stakeholders attempt to exert control over the uncertainties that arise in making collection care visible.

The category Perceived Benefits was constructed as a means to map the subjective and anticipated positive outcomes of making collection care work visible. Developing these themes in dialogue with one another allowed me to create a more nuanced analysis of risk and benefit (RQ1) that treated them not as separate categories but as the result of interwoven phenomena. It became clear in the data that risk and benefit are subjective and shifting constructs, taking on different properties for different actors. As I explored this strand of the project I kept in mind further questions, such as: *who* defines risk and benefits? To *whom* or *what* does 'making visible' pose a risk? *Who implements* actions to reduce risk or ensure benefits? Exploring these themes in tandem also enables begin to answer the overarching research question for the project: To what extent might greater visibility of behind-the-scenes work create opportunities for the development of inclusive and equitable practices in the contemporary art museum? I will highlight how many of the

perceived benefits, both by individual staff and Tate itself, implicitly or explicitly, relate to the creation of a more inclusive and democratic museum whilst anxieties, on occasion, serve to inhibit progress towards these aims.

In the next 2 chapters I will present discussion of Anxieties and Perceived Benefits in dialogue with one another, through the shared subcategories of Individual, Practice-Based and Institutional in order to understand their dual manifestation on a micro, meso and macro level. I draw from staff interviews with collection care practitioners as the primary source of data. Fieldnotes and documentary materials were used to as secondary materials to test the codes I developed and contextualise participants' accounts.

Theme	Micro/ meso level	Subcategories	Instances in interviews
Anxiety	Individual	- Professional reputation - Loss of safe spaces - Being on show - Personal accountability	2 1 3 5
	Practice	- Maintaining seriousness - Threatening authenticity	4 3
Perceived Benefits	Individual	- Connecting with audiences - sharing excitement of the object - Aiding understanding - Refining practices	3 7 2 2
	Practice	- Acknowledging authorship - Play - Challenging hierarchies - Survival - Skill sharing - Opening up the field	2 3 5 5 5 5

Table 6. Thematic codes discussed in chapter 8.

8.1 Individual

Individual anxieties and perceived benefits were primarily traced in interviews with collection care staff and, less overtly, in interviews with mediators when reflecting on past projects that made collection care visible. Examples of anxiety at an individual level were categorised as pertaining to Being on Show, Professional Reputation and the Loss of Safe Spaces. Examples of perceived benefits included Sharing the Excitement of the Object, Connecting with Audiences, Aiding Understanding, and Refining Practices. Often these categories occurred concurrently in the same sections of data.

8.1.1 Being on Show and Connecting with Audiences

'Being on show' was cited by one conservator as a cause of personal discomfort. In response to a prompt as to how they conceptualised (in)visibility at Tate, the participant mentioned other art museum initiatives to install glass windows which would allow visitors to look into conservation studios and observe work taking place in real-time, a gesture that Marstine might describe as merely a 'visual metaphor' for transparency (2013:2). Such a set-up had apparently received 'some resistance', and in any case, the participant explained:

'I wouldn't feel comfortable doing a lot of the work I do if I have people looking over my shoulder. I mean most of it is not very interesting because it's only sitting at a computer writing emails.'

Similarly, when recounting their participation in a short film about time-based media conservation, they described how...

'...it felt a little bit lonely in that I'd never done anything like that and trying to figure out what to bring out [...] about what we do was really difficult'.

When considered in the context of the participant's other mentioned activities (lecturing, teaching, participating in conferences) this discomfort of being on show should not be mistaken for an overall lack of enthusiasm for involvement in outreach projects. Rather, in this instance, it seems that the hesitancy lies in a general uneasiness with being watched, who sees (the participant was highly active in the academic and professional world) and how best to communicate their work, and the

work of their team ('we'), without over- or underwhelming a more casual visitor or viewer. The conflicted nature of their response is suggestive of Star and Strauss' discussion of the difficulty of 'disembedding' some forms of work, and the implications this might (1999).

The discomfort that some collection care staff experienced in front of the camera was also noted by those in mediational roles. A mediator explained that a problem their team experienced when trying to recruit a diverse cast for collection care films was a lack of confidence in staff:

It was easier to - to make sure we had that kind of gender balance. That can be challenging as well, because often that meant maybe sometimes working with junior members of the team who didn't feel that confident on camera.

They added:

I think everyone was really good, it just meant that we had to [...] do a little bit of kind of practice at the beginning and reassure them and make them feel comfortable and I think everyone has contributed really, really well. And that became more of a - an organize- a deciding factor than always having like the heads of the team speaking.

From a mediational perspective, the participant reveals how a lack of training or unfamiliarity with taking on the role of mediator had inadvertently led to a familiar cast of spokespersons for collection care. This was corroborated by my analysis of existing mediational materials (chapter 10.1), in which a core group of staff members appeared in multiple films. The participant went on to describe how, in the film *Caring for Art During Covid* (2021), they tried to centre 'on the ground perspectives' of junior staff rather than 'a kind of strategic management answer' that might be provided by department heads, suggesting that personal discomfort with being on show might inadvertently lead to what they inferred to be a more institutional voice being represented.

Despite a lack of experience or confidence, all of the collection care staff I spoke to, from conservators to art handlers and collection managers, were keen to take a more active role in engaging with audiences. Anxiety of 'being on show' did not correlate with a desire to stay hidden, rather it hints at an occasional personal uneasiness with being in the spotlight and the adoption of a certain kind of visibility

for which they were unprepared or that involved being observed via a token act of ‘seeing through’, as Marstine might term it (2013:1).

Instead, ‘connecting with audiences’ was cited as both a perceived benefit of being more visible and a way to create a seemingly more meaningful or impactful way of communicating collection care work. This theme emerged in interviews with three conservators, although only one of whom could point to an experience at Tate.⁴⁶

When I asked a conservator if they had ever interacted directly with visitors, the participant recalled a positive experience during the Nam June Paik retrospective at Tate Modern (17 October 2019 – 9 February 2020):

P: When I was working on the Nam June Paik exhibition, though, I did actually do a lot of interaction with people, and part of that is that it required a lot of maintenance, so we often had to go into the galleries during opening hours and and do some tweaks or adjustments on things and that gave a lot opportunities to talk to people about what was going on, particularly because the artworks are very interactive. So, I really enjoyed that.

I: Did you find people were curious while you were doing that?

P: People are very happy – it’s interesting to have the option to interact with artworks, it gives a completely different feel to something than just looking at it from afar.

I prompted the participant to elaborate further, asking what the visitors asked and what those interactions looked like. In their response, the conservator described how their interactions often took place during maintenance of the work *Random Access*.⁴⁷ This interactive installation, comprising a modified cassette tape and reel-to-reel tape player, is activated by visitors as they move the extended ‘head’ of the tape player over scattered magnetic strips affixed to the gallery wall, creating sounds that respond to their gestures. The participant explained that the Guggenheim New York, who own the work, authorised Tate to work with Paik’s estate to fabricate and install their own version of the reel-to-reel player and magnetic strips. This slightly different iteration of the work meant that ‘our wand actually [left] marks behind on the wall and can kind of rip up the tape a little bit more’, meaning that the conservator had to

⁴⁶ The other two conservators reflected on their experience at previous workplaces.

⁴⁷ Nam June Paik, *Random Access*, 1963 (2000 version). Strips of audiotape, open-reel audio deck, extended playback head, and speakers. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (Accession no. 2001.5). For more information see <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/9536> [accessed 22 August 2024].

come into the galleries more often to tend to the work. For these same reasons, visitors also sometimes struggled to interact with the installation, creating organic encounters between the conservator and visitors as they intervened with the materials of the artwork together:

P: And so, with that then, it can be a little bit trickier to use. So, a lot of times I would go out and see people trying it and they didn't really know if they were quite allowed to and then I'd show them like 'oh this is the best way to do it' or 'I really like this particular part here' and then that was really nice. And I'd explain how it works and what they're hearing. So, that was really fun.

I: Did you kind of introduce yourself as a conservator or –

P: [interrupting] I did, yeah.

The reflection discussed above was also coded with the phrases Sharing the Excitement of the Object and Aiding Understanding. It demonstrates perceived benefits to both collection care staff and visitors, the former being able to connect with audiences and derive pleasure from sharing their enthusiasm for the artwork, and the latter gaining a deeper understanding of the artwork on a material and conceptual level and as a result the confidence to interact with it. Importantly, this encounter is triggered by the 'unruly' characteristics of the work, which require repeated attention in the frontstage of the museum (Dominguez Rubio 2014; van Saaze 2009). As such, the conservator is required to undertake work in the galleries (as opposed to a painting, which might be taken off-show), but rather than simply watching the maintenance work unfold at a distance, the tactile and participatory nature of the artwork engenders the opportunity for visitors to interact with the conservator and the work itself. Through this organic (and perhaps less pressured) moment of 'visibility', the conservator becomes a mediator and, in explaining the technical components of the work and their operation, provides a toolkit of understanding for visitors. As another conservator put it: 'I think many works have a lot of interesting aspects that you don't see, that have to do with this technical aspect I feel is quite forgotten.... I think for people to know how much in-depth knowledge we have of those objects [...] brings out new perspectives about individual artworks'. As suggested by the participants, in exposing the vulnerability of the artwork a new relationship between spectator and practitioner emerges, who both come into contact with and shape the work in ways that reveal, implicitly, both the

intersubjective nature of conservation work (Muñoz Viñas 2005) and artworks as social assemblages (van Saaze 2014).

8.1.2 Professional Reputation and Refining Practice

As expected from the literature review (see van Saaze 2013 and Miller 2021), there was also concern from practitioners around risk related to professional reputation. During an interview with a conservation scientist, I asked them to tell me about a time they communicated their work to a general public. The participant chose to reflect on their department's central role in the Restoring Rothko video. During this phase of the conversation the professional stakes of making active repair work visible became clear:

P: Here's the – the conservation team were a bit nervous, like what if we if we can't fix it? Or what if we fail? You know because we were being filmed throughout.

I: Yeah.

P: all the way through, so we didn't know what was going to happen, so it was a leap of faith.

Here we see the intersection of 'being on show' with the threat to professional reputation. The filming process is cited as the cause of anxiety, but it is important to recognise that this doesn't necessarily mean that the anxiety lies in the public 'seeing' the potential failure of the project. This was not a live broadcast, and it would be unthinkable for Tate to publish a film that depicted a failure to conserve one of the highlights of the collection. Instead, perhaps it should be interpreted as both the pressure of public duty and accountability to save the work and an anxiety rooted in the uncertainty of the task playing out in the presence of cameras documenting work, of being observed by actors beyond the discipline and feeling that 'a safe space of experimentation' might be being encroached upon.

A sculpture and installation conservator, however, wondered whether public scrutiny might, in fact, be proactive in encouraging best practices:

I: I'm also interested in what you think is at stake in being more visible to audiences in that particular way and - and this could be in terms of what's at stake for you or for the museum or for perhaps collection care, kind of as a broad concept.

P: What's at stake? [...] Well, I guess transparency leaves you vulnerable to judgment, basically.

I: [overlapping] Yeah.

P: it's like - that's what it can come down to. But I don't think that's a [...] bad thing in any case, that could kind of just hold us to account that we're making the right decisions about these works.

This extract is notable for the way the participant finds a generative use for anxiety around professional accountability. The notion of being held to account is also important, prompting further exploration of to whom do practitioners (and by extension the museum) feel are holding them to account, and why? The implication in the extract is that it is the 'public', as stakeholders in the national collection, who are invested in conservation practices. 'Judgement' is identified as a possible outcome of being on show, but this may also be beneficial as increased visibility *could* lead to the development of more rigorous professional practices.

8.1.3 Safe Spaces for Experimentation

The notion of 'safe spaces for experimentation' and their value to practitioners emerged in an interview with a time-based media conservator. Extrapolating on initial discussion around how they came to be in their role, the participant cited the relative freedom of experimentation they experienced when working with artworks that incorporate technology or electrical equipment as medium:

P: it feels like there is kind of space to experiment with that without impacting the authenticity of the artwork. And by experimentation I guess I'm talking about in a museum context, I'm not talking about a public context.

I: Sure

P: I'm not saying, 'oh, we just exper- we try, you know, installing this artwork like this. Oh no it's crap!' I mean we can really fact find about solutions in quite a sort of hands-on way. And that's quite an ongoing process with technical specialists and exploring solutions to particular problems that we might have identified and seeing if they can be applied to an artwork at any given point.

Significantly, the participant mentions that experimentation happens in 'a museum context' rather than in the galleries during installation. At first, the participant appears to be referring to the private areas of the museum, but it could also be read as the

museum world or 'organisational field', in general (DiMaggio 1991). This hints at the complexity of (in)visibility, suggesting that it operates not just at an insitutional level but at a greater 'macro level'.

All of the conservators I interviewed, and many more at Tate who were not involved in the research, regularly attend conferences and publish research. Many are part of a highly active but relatively small intra-organisational community of professionals, holding membership to various professional bodies and collaborating on research projects. In this way these professional groups display the attributes of a 'community of practice' through their grouping of individuals 'who share a concern or a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis (Wenger 2008:4). In the context of making collection care work visible, and through the analytical category of anxiety, it appears that a 'safe space for experimentation' is created as practitioners explore and share their advancements within their CoP and in the wider organisational field, and discuss their ethical, theoretical and technical frameworks for undertaking collection care. In other words, it is a space for collective learning and knowledge sharing at a professional level that creates, for the purposes of reputation protection, a boundary of access to outsiders who might misinterpret or misread practices. Evidence of some of these activities can be found on Tate's website via the webpages for the research projects *Matters in Media Art* (2003), *Inside Installations: The Preservation and Presentation and Installation Art* (2004-2007), *NeCCAR: Network for Conservation of Contemporary Art Research* (2012-2014), *Pericles* (2013-2017), and *Reshaping the Collectible* (2018-2022). The wealth of information available on these pages is extensive but it is hard to find on the website without prior knowledge of its existence and dense and perhaps even impenetrable to a reader outside the community. Whilst it is an example of 'visible practices' it nevertheless represents a 'safe space'; visible in whole only to those who have the knowledge to unlock it.

8.1.4 Summary

In this subsection, I have explored interrelated forms anxieties and perceived benefits that emerged on an individual level during my conversations with collection care practitioners. 'Being on Show' was discussed as encompassing both personal

discomfort and vulnerability, as well as the potential for misrepresenting conservation work, even when presenting a seemingly transparent window in. I have also shown that in some instances, undertaking work on an interactive time-based media work in the public space of the gallery did deliver an opportunity for collection care staff to share their excitement of the artwork and connect with visitors through organic, one-on-one interactions. Interacting with visitors through a shared interest in the materiality of the artwork repositioned the conservator as a mediator between object and visitor, offering those who were unsure an alternative means of understanding complex works. The risk to 'Professional Reputation' was also mentioned by practitioners, describing a fear of being exposed to criticism and judgement, of being seen to fail in their task to care for the collection. However, there was also an acknowledgement that with transparency came the possibility to be held to account in productive ways that enable reflection on and refinement of decision-making processes. This in turn was linked to the concept of 'Safe spaces for Experimentation', which could be defined as private (not on show) areas of the museum where experimentation could take place without fear of risk of reputational damage. Safe spaces were also shown to be partially open and dynamic loci of exchange and learning, but only to those in particular communities of practice, whose members possessed the ability to interpret the knowledge on display, thus also rendering academic or intra-organisational spaces of exchange 'safe'.

8.2 Practice

Sorting anxieties and perceived benefits into the level of Practice enabled me to understand the fears that might arise through exposing knowledge-making practices within and outside the museum, with particular focus on how this might disrupt established hierarchies of knowledge or the positioning of actors within a given field and, on the flipside, how this might in turn benefit collection care practitioners. Focusing on hierarchies and challenges to traditional knowledge, this category builds upon Bourdieu's notion of a field as a zone of organised striving, stratification and domination (Martin 2003:14). In this section I will discuss data driven codes that described anxieties and benefits at a practice level. Anxiety describing codes include Threatening Authenticity, Balancing Seriousness and Play, Challenging Hierarchies,

and Loss of Status. Potential Benefits were identified as Acknowledging Authorship, Survival, Opening up the Field, and Skill Sharing.

8.2.1 Threatening Authenticity and Acknowledging Authorship

The extract below, from a time-based media conservator, displays an entanglement of individual, practice and institutional level readings, but is presented in this section because the root concern is located in the threat to the authenticity of an art object. When asked what was at stake in making collection care work visible, the conservator provided the following reflection:

P: There is this idea of authenticity in an artwork, and they are very valuable and complex objects. And [...] there is – the conservator - I think we're becoming more comfortable with the idea that the institution and all of its employees are influencing that artwork in some way and definitely the conservator as well. [...] And I think there's this kind of feeling that what you have to do needs to be right, and if it's not right then – [...] or if your interpretation is kind of scrutinized that you would kind of risk professional damage or something, you know? Or, the institution would maybe suffer that, and maybe you would get that sort of personally or something as well. That if you might show you workings or something that might be, you know [...] that's the sort of insecurity, isn't it, I think?

A tension can be located between conservator's understanding of their work as part of a larger network of ongoing influence on the 'life of an artwork' and the need to be 'right', both in the eyes of the institution and by professional standards.⁴⁸ Making the 'right' decision becomes fraught, leading to the emergence of individual anxieties. It also hints at a friction between ideas expressed within the conservation 'community of practice' and those outside the discourse. The loss of a safe space is inferred, but the need for that space is related to a dominant conception of authenticity, at the institutional, public and art historical level that corresponds with Muñoz Viñas definition of 'objective conservation', in which an inherent truth is present and preservable within the object (2005).

⁴⁸ This participant was involved in the Reshaping the Collectible project, so their conception of artworks as moulded by many forces within an institution is expected but not necessarily representative of those outside the project.

The ethical and philosophical tension between methods of conservation and the authenticity of an object is an established concern in conservation literature, particularly in reference to contemporary artworks (see Brost 2022; Laurenson 2006, 2014; Miller 2021; van de Vall 2022). It was thus unsurprising that this emerged as a theme in the data. However, the desire to make collection care work visible and the elastic nature of authenticity and the fuzzy boundaries of what constitutes a complex evolving artwork proved tricky to reconcile when trying to communicate conservation techniques to a non-expert audience.

Anxieties around authorship were also traceable in two other examples. One time-based media conservator positively described an initiative at the Museo Jumex in Mexico City, where conservators are named on wall labels next to the artworks and displays they contributed to. The participant described this as a ‘really interesting way to highlight that someone worked on it’. Despite the considerable contribution collection care staff make to the installation of a work (and the developing field of study around the relationship between art object and collection care practices, as indicated in the previous interview extract), this information is not included on gallery wall labels for individual artworks at Tate – although it is occasionally provided in more general in-gallery exhibition credits. *The Lives of Artworks* display at Tate Britain (2021-2022) by Reshaping the Collectible did try to counter this through an endeavour to document every member of staff that contributed to the ‘life’ of Ima-Abasi Okon’s artworks.⁴⁹ The display itself was located at some distance from the exhibition room although a condensed version of this information was available in a handout near the artworks. Despite this, further implementation of an expanded recognition of exhibition labour has not been applied to other exhibits at Tate.

The second example involved a failed attempt to make visible the work conducted by another time-based media conservator on a sound installation by Bruce Nauman. Anxiety around authenticity and authorship could be detected in the practitioner’s anticipation of concern from colleagues around the method of documenting the work – in which the conservator recorded how the work sounded in the space. Offering an insight into an epistemological anxiety more specifically attached to time-based

⁴⁹ Further discussion of the details of this display can be found in chapter 10.

media work, the participant explained that such a document could be misinterpreted as a copy of the artwork itself:

And as these forms of documentation become a little bit more like a kind of full-scale capture of the artwork experience, then those distinctions can kind of so easily get blurred a little bit. People are sort of like 'woah [inaudible], what - why have you done another version of the artwork?'

However, the participant was surprised to find that the show's curator positively responded to the idea of making the audio document visible.

Yet, despite curatorial support the initiative to show the conservator's processes ultimately failed, in part due to a misunderstanding about the purpose of this document. Both examples cited above indicate an entanglement of three elements in tension: a dominant interpretation of an artwork as an original, bounded expression of artistic intention; the reality of collection care practices that test this idea of authenticity (but are only really visible in the professional community of practice); and the desire from practitioners to communicate their work and receive acknowledgement as contributors to displays or authors of their own practices.

8.2.2 Maintaining seriousness and Play

I also found a tension in the desire to communicate aspects of collection care practices in new and engaging ways without diminishing the seriousness of the work involved. Digging deeper, distinctions can be made between strands of collection care work, some of which allowed for a more playful exploration whilst other disciplines were anchored to a more serious portrayal or were less visible altogether.

Alongside an acute awareness of the responsibility of their roles, collection care staff also displayed a deep enthusiasm for their work, emphasising the creative and experimental nature of it in language associated with play. This devotion is akin to Geoghegan and Hess's concept of Object Love (2014). When asked to describe a 'typical day' one conservator emphasised the varied and stimulating nature of their work, particularly when collaborating directly with artists and curators to determine how to adapt an artwork for installation at Tate: 'that kind of variability can be really fun to play with' whilst 'figuring out how visually to make something the best it can

be'. Yet in public materials, often the 'playful' nature of conservation and collection care work was less visible.

Preventive conservation was perhaps the most anxious in its practice and its relative invisibility appeared to support this. Miceli and Castelfranchi describe a 'strict' relation between anxiety and a need for control: 'the future addressed thinking in anxiety mainly addresses one's own control over the threat, concerned as it is with trying to ascertain it's probability, size, and consequences, as well as one's own ability to cope with it' (2005:295). Preventive Conservation – an anxious term when considered through Miceli and Castelfranchi's lens of control - seemed to situate the museum as part of an expansive environment of potential catastrophes, within which it is tasked to protect the collection from myriad threats of damage and destruction. After a 'behind-the-scenes' tour for staff I noted in my research diary that:

A preventive conservator also spoke to us about the 9 threats that she has to look out for in her role. She described preventive conservation less as working with objects but the whole environment around them, thinking about the gallery spaces, the museum – its external dangers like flood and fire, the chaos of visitors (intentional or unintentional damage), the presence of insects and animal threats and the invisible perils of humidity and chemicals. These are all actors in the struggle to maintain a collection and, if managed correctly, are invisible.

(Research diary, 27 June 2023)

Despite this, the potential for this work to be presented in a more playful way, particularly to children, was highlighted by a Digital Producer. When I asked about whether any collection care focused content was specifically targeted at young adults, they instead mentioned an as yet unrealised project with Tate Kids, where the departments had wondered whether 'bugs and things under the microscope' could be a 'way into that content'. The absence of this content may be because, as one conservator suggested, Tate is uncomfortable with the public knowing there could be bugs in the museum. However, contrary to this statement, the presence of insects in the museum was referred to in the Caring for Art During Covid video, although notably stripped of its playful link to science and learning and instead presented in the more serious context of managing the spread of infection:

In today's coronavirus world quarantine is something that is a daily topic of conversation but it's something that we've been doing as best practice in our

pest management for a long, long time in a very similar way to the way that we want to stop coronavirus spreading from country to country we also have pests that we don't want to spread from store to store.

(Caring for Art During Covid, 00:05:42)

At the time of its release, the film was first sent out to Tate members and later published on Tate's YouTube channel but, perhaps tellingly, the video can no longer be searched for on the platform (the video is categorised as 'unlisted'). Although ostensibly still available for the public to watch, it has receded from view. From internal conversations and my interviews with mediators I knew of the video's existence and thus I was able to access it, though only through a convoluted route via Google search of the title and then subsequent redirection through Art History News website. Whilst this obfuscation is highly unlikely due to the preventive conservation content alone (the video will be discussed further in the moments of emergence chapter) it nevertheless obscures one of the few appearances of the department in Tate's digital output.

A sculpture and installation conservator suggested that public interaction with conservators was often expected to involve a 'fun' element, which was difficult to communicate due to the true nature of their work at Tate. I was surprised to learn that despite the often tangible and material nature of sculpture and installations, the conservator didn't come into contact with the artworks regularly:

When people think public interaction it's like 'we need some kind of thing for people to play with and touch' and so much of our job isn't actually about the amount of - like this week – oh, no, I have touched an artwork this week, but the amount of times that I actually touch an artwork, I can go a couple of weeks maybe without actually physically touching an artwork. So how do you have a fun, interactive display that shows a job where you're not always physically interacting with things?

Here the participant makes a link between materiality and playfulness. There is a sense that the possibility of touch offers a more exploratory and potentially accessible way into conservation practices, but this is restricted by a desire to present a truthful portrayal of the work. Two conservators I spoke to had, however, participated in this kind of outreach in previous non-art museum jobs - and one described how they worked with outreach professionals with theatre backgrounds to encourage collection care staff to feel more at ease in their visitor interactions. At

Tate, however, the participant felt spontaneity of opportunities for outreach was somewhat different: 'I felt at Tate it was quite controlled'.

Art Handling, meanwhile, did appear to successfully integrate playfulness, in a literal sense, despite the high-stakes nature of their work. In *Ken's Show: Exploring the Unseen* (Tate Liverpool 30 March-17 June 2018), Art Handler Ken Simons curated an exhibition of 30 artworks to mark his 30th year at Tate and the 30th anniversary of Tate Liverpool. Associated programming also provided activities for families and children, asking visitors 'have you got what it takes to be an art handler?' and inviting them to 'take on three challenges linked to Ken's job as an Art Handler, learning more about what we do to take care of, assemble and hang artworks' (Tate website, Art Handling Challenge, 30 May 2018 and 2 June 2018). The show is remarkable in its ostensible disruption of the epistemic hierarchy of the museum, where a 'hidden' staff member was able to take on the role of curator. Yet it should also be noted that this appears to be an exceptional event in Tate's history, and the 'playful' element of the programme was oriented at families and young children, not for young adult or adult audiences.

One participant involved in collection care research wondered whether it was artists, unburdened by the professional responsibilities of collection care work and the constraints of being attached to an institution, that might be able to undertake a more creative exploration of the 'behind-the-scenes':

So, I think the kind of people who steward the collection and care for it [...] are rightly very serious about their jobs and kind of like recognise the [unclear – policies?] that have been and so [...] there's maybe less lassitude or less scope for kind of [...] play in that sense.

The extract quoted should be read not as 'play' in a literal sense but rather as an intellectual or creative 'playfulness' with the subject matter.⁵⁰ A recent example from Tate somewhat supported the participant's observation. From 19 October 2020 – 27 February 2022 Ciprian Mureşan's sculpture *Plague Column #2* (2016) was on

⁵⁰ The quote presented was preceded by discussion of a show by Ruth Buchanan at Govett Brewster, which endeavoured to 'break (open) the mechanisms of collecting and challenges the role and success of the museum' (see e-flux 2020. *Ruth Buchanan: The scene in which I find myself / Or, where does my body belong*, exhibition held at Govett Brewster, London, December 7, 2019–March 22, 2020. Available at <https://www.e-flux.com/criticism/311602/ruth-buchanan-s-the-scene-in-which-i-find-myself-or-where-does-my-body-belong>. [accessed 22 August 2024].

display at Tate Modern. The work comprises an assemblage of limbs cast from sculptures in the storage facility of the Museum of Art in Cluj, Romania. The original sculptures are confined to the stores because they ‘reflect historical periods at odds with contemporary politics and cultural values’ (Tate n.d.1 Ciprian Mureşan. webpage).⁵¹ Tate describes the work as helping to ‘examine the role of museums and focus on activities that usually happen behind the scenes’ (ibid), yet to do so through this particular work is a seemingly ‘safe’ method of raising awareness of hidden collections that does not mention the many seldom or never exhibited works in Tate’s own stores.

The ‘Lives of Net Art’ event (4 April 2019), run by the Reshaping the Collectible project, attempted to integrate both an intellectually and tactile playfulness with time-based media conservation practices and wider unresolved questions about obsolescence, digital infrastructures and the future of Tate’s collection and collecting practices. A line-up of Tate staff, artists and external makers, academics, and tech professionals explored the digital infrastructure of Tate and the web itself, presenting a networked, expansive vision of collection care work. The event incorporated a series of workshops in Tate Exchange, a designated experimental learning space in Tate Modern’s Blavatnik Building. In its five-year programme, Tate Exchange brought together communities, artists, invited collaborators and visitors to ‘reflect upon contemporary topics and ideas, get actively involved, think through doing, and make a difference’ under a different theme each year (Tate n.d.3 ‘Tate Exchange 2016-2021’ webpage). The RTC event inhabited this environment, running small pop-up areas for visitors to make (paper sculptures, digital avatars, digital montages), discuss (‘silent conversations’, contribute to a communal timeline), listen to talks from artists, curators and academics, and learn transferable, hands-on skills such as archiving internet content through Webrecorder. In this way it can be interpreted as a community of practice (the RtC team) creating the conditions for peripheral experiences to enable casual access to take place (Wenger 2008:117). The event was the most comprehensively interactive and ‘playful’ during my research period at Tate, although it’s occurrence before pandemic restrictions on movement and contact

⁵¹ See <https://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-modern/display/tanks/ciprian-muresan> [accessed 22 August 2024].

likely contributed to this impression. However, despite being free and open to all, I noted in my research diary that the audience was somewhat homogenous:

‘Whilst the event was popular it seemed that most of the people there knew each other, or worked at Tate or were artists. There didn’t seem to be many people who walked in organically and there were no children or families. Most people seemed to know more about net art than I did.’
(Research diary, 4 April 2019).

As with many outputs relating to the care of complex and so-called unruly artworks, attempts to make visible that were designed to be open to all nevertheless seemed to reach few visitors that were not already partially aware of the discipline. Despite the potential of the opening up of these peripheral experiences, a wider issue of exclusion was at play. Furthermore, with the closure of Tate Exchange in 2021, permanent spaces for this kind of discursive, expansive, hands-on and playful presentation of different aspects of museum work have greatly diminished at Tate.⁵²

8.2.3 Challenging Hierarchies

The potential of increased visibility to disturb museum hierarchies emerged as another complex area where anxieties and benefits intersected. The category ‘Challenging Hierarchies’ occupied the dual position of both a perceived benefit to some practitioners and an anxiety that they identified as present in those with more power. Staff were well aware of hierarchies within the museum, both epistemic (relating to whose knowledge is valued more (Miller 2020)) and operational (the hierarchy of decision makers). The potential for greater visibility, both within the museum and to visitors, emerged via a motivation to disrupt these power systems but also revealed an interconnected anxiety: that their lack of visibility in the first place, and the maintenance of the status quo, were indicative of a pervasive desire to quell challenges to established hierarchies in the museum. Interpreted through the

⁵² The significance of the closure of Tate Exchange has been the subject of discussion elsewhere and has been seen as a significant loss to the sector. Stella Toonen, writing in *Arts Professional*, described the decision as a ‘step backwards for a sector that had begun to let new voices in’. (Stella Toonen 2022, webpage). Meanwhile, the artist Madeleine Collie told *The Guardian* that ‘the closure of Tate Exchange showed that the Tate was not able to nurture complex discussions while prioritising the safety and wellbeing of artists and contributors’ (Ben Quinn 2022, webpage).

lens of Bourdieu's work, this acted to prevent the redistribution of cultural capital in the field (Bourdieu 1983), with the knock-on effect of jeopardising emotional and cognitive investment in the institution as a whole (Voronov and Vince 2012).

The lexicon of making collection care work visible was one such area of contestation, with the phrase 'behind-the-scenes' identified by one conservation scientist as a contributor to the perceived epistemic hierarchy that separated curators from collection care staff. The term was deemed to be a demarcation of value, with 'behind-the-scenes' inferring quotidian or less-skilled labour. When prompted to say more about why they thought this, the participant made a link with the gendered connotations of hidden work and the female dominated world of conservation:

It can marginalise the work in some way, and I think it has a gender connotation to it, because conservation is very female.

Framing invisible work in this way, particularly care work, has been observed in other workplace studies, and it is notable that the participant linked female labour with invisibility and subsequent 'marginalisation' (Star & Strauss 1999). When I asked what term they might use instead, they suggested the 'museum interface', connoting, intentionally or otherwise, a more technological, dynamic and gender-neutral zone of activity.

The conservation scientist felt that marginalisation was further exacerbated by the homogeneity implied by the term:

I just think it's a bit of a one-size fits all term that marginalises some of the work that we do.

To describe all collection care work as 'behind-the-scenes', even in initiatives to make it 'visible', would conversely serve to render invisible the spectrum of varied practices that exist within collection care. This resulted, the participant suggested, in further widening the gap between curatorial and collection care work and reifying epistemic hierarchies, both within the museum and in the minds of visitors:

What the curators do to get exhibitions going is also 'behind-the-scenes'. They don't do their work in public, do they? But why does it only apply to us? And does it only apply to us? Am I making a big assumption there? I might be, but you know, there's interest in it, and I think the roles need to be more public. All the roles need to be more public because otherwise you're just perpetuating the hierarchy, aren't you?

I decided to further explore the conservation scientist's perception that the phrase 'behind-the-scenes' was only used to describe non-curatorial activities. First, I used NVivo to search through Tate's Annual Reports (designed and condensed for a general audience) and The Board of Trustees of the Tate Gallery Annual Accounts (publicly available but presented as the original document submitted to DCMS). I recorded each instance that the phrase appeared and to what part of the museum it was applied to. In the Annual Reports there were few mentions of 'behind-the-scenes' in general, although it was applied to Collection Care work slightly more often. In the Board of Trustee Accounts, the phrase was more commonly used but applied roughly equally across departments.

I then turned to the website to look for instances of the phrase's use in marketing materials, including events, talks, lectures and courses for Members and non-Members. I also included content that Tate tagged as 'in-depth' – *Tate Etc* articles, podcasts and videos. I was surprised to find that, contrary to the conservation scientist's perception, the greatest numbers of events that included the phrase 'behind-the-scenes' were led by curatorial (35 in total, compared to 15 foregrounding conservation) – these were often tours and talks attached to temporary exhibition programmes, that offered insight into how the exhibition was conceived and installed. There are, though, important caveats to consider. First, curatorial content on Tate's website vastly exceeded collection care content, naturally skewing the results to make it appear that the phrase is more commonly associated with curatorial when in reality it was only applied to a fraction of curator led content. Second, combining Art Handling, Conservation, Framing, RTC, Stores, Library and Archive, and Records under a larger Collection Care bracket did produce a greater number of instances of the phrase's use. Tate also has a content strand on its website specifically titled 'Behind the Scenes' comprising short articles in a blogpost-type format that talk about specific jobs in the museum. Notably, Curators did not appear in this series, but Art Handling, Conservation and Conservation Science did, as well as Marketing and Interpretation. Then, I ran a more focused search for conservation science. This returned only two explicitly conservation science focused articles or events for a general audience; both described the work as 'behind the scenes'. Conservation science was not associated with the phrase on its departmental page and corresponding research projects and announcements, though this more academic

content was not intended for a general audience. This search of the website somewhat challenges the participant's original assertion that curators and curatorial labour is not associated with 'behind-the-scenes' terminology but does support their view that Conservation Science was presented, to a general public, as 'behind-the-scenes' labour. Neither does it change the reality that Collection Care work *is* less visible, with opportunities for public exposure few and far between, and that Collection Care work more widely was commonly presented as part of a homogenous behind-the-scenes 'world'.

Although the documentary materials revealed a wider usage of the phrase 'behind-the-scenes' in public facing content, it nevertheless added further evidence to the claim that curators were significantly more visible to audiences than museum practitioners in other departments. This was perceived by many staff to be directly related to power and influence within the museum, which in turn lead to the perceived benefit that greater recognition of more hidden practices in the frontstage of the museum would permeate into the 'backstage' area and disrupt ingrained hierarchies. When I asked an Interpretation Curator what would happen if Tate produced more content about collection care and conservation practices, a broader conversation about the problem of invisibility, the value of labour and inequitable practices ensued.⁵³ The participant was keen to emphasise the invisibility of multiple departments across all areas the museum and compared this to the public profile of curators, characterising this as unacknowledged and acknowledged labour respectively:

It all comes back to this kind of hierarchy that are in museums and galleries where kind of curatorial are the only real department or position that is kind of acknowledged publicly and all the other teams kind of work behind the scenes. And I think that's a real issue with big institutions, and it creates a really toxic environment where people feel under respected and- and not - their work goes kind of unnoticed and unacknowledged. So, I think through being more open and transparent about collection care that would go - that

⁵³ The job title of curator/assistant curator is used at Tate to describe those who work in the Curatorial division but is also used in Public Programmes, Interpretation, Learning, and Young People's Programmes where curators and assistant curators can also be found. However, it became clear that references to 'curators' in my interviews applied to the Curatorial division only, and that curators in other departments saw themselves and their practices as distinct from their colleagues in Curatorial.

would really help change that structure but there are lots of different places as well that I think could be made visible.

Like the conservation scientist, the interpretation curator observed a similar homogenisation of less visible labour, with departments outside curatorial perceived as 'service providers', propping up the apparently more valuable intellectual labour of curators. Their perception begins to suggest that visibility affects the exchange of cultural capital within Tate, and that the pursuit of this is, on some level, 'emotional and traumatic work' (Voronov and Vince 2012:62-63). The participant then questioned whether this hierarchy was something that those with more power would be 'anxious' to preserve:

But so in some ways like why would they want that - why would they want that broken down? It gives, you know, curatorial practice a kind of [...] high stake in the institution and the decisions that are made, and I think a lot of teams then respond and are felt to be kind of service providers to make sure these curatorial narra- ideas and shows are able to be fulfilled. So, whether that's collection care, whether that's public programmes responding to the narrative, whether it's, you know, interpretation writing texts and responding to the narrative, I think it all feels like they're all responding to that one thing, whereas individually, and I think collectively in different teams, it's felt like there's lots of work going on separate to that, but it's not necessarily being acknowledged.

An Art Handler provided a similar account of undertaking invisible labour deemed to be in the service of curatorial vision but offered a glimpse into how change might take place – and the benefits of this. When I asked how they thought visitors might conceive of their role, the practitioner began by describing their initial relationship with curatorial:

It - that's really changed because I would say when I first started art handling work, we were like secret ninjas, you never saw us. We were behind the - absolutely behind the scenes. I remember a curator saying 'well, you can run along now'. It was - and it was all 'this is happened by magic'.

Yet it was through the interest of visitors, they suggested, that this unequal relationship had begun to change. Social media seemed to allow visitors to express - and sate - a curiosity with 'how things are', with demand for content creating a new appreciation for art handling as a discrete and skilled practice:

But now I think because social media is the driver now, people are absolutely fascinated with how things are done, who makes decisions. More and more people want to know how things are. And - and there's a real fascination about it. Not just how it's done, how people acquire these skills, what's their background. People - you know, there's part of it is like, 'oh, it must be really cool to work with an artist'.

Whilst the Art Handler recounts a shift in the appreciation of their work, it is notable that they locate this as primarily due to forces outside the museum and outside the fields of contemporary art and art museums. Their account suggests that greater interest from visitors has directly resulted in a higher profile within the museum. Again, we can observe how visibility to audiences to some extent determines the acquisition of cultural capital in the museum and the organisational field.

Another means of creating change and challenging hierarchies was through research. If visibility was the currency through which staff were able to increase their value in the museum, then it was being involved in research, or having proximity to it, that enabled opportunities for its accumulation. Research projects created unique constellations of actors and, crucially, provided staff with the time, money and institutional permission to work on communicating their practices to a wider audience both within and exterior to the museum. Two of the participants reflected on their experiences of being part of a research project. The former found that being given the opportunity to critically reflect on museum practices with external academics enabled them to envision new ways of working outside of established operational hierarchies:

I: It's interesting that you mention Fernando's talk from last week. I'm curious as to whether being involved in research projects might have developed or changed your thinking about the visibility of conservation work in any way? Because earlier you sort of suggested that he had made you think slightly differently about that, I just wondered if you could talk a bit more about that, because I'm interested in the development of your thinking.

P: I think [...] I sort of take things as they are; I'm not very critical. But sometimes I hear a critique and I'm like, 'Oh yes, that is so true', you know. So, I mean, we're all super aware of the hierarchical structures of the museum and who has the decision-making power in the end and - and I just, you know, I just live with it and I don't question it, but having it exposed, there's sort of

*like, 'Oh yeah, that's true' and I wonder if there's something we could be doing there.*⁵⁴

Similarly, a mediator found that research projects carved out new spaces of contact in which true collaboration could occur, allowing for the freedom to experiment with different models of how the museum could be, particularly in relation to the flattening of epistemic hierarchies:

I think the full Reshaping the Collectible research project just allowed us to work in a completely different way, it almost gave us like a reason or justification for - for doing things differently and there was a real collaboration right from the very beginning, which although I think everybody really wants a collaborative approach at Tate, I think it's just in reality it's really hard to really foster that in a meaningful way and the project kind of just really allowed for that. And really giving respect and space for everyone's different practices and disciplines but also sharing them across project meetings. So, yeah it was - it was a really different way of working as I thought there was a real level of respect there that sometimes gets lost at Tate as well.

Whilst these new assemblages of practitioners created a different hierarchical model of work, it was the importance of having a research question around which to coalesce that allowed these collaborations to flourish:

Like I think that's why the Reshaping the Collectible works so well as a project because it was sort of responding to a research question – [um] not that it has to be posed in a research question format, but there was - it was responding to something.

Having a shared goal enabled the establishment of a new community of practice, turning the participants into 'boundary crossers' able to move between departments and groups (Wenger 2002). Moreover, translating simmering tension around epistemic hierarchies into a research topic gave practitioners a means to organise, critique Tate, and push back against its practices in a way that was seen as legitimate by the institution. Research at Tate, underscored by the aim to increase awareness of practices, thus created opportunities for knowledge exchanges at the periphery of CoP that empowered staff and legitimised critique.

⁵⁴ My question refers to a talk given by Fernando Domínguez Rubio to members of the Reshaping the Collectible team and other invited Tate staff on 14 January 2020.

In my work on the *Lives of Artworks* display I directly encountered the difficulty of trying to acknowledge and highlight the hidden contributions of staff in a way that included everyone in an equitable way. I noted in my research diary after a planning meeting that:

'We discussed where we should 'cut the network' in the life of the artwork – who is included and who isn't? And how do we present the dynamism of many people working together in a static diagram?'
(Research Diary, 24 May 2021).

My notes reveal the difficult decisions we had to make around who to include in the life of an artwork and who to exclude, raising unresolved questions about whose labour is seen to be actively contributing to an artwork – and why we, as researchers, should have the power to decide such things. I was forced to reflect on my own anxieties about the ethics of exclusion and the power I had in determining who was acknowledged. Similarly, a Research Manager connected to the project explained to me during our interview that they too were anxious around the potential to misrepresent or lessen staff contributions, but they also hoped that the audio tour and display 'helped those teams to feel involved' and feel that they were able to have ownership over the content and therefore be part of the encoding process.

It was during my interview with a Curator that I was able to understand the epistemological hierarchy from a curatorial perspective. The participant's account suggested that the 'atomisation' of museum departments, and the separation of curators in particular, was symptomatic of wider shifts at the level of the contemporary art field. The participant located an anxiety amongst conservators at the dislocation between the two departments, attaching this to the rise of the independent and roving art curator whose profile eclipsed their collection care colleagues and, significantly, even the museum itself:

There's systemic and historic approaches to conservation within a museum such as Tate, which have essentially seen a disconnection between what people refer to as a curatorial practice and a conservation practice. And I think this makes conservators very anxious. I understand why, because it is in a way a product of a perceived rise in the profile of curatorial over and above conservation if not the museum at times. And I think there is a moment there where in the misinterpretation of what curatorial does there's a – there's a subsequent knock on for conservation and conservators. And I'll just put this into context: so, since I would say the 70s, there became such a thing as the

*independent curator and the independent curator was exciting because they decided to work outside of the museum or institutional model. So, their independency was largely cast by their not being part of an organisation. So, they could use alternative spaces or independent spaces, or they could go through that were not or other than institutions.*⁵⁵

As a result of these changes at the level of the contemporary art field, curators, they went on to explain, were no longer 'seen as part of the caretaking team' within the museum. The participant attributed this to rise of the independent curator which grew from the emergence of conceptual art in the 1960s. This new movement emphasised the theoretical and open-ended possibilities of art without the need for a finished, material or tangible outcome (Lippard 2009:np). Connoisseurship became redundant whilst the roles of curators, artists and critics increasingly blurred (Lippard 2009:np). This observation offers a fundamental insight into the epistemic infrastructure of the contemporary art museum. It seems that care work in the museum and the connotations of the term 'behind-the-scenes' - suggested by the participants as homogenous, quotidian, unintellectual, historically female, and marginalised – has ceased to be associated with the role of the curator. To be a curator in the contemporary art museum is to have the power to inhabit multiple identities: to be both a museum worker and independent figure, to work with but also *be* an artist, to be a critic and an art historian, and to simultaneously inhabit the frontstage and back-stage of the museum. To be part of the 'behind-the-scenes' world is to be tied to place and practice, to be denied authorship and creativity and to be hidden from view.

8.2.4 Survival, Skill Sharing and Opening up the Field

Intrinsically connected to the internal hierarchy of the museum was the anxiety that surrounded the future of collection care during a period of turbulence and change. The code Survival was derived from the data as a way to describe the anxiety experienced by some Collection Care practitioners that their role, or that of their department, was under threat; becoming more visible was seen as a potential way to ensure survival in the institution. Linked to this were the codes Skill Sharing and

⁵⁵ Interestingly, the participant, when asked about Collection Care, associated the term with conservators and conservation practices only. Other areas such as Art Handling, Collections Management, Conservation Science, Registrars and Framing etc did not feature in the conversation.

Opening up the Field; these were seen as perceived benefits to greater visibility that would in turn secure the longevity and diversity of the various collection care disciplines.

The need to 'survive' came as a direct result of the external factors of the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent devastating financial impact on the cultural sector. Like other institutions Tate was severely impacted with staff facing a period of significant uncertainty and precarity. The Board of Trustees of the Tate Gallery Annual Accounts 2020-21 documented the reason for the implementation of a period of 'restructuring', resulting in a voluntary redundancy scheme:

The scale of the organisation and its activity prior to March 2020 was simply not sustainable given the reduction in attendance and consequent impact on the institution's finances.

(The Board of Trustees of the Tate Gallery Annual Accounts 2020-21:16)

With the institution in crisis, Tate was forced to make changes at every level of its operation, from staffing to working practices; this anxiety was felt acutely by staff. The interviews for this research project took place during this period of restructuring, and it seems no coincidence that explicit and implicit references to survival abounded.

I asked a conservator what the stakes were in being more visible, if there were any particular risks or benefits and what that might mean for their practice. The risks, they explained, were minimal in comparison to the potential for greater recognition within the institution:

I think that this gives a voice so that we are able to express our approach for different things, and I think in terms of internal advocacy in the museum, it gives a much greater voice and allows us to really show how the work that we do is important. So, I think for other – I think for a lot of museums the conservation side is also slightly hidden from internal staff in that they may not see it – the results of it on display, because everything just looks like it's working. And so that preparation that's done in the lab you don't quite see so much. So, I think that also would provide the department with a stronger bargaining chip in terms of showing the contributions that they give to the museum.

If invisibility is a measure of a conservator's success, then they were already at a disadvantage when needing to demonstrate the department's importance to the daily operation of the museum. To become more visible to their colleagues was thus a form of 'self-advocating':

Yeah to be also very frank with you, with all the layoffs that are have gone on across – I know a little bit more about the United States - and I found that conservation departments that I think do a better job at self-advocating have been able to retain more staff members, and that that also highlights that we should be doing as much as we can to really highlight our position and the role that we play in the museum.

In contrast, a conservation scientist expressed the fear that increased visibility might conversely jeopardise their survival in the museum because science, as a difficult to understand practice not traditionally associated with art, could be considered an expensive luxury and therefore at risk of being cut. This manifestation of anxiety is closed linked to the internal hierarchy of the museum as well the critical financial pressure caused by the pandemic. With the institution in crisis the stakes of being 'more visible' seemed to become further charged. Whilst the need to survive provided a motivation to be become visible it also created a shadow anxiety: could greater exposure within the institution have the opposite effect? In the case of Conservation Science, the anxiety reveals something greater about how different kinds of knowledge might be valued in the art museum. When asked where they perceived the lines of visibility to be, the participant suggests that 'people don't understand science in an art museum'. This was a cause of frustration: 'I feel we're hitting the real arts science barrier'.

The need to 'Open up the Field' and encourage 'Skill Sharing' was seen as both a way for practices and departments to survive and a perceived benefit to those outside the museum. The same conservation scientist that located anxieties in internal visibility saw benefits in communicating their work to a wider public, particularly in encouraging the growth of a lesser-known profession:

I think ultimately it might turn into [...] more people being interested in becoming heritage scientists because it is difficult to find people who want to become heritage scientists. There aren't many jobs so it would be helpful to

demonstrate the value of it. To encourage the profession to grow and expand because it is not very sustainable as a profession at the moment.

In this instance 'survival' took on a greater significance pertaining to the future of conservation science in general and the preservation of knowledge within the discipline:

P: A lot of the knowledge is rested within individuals. If they leave or they die, or they retire, the knowledge is gone, that strand of research is dropped or, you know, it's just not - that's what I mean by unsustainable.

I: Right.

P: There is no critical mass of people, so that will continue when these individuals leave the field. So, there's not a lot of succession planning or continuity, and up until recently there was very little government investment in the field, which is just starting to change through the AHRC grants that we're being offered at the moment.

Again, the importance of research emerges in the extract quoted. Communicating practices to the right external stakeholders – in this instance at the level of the field of power - has the potential for a positive feedback loop, resulting in a cycle of investment and visibility that ensures the longevity and expansion of the discipline.

Another conservator saw the potential for visibility of practices through skill-sharing as way to help smaller institutions survive the pandemic:

I'd love to see like some more holistic efforts to create workshops or something to support institutions around the UK. You know, like a sort of skill sharing workshop or something, or just a sort of transparency around our processes. One of the things that I'd really like to do is that we're developing a wiki within time-based media about all our processes, and I think there's this kind of like simmering feeling that– [...] what it would mean to be able to make that public. That - you know, to turn over this - [...] our internal resource and make it external. So, I just think that it would be - I have a sense of responsibility there and I think it would be amazing to try and think about ways that we could be more of a resource for people.

In this proposal the participant suggests a model for greater transparency at the level of the organisational field, resulting in a potential redistribution of power to smaller

museums. Notably, this extract hints at a wider tension between practitioners and the museum. This is an as yet unrealised project – the use of the phrase ‘simmering’ hints that this is a staff backed, but not necessarily institutionally supported, proposal. In the next section I will address further the idea of a tension between staff desires and institutional practices.

8.2.5 Summary

In this subsection I have addressed anxieties and perceived benefits that I classed as occurring at a practice-based level. First, I addressed the professional concerns of collection care staff with regards to the dual issues of preserving the authenticity of an artwork whilst simultaneously acknowledging their work in its realisation. Contemporary artworks emerged as source of particular tension as the continuously evolving artistic and conservation practices outpaced more traditional art historical concepts of authenticity as pertaining to a singular artistic vision and inherent truth within an object. Although notions of networks of care and contributorship were readily discussed by practitioners this way of framing collection care work was less well known outside the professional community of practice. Whilst sporadic efforts to acknowledge conservators and their work did occur, no lasting strategy had been put in place indicating that this tension remained unresolved.

When collection care practices did surface, issues around how to frame them emerged. The pressure of accountability to various stakeholders and the responsibility of preserving a public collection combined with the creative, experimental nature of the work itself seemed to be in tension. As a result, anxiety manifested in how to communicate collection care in a way that was both engaging and inclusive but retained the seriousness of the profession. With further analysis, distinctions were drawn between the various divisions of collection care. Whilst art handling was able to communicate to families through the physical aspects of their work (packing, transporting and hanging), with other disciplines such as conservation science and preventive conservation the potential for play was overtaken by the risk of revealing the potential weaknesses of the museum. Reshaping the Collectible provided an attempt to merge the two by exploring the various aspects of the ‘life’ of unruly artworks in at Tate Exchange, but this struggled to reach a wide audience and

the potential to recreate this kind of content was stymied both by pandemic restrictions and the closure of Tate's flagship participatory learning space.

Challenging Hierarchies emerged as a significant concern for participants in less visible roles – both in collection care and other areas of the museum. This code represented a converging of perceived benefits and anxieties; many staff saw the challenging of hierarchies within the museum as a perceived benefit but assumed that this would be seen as an anxiety by those with more power in the institution. Hierarchies in turn were revealed to be both operational and epistemic, with the latter being an area of intense contestation. A gulf between curatorial and other areas of the museum was identified. This was perceived to be exacerbated by the language of 'behind-the-scenes' and the homogenising effect of such a catch-all term. Implicit in this is contestation over the idea of who produces knowledge in the museum, whose knowledge is valued, and how this, in turn, might be linked with visibility. Curators at Tate are positioned in the public areas as a certain kind of museum 'professional' who undertake creative, academic and knowledge producing work. It could be inferred, then, that it is the proximity to art history, rather than artworks or the artists themselves, that determines the amount of cultural capital that an individual holds within the museum and the wider contemporary art and organisational fields.

Finally, I discussed the codes Survival, Skill Sharing and Opening up the Field. These were closely related to hierarchies in the museum and the notion that some practices might be seen to be of lesser value to a museum in crisis. Visibility was seen as way to advocate for survival but wasn't without risk; to be visible could expose collection care departments to scrutiny. Survival within the museum was shown to be linked to the survival of collection care practices on a greater scale at the level of organisational field. In making visible their work, Tate staff saw the potential to make their professional fields more inclusive and equitable by diversifying the workforce and sharing skills with smaller museums.

9. Phase 1: The Perceived Benefits and Anxieties of making collection care work visible for the institution

In the previous chapter I detailed how epistemic hierarchies within Tate contributed to the development of a field of organised striving, in which visibility became a currency for increased value and therefore increased influence within the institution. This section will zoom out further to consider anxieties and perceived benefits at an institutional level, touching on how Tate operates as a historical, political, commercial, art historical and societal construct that creates an environment in which (in)visibility is perpetuated and challenged.

The purpose of locating anxieties and perceived benefits at this level is crucial to the overall scope of the project which looks at what it means for the institution and audiences to 'make the invisible visible'. It enables me to understand further the 'Relations of production' - that is the relations between actors, both internal and external - that are involved in 'making visible' collection care work, which determines the meanings encoded in content produced by Tate (Hall 1975). This chapter therefore adds further evidence to answer research question one (RQ1): *What are the perceived risks and/or benefits for the museum in making the private and behind the scenes processes visible?* It also helps to answer research question two (RQ2): *What do museums believe that they are communicating by making behind the scenes processes visible?* And addresses the issue of inclusivity and equity at the core of the overarching research question.

I found many potential benefits located at the level of the institution. Behind the scenes content helped Tate work towards achieving its vision and demonstrate to audiences its commitment to its values, particularly inclusivity and openness. Communicating collection care and conservation practices allowed Tate to control narratives and communicate to different stakeholders across different fields in order to strengthen relationships and demonstrate the institution's value. Sending the 'right' messages through content that made the behind the scenes visible was seen to have implications for Tate's survival: reaching stakeholders in the field of power, for example, had the potential to secure funding and bolster key relationships.

I also bring into focus the many anxieties that cause Tate to tightly manage moments of visibility. These anxious actions were often due to the many (competing and in tension) dependencies that Tate has to external stakeholders who operate at the level of different fields. These responses will be interpreted through Miceli and Castelfranchi's positioning of anxiety as caused by uncertainty, resulting in a need for control that can manifest as *pragmatic* (responding to a threat in a way that 'reduces or terminates it' leading to the illusion that 'one has power over reality') and *epistemic* (the need to foresee any threat and 'predict its occurrences and consequences' and predict whether one has the ability to cope with it) (2005:296).

This chapter is presented in five subsections, structured via relationships that emerged between categories of benefit and anxiety. To tie these relationships together I also use Marstine's (2013) spectrum of transparency as an analytical tool to understand the types of visibility that these benefits and anxieties cultivate. The analysis presented in this chapter takes interviews with staff as its primary source of data and uses secondary data from fieldnotes, documentary sources and examples from the mediational materials to illustrate the themes.

Theme	macro level	Subcategories	Instances
Anxiety	Institution	• Questioning the Institution • Reputational risk • Jeopardising relationships with stakeholders • Art Market • Safety and security	10 9 7 6 8
Perceived Benefits	Institution	• Diversifying Tate's workforce • Openness • Polyphony • Exclusive experiences • Strengthening relationships with stakeholders	14 13 3 40 24

Table 7. Thematic codes discussed in chapter 9.

9.1 Balancing inclusivity with exclusivity

9.1.1 Diversifying Tate's Workforce

Diversifying Tate's Workforce emerged as the most commonly cited benefit of greater visibility, emerging in ten staff interviews.⁵⁶ These participants voiced a need to create pathways for individuals from underrepresented demographics into Tate and this, they felt, would only happen if the full spectrum of roles available in art museums was made visible to audiences. Six participants representing different areas of collection care noted the need to diversify their areas of practice. Of these, two conservators mentioned their participation in careers fairs as a positive experience, although both noted that such events had ceased during the pandemic. An Art Handler, meanwhile, offered examples of positive changes directly caused by raising the profile of their area of collection care work. Whilst discussing the stakes of making their work visible, the participant referenced their personal involvement in efforts to increase the representation of women in the art handling world, which, they felt, had historically overlooked and dismissed female candidates:

I championed that we needed more women in the art handling team. I installed a piece - we did a calendar once and I did a calendar shoot where my whole team were female, never been done before, and it went viral. Well, when I say viral, the art handling world went crazy because there's a picture of six women installing a work by Richard Deacon and it became quite - it was a bit of a landmark actually.

They also referenced the lack of BAME representation in collection care and museums more generally, noting that although they felt things had significantly changed now, their own route into the arts was not without difficulties. This motivated them to be highly active in mentorship programmes, talks, tours, and Tate's digital output:

I would like to be able to think that when I decide to call it a day, I can look back and there's a path behind me. That's it, really.

⁵⁶ One of Tate's objectives for the period 2020-2025 is 'to enable Tate's people to thrive and shift the workforce to more closely reflect the UK population today.' (Tate Vision 2020-2025: 4)

They added that as a direct result of giving a public talk, an attendee had gone on to pursue a career in collection care. Although the Art Handler's account operates on an individual and practice-based level, it is presented here as it highlights the inclusive potential of giving voice to collection care staff and how this might have a wider impact on institutional policy and practices. Yet it should be noted that the persistence of such efforts highlights that Tate – and collection care jobs more broadly – are still impenetrable to many people and may also indicate an outsized reliance on individuals and departments to be the drivers of change.

Three mediators similarly made links between increasing the visibility of individuals from collection care departments by giving them a voice in audio, video and social media content and the subsequent impact this might have on encouraging more people to enter the museum by reaching new audiences. A member of Tate's social media team, posting on sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, described how, via these platforms, 'behind-the-scenes' content allowed a spectrum of previously hidden voices to 'speak' *directly* to audiences. Similarly, when considering the stakes of making collection care visible, a Digital Producer saw a link between showing a diversity of roles and the potential to show a more human side of Tate in the hope that it would lead to greater access to museum jobs:

It's a great way to show - I think for multiple layers it shows a – Tate's workforce and it shows that Tate is a museum powered by people and the people who work here are - they're the reasons why things hang on the walls and that work goes unseen. So, I think lending a human face to Tate, that's really important and automatically kind of softens the ivory tower image of a museum. Linked to that is the kind of careers prospects side of things, which is a little harder to square in the - you know, it's still quite an impenetrable field to work in [...] but just showing diversity, I think a lot of people think about working at a museum or they think about curators, or they think about a visitor experience host and those are the two things they can kind of get their head around. But showing a diversity of roles is always important.

What the Digital Producer and their colleagues describe aligns with Whitaker's argument that the 'life' of an art museum is a story of people, not simply collections; narrating the story of Tate through a focus on the people who comprise it may offer a way to create a more diverse workforce and workspace – particularly if those workers push for internal change (Whitaker 2023:114).

9.1.2 Encouraging Polyphony

Also implied in the Digital Producer's account is a second closely related theme: the encouragement of polyphony, a concept I have drawn from Bakhtin (1984).⁵⁷ Polyphony becomes a particular system of representation to encode meanings that aim to communicate the 'human' side of Tate, the diversity of roles and people that comprise it, and present the institution as more accessible and in dialogue with the audience. A second mediator noted that without a plurality of voices there is a singular, established and somewhat intimidating Tate voice that hinders attempts to be more inclusive. This was made more explicit by a Curator of Interpretation, who described how their team were in the process of overhauling what they described as the traditional 'editorial' approach of Tate to develop a critical, reflective and inclusive practice that acknowledges the importance of their role in constructing the textual frame that determines how visitors understand artworks, follow the narrative of exhibitions and interact with the museum itself. In creating an exhibition guide with multiple contributions, the team were able to 'move it beyond, just the curatorial voice, Tate's voice, and - and [bring in] different perspectives', suggesting, again, the dominance of curators and the presence of epistemic hierarchies at work in the museum. Interested in how their approach could allow for the production of a spectrum of content, I asked the participant whether they pitched their work to specific groups or opted for a more general audience. Their answer suggested that whilst there was always a target audience for exhibitions, their team tended to focus on young, local audiences:

For us as an interpretation team, I think what we're trying to do is focus on a younger, local audience and always try and write the interpretation for visitors who might not be familiar with art history or be visiting Tate for the first time. So, I think we always try to focus on that rather than a 'general' audience, which our texts might have historically done.

Furthermore the 'traditional' museum 'voice' – catering to a narrow demographic of middleclass visitors – was 'not at all [who is] writing our text'. This approach

⁵⁷ This category is closely linked with the practice-based category 'Challenging Hierarchies' discussed in the previous chapter, where I noted that making staff and practices visible was linked to a staff perception that this would challenge the status quo within Tate. The category discussed here is distinct in its external focus: the association with Tate's values, the specific goal of opening up the museum to previously excluded audiences, and the relationship this indicates between Tate and its publics.

correlates strongly with Bakhtin's polyphonic novel of independent and unmerged voices who present different accounts of reality (Bakhtin 1984:6). The participant further developed this strategy in the *Lives of Artworks* display and the accompanying audio trail (two examples I discussed with the young adult participants in the research):

I did decide really early on that the priority for this display wasn't the visitor - it wasn't the Tate Britain visitor that kind of middle class, older white person who would come to the display, the priority was Ima and her network. And so, we did kind of approach that text in a different way and really tried to make sure we weren't putting too much of an institutional kind of not stamp on it, I don't want to use that word, but kind of be respectful to Ima's kind of priorities and needs in that respect.

Their insight as a mediator shows that tailoring content to a 'general audience' is not neutral: the category responds to and produces a middleclass visitor that becomes the 'norm', reducing other voices and perspectives to the position of outsider. This is neither representative of the local communities around Tate's sites, the artists it works with and, as the participant notes, the individuals within the museum who are writing these texts. Again, though, it should be noted that the Interpretation Curator feels a friction with traditional ways of operating at Tate, suggesting that, like the Art Handler, there is a reliance on individuals, or departments, to propel change despite institutional documents that claim to take the lead.

I asked a Digital Producer whether they had created any collection care films for a specifically young adult audience and they pointed to one example – *Reframing Constable* (Figure 9.1). In their response they noted that generally, collection care focused content 'can often feel very similar' and might be inaccessible in its subject matter, but in this instance the team purposefully incorporated the voices of Tate Collective Producers, who were perceived to be able to act as intermediaries between experts and novices and bring a fresh perspective to an already well explored artist.

They're often - and I think this - this can sometimes be the trouble when curators or researchers or – or anyone - conservators are kind of talking about a subject they know very well and are very invested in, it's very hard for them sometimes to know what a kind of general lay person or even an arts

engaged person might know about that, and it's often less than they might think. So, there's a certain amount of kind of taking them on the journey and explaining some key concepts that you need to do from the beginning. So, having two Tate Collective Producers in the studio was brilliant because they could ask those questions and they could say then 'What is gilding? Why do you need to gild it at all?' Whereas the conservator might just take it as read that everyone knows that that's what you need to do.

The participant suggests that polyphony, particularly when external voices are included, acts as a foil to the perceived exclusivity of dense and expert-focused content. The film itself also represents a merging of both categories (diversifying Tate and encouraging polyphony), providing a polyphonic account of the museum as we navigate the backstage of Tate through the eyes of our TCP guides, and watch as they uncover hidden roles in the museum and demystify the processes involved. It is also significant that the film employs a narrative structure that shows the process of learning at the periphery of a CoP (Wenger 2008). The very fact that the TCPs are involved in the film is evidence of the presence of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 2003), whereby the young adults learn the to produce and create film materials for Tate.



Figure 9.1 Screenshot from Tate, 2018. *Reframing Constable* (00:04:41).

Yet, Polyphony posed its own risks. Without the guardrails of a singular perspective, a mediator explained they had to ensure that 'it's clear when someone is speaking kind of as an individual about their role versus, you know, Tate's values and just making sure that it's always favourable'. Despite a concerted push from staff to platform different voices and perspectives in the interest of diversifying the workforce and appealing to new audiences, this was nevertheless balanced against an anxious need to regulate content through an institutional voice that in its stability and perceived 'neutrality' represents a form of epistemic control over the uncertainty caused by multiple viewpoints emerging at once (Miceli and Castelfranchi 2005).

9.1.3 Providing Exclusive Experiences

Providing an exclusive experience for certain groups of visitors was also a perceived benefit for Tate, although this was at times in tension with their aim to be 'open', inclusive, and to ensure access to the collection for all. It was evident in the documentary materials that providing access to the 'behind the scenes' areas of the museum was a way to reward patrons and funders and increase revenue. Of the 45 historic event listings I surveyed (spanning 2012-2020) – comprising talks, conferences, tours, workshops, and courses - the majority (36) charged entry prices or fees. Courses were the most expensive (£320 for general participants, £270 for members), whilst some talks and tours were the cheapest, costing £5 for standard tickets and £4 (or free in some instances) for members. Eight events were free; ticketing information for the remaining listings was unavailable. Thus, an invisible boundary emerged, which could be traversed only by audience members who were willing or able to pay for access to this knowledge. Words and phrases such as 'rare', 'exclusive chance', 'privileged access', and 'a limited number of guests' were commonly used in descriptions of these events. Through a Bourdeusian lens, this language is indicative of how Tate harnesses the symbolic exclusiveness of the art museum to appeal to a culturally aspirational strata of the public – all the while attempting to present itself as inclusive to visitors (such as young adults) that tend to be deterred by art museums' associations with wealth, whiteness and middle-class culture (Bourdieu 1991:4; Sim 2019).

The physical space of 'behind the scenes' seemed to be offered as a reward for the loyalty of paying members or patrons. Images documenting and publicising these events further solidified this boundary: when visitors were depicted in images, they tended to be majority white and older participants (Figure 9.2). Physical access to behind-the-scenes areas was thus reserved for paying or more affluent audiences.



Figure 9.2 Screenshot from Tate website, 'Members Behind the Scenes: Conservation' held at Tate Britain on 2 & 3 December 2016. (Tate 2016, webpage).

The theme of providing exclusive experiences emerged in four interviews. Two collection care staff recalled giving tours and talks to patrons, one decision maker recounted showing a politician the conservation studios, and a mediator explained how certain materials were produced with members in mind. An art handler explained how talking to members helped them understand how their money benefited the institution and to feel more connected to its work:

They - they now feel that they're more connected with Tate because they have a better understanding that it – they're not just supporting - it's not just

about art, they're supporting a community and the community that makes all this happen.

Crucially, in his experience it was the people around the art – not just the works themselves - that inspired donors to connect with and feel part of Tate. Presenting the museum as a 'community' of invested individuals is reminiscent of Whitaker's (2023) call for greater acknowledgement of how *people* are the institution, although perhaps in a way that she doesn't anticipate; including patrons as part of this community is seldom mentioned in the literature and referenced here in the context of providing 'exclusive' content, yet the benefits for the museum are important for enabling its long-term survival. Viewed through the lens of an emotional reading of institutional work, we see how providing exclusive experiences to donors increases both emotional investment (through feeling part of a community) and cognitive investment (through understanding the aims and values of Tate), leading to greater support for the work of the museum (Voronov and Vince 2012).

A conservator was able to give an insight into how physical access to conservation areas was reserved for a certain 'level of public'. When I asked them to tell me about a time they communicated their practices to the public, they noted that they had only given behind these scenes tours to 'patrons and important people', contact with a more general public was generally reserved for the gallery spaces.

A mediator, meanwhile, explained how there was a drive to provide exclusive content for members during the pandemic; a direct result of the financial pressures experienced by the museum. It was under these conditions that the *Caring for Art During Covid* film was released:

Membership was always - we talked about membership from the very beginning and then it kind of dropped off the radar and it then came back when it was nearing the end of the edit. And yeah, we did - we knew all along that we wanted to release it to Members to begin with. But it wasn't necessarily created as a Member's first piece of content, but I suppose it was easy to package it up in that way.

A significant tension thus emerges in the desire for inclusivity and the need to retain a semblance of exclusivity. In a film that endeavoured to present a spectrum of

'hidden' staff members, and give voice to many perspectives, it nevertheless had to conform to the museum's need, at a time of crisis, to provide exclusive content and experiences to its paying members. Crucially in this account the Digital Producer describes the ease with which 'behind-the-scenes' stories can be encoded as exclusive content. Even in digital form, glimpses behind the scenes of the museum were initially offered to a fee-paying stratum of audiences. As with many categories presented in this chapter, what emerges is a complicated trade-off between 'open' and 'closed', impacting who has the power to shape the future of the museum.

9.1.4 Summary

In this section I have addressed three categories of perceived benefits for the institution, grouped under the theme of balancing inclusivity and exclusivity. Showing a spectrum of roles in the museum - and *giving voice* to these staff members by allowing them to explain their practices - allowed Tate to move towards achieving one of its stated aims to diversify its workforce so as to better represent the national population. Furthermore, the staff I interviewed were aligned with these goals and diversifying Tate's workforce was the most commonly cited reason to make collection care visible. In this way Tate hoped to develop its relationships with audiences, particularly those who might feel unrepresented by the institution and, importantly for this study, young adults looking to build a future career in the arts.

However, a tension emerged in the growing need for Tate to also provide exclusive content. Even as the need to encourage and cultivate inclusive practices increased, the external pressure of the pandemic necessitated Tate to continue to provide rewards and 'special' content to Tate members, whose financial assistance was so vital during this period. It should be noted that members are also a section of Tate's audiences, and without demographic data we should not assume that they are a monolithic and privileged group, yet the language used in events created for them does reaffirm the elite nature of art museum visiting (Bourdieu 1991), perpetuates stereotypes of collection care work as something mysterious and permanently hidden, and presents the museum as a site of physical barriers and guarded routes of access.

9.2 Openness and Reputational Risk

9.2.1 Openness

A core tenet of Tate's values is the somewhat undefined notion of 'openness'.⁵⁸ I found references to the idea of wanting to be an 'open' institution in staff interviews and documents, but with closer analysis a distinction emerged between how the institution and staff defined this term.

For Tate, making collection care and conservation visible was a way to actively demonstrate or visually express this value. I found references to a desire to become - or claim to be - open in 12 public facing annual reports. In the Tate Annual Report 2009-2010, for example, imagery of art handlers installing a work by Henry Moore is used to illustrate the page 'Improving Tate' which discusses Tate's commitment to its staff and also reaffirms that:

'Tate aspires to be open, diverse and entrepreneurial. A further focus this year was to promote a culture of openness and collaboration, where everyone's contribution is respected and valued'.

T(at) Annual Report 2009-2010:50).

The choice to use this imagery suggests behind-the-scenes work communicates an authentic essence of Tate and demonstrates a figurative 'opening up' of the institution. Here we see a coming together of two concepts from Marstine; the notion of the visual language of openness and seeing through used as a frame for 'dashboard transparency', whereby official documents are made available in a gesture of openness, but they are only legible to those who possess the professional skills to make meaning from them (2013). The imagery of the 'behind the scenes' is not enough to make this a moment of radical transparency, despite the content of the text, which wills it to be so.

For staff, 'openness' was often equated with a sense of moral responsibility, particularly with reference to confronting power imbalances between Tate and its publics. Three mediators saw openness and transparency as essential for building trust with communities who 'are not represented within our collections, workforces, audiences'. A Curator of Young People's Programmes acknowledged the need for a

⁵⁸ Tate's core values, developed with staff, are to be 'open, bold, rigorous and kind' (The Board of Trustees of the Tate Gallery Annual Accounts, 2022-2023:6)

pragmatic spectrum of (in)visibility but thought there was nevertheless space for much greater transparency around museum processes. Vulnerability and openness from Tate, they suggested, was a prerequisite for building meaningful and equitable relationships with audiences, particularly young adults:

I think opening up our practices and opening up sharing how we do things is a kind of - is a little bit like, you know, human relationships- we kind of need to open up ourselves and share, what's going on inside, our process, our thinking, our working out sometimes, to build trust. I think people just really appreciate understanding how things are done - it feels real, and it feels genuine. It helps - it brings communities into our reality with us. They're able to see us for who we are. And, you know - and that goes for collection care but also decision making, programming. I think there is a need to - obviously we can't be entirely transparent about every decision, it just wouldn't be possible or feasible - but I do think there are pockets we're able to share given that we know how much desire there is to understand what happens behind the scenes.

When I followed up by asking what they thought a more transparent museum would like the participant described a vision of 'porosity'. They saw the museum/young adult relationship not as a dialogue between institution and its audience but rather something fundamentally more human, involving listening and vulnerability:

So, it's porous. It's vulnerable and it's porous. I think that makes it stronger because it's able to - and again, likening it to human relationships, if you have a relationship with somebody who does something that you don't agree with, you kind of have to have a conversation about it. And there needs to be listening from both sides. I think when institutions become this large, it can be very difficult to do the listening part. Often the focus is on broadcast.

Her description envisages a boundary enables boundary crossing via the process of delegation, whereby true knowledge exchange between different groups takes place (Wenger 2008:112-113). These boundary encounters are empowering for the outsider, allowing them to have the tools to better critique and enter into dialogue with the institution, resetting power dynamics. As it stands, current practices of 'dashboard transparency' appear to reify boundaries, preventing any kind of depth access.

Three collection care practitioners similarly suggested that being open about conservation processes – particularly how decisions are made around the care of artworks and the results of research – would be beneficial for both audiences and the museum. With regards to the stakes of being visible, one conservator saw it as vital for the profession and the museum, implying that the current status quo was ‘unhealthy’ for both the field of conservation and the museum:

I think sort of like demystifying processes is just something that would be really healthy to do and I think that this idea that these processes are sort of magic or something, or should be invisible, is just generally an unhealthy one.

Likewise, they also considered conservation research as something that should be fully open and accessible:

For this research to be the most meaningful and for us to [...] affect the most meaningful change, we need to be completely transparent and honest here.

A conservation scientist floated the idea of advisory boards for conservation comprising experts and members of the public, particularly younger people, who they felt were ‘really engaged with what’s happening at the moment’ and had a sense of ‘urgency’ around climate change as well as a disposition to ‘ask questions’. In the extracts quoted above the practitioners conceive of ‘openness’ as akin to ‘radical transparency’, naturally suggesting ‘situated revelations’ where the boundaries to the museum are truly ‘porous’, the museum listens to its publics, and transparency becomes a matter of encouraging civic engagement (Marstine 2013:4). The institutional definition of ‘openness’ stops short of this.

9.2.2 Questioning the Museum and Reputational Risk

Despite Tate’s stated desire to be ‘open’ it struggled to overcome anxieties that might expose the museum up to questioning and damage its reputation. Navigating the visibility of collection care and conservation proved to be particularly charged.

Four members of staff indicated that Tate was highly concerned with its reputation. In response to the question where the lines of visibility are drawn at Tate, one conservator thought that Tate sometimes operated as a ‘PR machine’, describing the

lines of visibility as ‘omnipresent’ and perhaps pertaining to the ‘relationship domain’. Another member of staff concurred, suggesting that most or all risk points back to a concern with reputation.

A Curator of Interpretation explained the difficulty of grappling with Tate’s positionality as an institution and its historic ties to colonialism. They also noted that young adult audiences were more likely to ‘expect transparency’ from Tate:

We’re trying to address a younger audience and be more honest, and an audience that is engaged with everything that’s happening in the world, that is more political, that is more activist in nature.

The potential for collection care practices to intersect with Tate’s discomfort in exploring its institutional past emerged in the documentation of a series of events, hosted in 2019, which offered conservation tours of the Rex Whistler restaurant.⁵⁹ At the price of £75 (£50 for members), attendees to the 2019 events were offered the rare opportunity to watch and interact with conservators over champagne and canapes:

A limited number of guests will have the opportunity to watch conservation work being carried out on the mural and attend an in-depth tour of related works in the collection. These works, much like the mural, will be themed around hunting and foraging for the refined and exotic amidst the fruits of nature. You’ll have the chance to ask our expert conservation team any questions you might have about the project as well as the conservation history of the mural. Champagne and canapes will be provided as you learn more about the celebrated piece.

(Conservation Tour: Rex Whistler, 2019, webpage).

The description of the mural in the above quote as depicting ‘hunting and foraging for the refined and exotic’ jars with the work’s content, which shows in one section the abduction and enslavement of a black child and racist stereotypes of Chinese figures. Through this event conservation becomes an elite spectacle and is explicitly revealed as part of an entrenched system that maintains and adds value to objects that celebrate Britain’s colonial past. During the process of data collection, a public outcry over the racist content of the mural erupted in the summer of 2020. This

⁵⁹ Located in Tate Britain, the now closed restaurant was situated in a room with a specially commissioned mural painted in 1927 by the artist Rex Whistler, titled *The Expedition in Pursuit of Rare Meats*.

webpage was deleted by Tate, as was any mention of the artwork on Tate's website; I was able to retrieve an online copy of the listing only from the National Archives.⁶⁰ This example is important for two reasons: the wiping of any reference to the events (and the artwork itself) demonstrates 'the strict relationship between anxiety and a need for control' that results in a lack of openness (Miceli and Castelfranchi 2005:295). It also demonstrates that conservation work is far from neutral and has the potential to maintain and participate in structures of exclusion. The event supports Henderson's call for us to interrogate who conservation is performed for – and in this instance, who it is performed to (Henderson 2020).

The tightrope walked by Tate in its efforts to make collection care visible became clear in an interview with a member of the executive office. Likely due to the seniority of their position, the participant was able to give a more total view of how (in)visibility was managed at Tate and how this intersected with external pressures. In the extract quoted below the categories of Openness, Questioning the Institution, and Reputational Risk converged. I asked whether the participant had been involved in any efforts at Tate to communicate collection care and their account suggested that rather than *making* visible they were more involved in *managing* visibility. To explain their role, they identified the complicated situation posed by the *Repairing Rothko* video:

The one that I was most involved with, fairly obviously was the Rothko. But my role brought me into that for very different reasons, which is 'what can we actually say about the Rothko?' And this is one of the considerations we have at Tate, sometimes we couldn't talk about the Rothko because we didn't know how it was going to end. The way that things fall out is really, really interesting. So, if you take the Rothko, we had to be very, very careful what we said about that.

The nature of the incident that caused the damage – a criminal act – meant that Tate had to be particularly attentive to what emerged in the public realm. The precision with which visibility around the project was managed was indicative of an acute awareness from the executive office of Tate's very real potential to impact actions in

⁶⁰ See Tate 2019, *Conservation Tour: Rex Whistler*. [Online]. Available at: <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20200205224347/https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/tour/conservation-tour-rex-whistler> [Accessed 22 August 2024].

the public sphere. Any information Tate divulged, the participant explained, ran the risk of prejudicing ongoing legal proceedings. This was reaffirmed again when they explained that each instance of making visible had the potential to then impact future activities, setting expectations that may not be possible to meet:

What you do in one context sets a precedent for what you do in another context, and you need to be very careful about that.

Yet, during a later discussion, the participant from the executive office explained that the Rothko film, despite its connection to an active court case at the time of production, was in many ways a more straightforward project for managing visibility.⁶¹ This was due to the unforeseeable, ‘extreme and unusual nature of the event’ and the fact that the work was owned by Tate and not the property of a third party. Because of the relatively contained ‘relations of production’ (to use Hall’s term), the encoded narrative could be controlled by the museum, with little to no risk of impacting future or current relationships with stakeholders. Instead, it was the apparently more innocuous issues of maintenance, preservation and cleaning that often proved to be thornier subjects to convey. That a work at the centre of a court case should be a more straightforward case is testament to the intricacies of revealing collection care processes in the art museum.

The Press Office emerged as a key actor in policing efforts to communicate collection care and conservation in the name of preserving Tate’s reputation. I was surprised by the extent to which references to the department emerged during the interviews: six participants mentioned that the Press Office or relationships with the national press impacted what was made visible.⁶² Although I was unable to interview anyone from the Press Office, their influence was keenly felt through the accounts of other participants. For one decision maker, placing images of conservation work in the press allowed Tate to tell positive stories about itself to a broad public during the pandemic. Yet for others, the influence of the department was more restrictive. In

⁶¹ I am grateful to the participant for offering additional information on the subject and for their permission to share it here.

⁶² The press office or references to portrayals in ‘the press’ was mentioned by nine participants (although three just in passing as a department they worked with). That participants across the museum should directly interact with the press office or be cognisant of the museum’s portrayal in the press, is indicative, I think, of the intense external scrutiny under which Tate operates. The continued maintenance of Tate’s reputation thus causes intense institutional anxiety.

response to a question about which aspects of their work could be made visible, a conservator mentioned that they'd had a number of conversations with the Tate Press Office who have a 'strong say' on the information that reaches the public and that they 'tend to err on the extreme side of caution'. Another mediator worried that Tate was ' beholden' to the press, and that a fear of negative stories restricted Tate's ability to be meaningfully transparent. What emerged was a sense that the Press Office keenly felt and played out the anxieties of the institution, attempting to exert epistemic control through the careful management of visibility in order to protect the museum from harmful questioning (Miceli and Castelfranchi 2005).

9.2.3 Summary

In this section I have explored the perceived benefit of increasing Openness and two related anxieties in Questioning the Museum and Reputational Risk. What emerged was a broad consensus that greater openness would be a benefit for Tate, but it was defined in different ways by staff and the institution. Official documents made numerous references to Tate 'being open' yet many staff suggested that there was scope for greater and more meaningful transparency. Staff envisioned an openness that was close to radical transparency in its embrace of vulnerability, self-reflection, dialogue and power sharing (Marstine 2013). This was linked to Tate's relationship with underrepresented communities and particularly young adults, who were perceived to value transparency, authenticity, and be critical thinkers.

Whilst communicating collection care and conservation was a way for Tate to embody and demonstrate its core value of being 'open', concerns around risk to reputation and being questioned inhibited the extent to which this could be realised. Staff characterisations of Tate as a 'PR machine' were supported by its apparent discomfort with exploring its links to colonialism and empire, exemplified by the erasure of documents pertaining to the Rex Whistler mural and its conservation – which further demonstrated how collection care practices are enmeshed with structures of power and exclusion.

The testimony of a member of the executive office with regards to making the Rothko video was used as a means of demonstrating the multiple tensions involved in creating mediational content with specific reference to anxieties around reputation

and questioning. For staff in a decision making and therefore risk mitigating position 'managing visibility' took precedent over 'making visible'. As a result, films communicating collection care may be read as both concerted attempts to make practices and people visible as well as documents that are shaped by anxieties and a need for control over past narratives as well future events. Finally, I addressed the importance of the press office as an additional force directly involved in monitoring what was made visible, situating them as both facilitators of visibility but also risk managers that operated in anxious ways to foresee future questioning.

The discussion in this section raises further question as to who Tate is constructing its image for and what it fears the consequences might be of the loss of its reputation. This will be addressed in the next subsection.

9.3 Strengthening and jeopardising relationships with stakeholders

9.3.1 Funders, donors, corporate sponsors, and the field of power

Strengthening relationships with donors, funders and the government offered important benefits for Tate, chief of which was the survival of the museum during a time of financial crisis. A decision maker and an art handler described how allowing patrons and representatives from the field of power the ability to see the museum as a complex network of individuals and departments fostered within these stakeholders a greater sense of understanding and connection to Tate. This demonstrated the value of the institution and their own important role as financial contributors to its work.

Examination of the Tate Management Statement and Financial Memorandum reveals the extent to which Tate is accountable to the government. Tate, which was established in its current form under the Museums and Galleries Act 1992, is still bound by the functions put forth in this legislature, which (to summarise) includes stipulation that Tate must maintain, add to, preserve and exhibit its collection and make it available to study, whilst also promoting the enjoyment and understanding of British and international art (Tate Management and Financial Memorandum, 2020:section I:12). Board members and the Director of Tate are appointed by the Prime Minister, and 'the Secretary of State is accountable to Parliament for the

activities and performance of Tate' (Tate Management and Financial Memorandum, 2020:section III:15).

As part of a wider discussion of the impact of policy documents and connecting conservation to a public message, a member of the Executive Office gave insight into how relationships with the government can be positively impacted by communicating conservation:

Why does Tate get funded to the tune of £36 million a year from the Government? Why should anyone fund us? Well, there are many different facets to that, but one of them is the amount - the amount it actually takes to do stuff and what sits behind the scenes. And so, it is not as easy, as we all know, just to get a painting out of the store or get a work out of the store, let alone hang it on the wall. We all know what it takes to do that, but that is not a widely realised thing. And what is it that makes this huge, huge machine work? Well, some of the vital cogs are of course, conservators and collection care. And I don't know how many times I've had to deal with a politician saying, 'well why can't you send that there?' Well, because we all know the reasons, it should be - that is not, you know - a politician can ask that question in a way that they wouldn't say something like 'well why can't you just operate on your own brain?' These things we need to do - one of the reasons for being more transparent about it is a) because it spells out the complexity and why the institution needs funding the way it does, but on the other hand, on the other side of it - not all conservation work will do this - but it's deeply fascinating.

They then went on to explain how this 'fascination' played out during a tour for a previous minister, who was taken to the conservation and framing studios to see the work carried out on the frame of a Constable painting:

He was utterly fascinated by that frame. How do you recreate the frame like that? And that was - that stuck in his mind.

The participant's insight offers a rich source for deeper analysis and surfaces multiple factors that determine current states of (in)visibility. Notable is the gulf in understanding between those inside and outside the institution – even those with vested interests in Tate and knowledge of the sector - as to the reality of how a museum of Tate's size works. The invisibility of these processes is in many ways a sign of Tate's success, so much so that, as Latour reminds us, work comprising

many elements and processes becomes invisible – black boxed – when it is functions smoothly (Latour 1987). The downside of this is that it fails to communicate exactly how much financial assistance is needed to maintain or improve these processes. In this instance we see an example of *invisibility* jeopardising relationships with stakeholders.

Making a controlled section of this work visible in a way that communicates its effectiveness but simultaneously demonstrates the high stakes involved is achieved through a visit to a conservation studio where tangible, visible work is undertaken on a physical object that demonstrates national significance and personal interest to the minister. Again, we might bring in the concept of ‘object love’. In this extract the minister displays a deep personal attachment to the work and shares this feeling with the conservators. Being immersed in the intimate space of the conservation studio, where forms of devotion take place, represents what Geoghegan and Hess argue is the power of architecture and spaces to become geographies of ‘love’ (2014:452). Having access to these spaces, and sharing in emotions, is a powerful tool in strengthening the relationship between Tate and the stakeholders it is beholden to.

The account from the executive group member also reveals that there is a reliance on conservation work that can be easily ‘seen’ and easily sparks the sense of fascination that the participant describes. Perhaps work that is more intangible in nature, such as that carried out on time-based media artworks, is harder to package as a success. In my research diary I noted after a visit to the stores that *‘I joined a time-based media conservator at her computer tucked away in the stores and visited others in an office space, also undertaking computer-based work. Staff noted that their jobs were ‘not exactly visually interesting’ for me to observe’* (Research diary, 30 August 2022). Indeed, I was unable to find any examples of patrons, donors or government figures coming directly into contact with these areas of the museum and as discussed in the previous chapter, most material produced about this area of conservation work was directed to an academic or expert audience. It seems there is a difficulty in packaging the speculative work often attached to contemporary artworks, which is concerned with ethical and procedural dilemmas and the acceptance of uncertainty and change, as a success.

Reliance on the visual, and the presence of staff to demonstrate their work, was corroborated by the account of an art handler who described giving tours to Tate Patrons:

They just [...] were so fascinated by it. But then on the upside they then felt 'I'm a patron, I'm not just helping Tate acquire work, I'm helping Tate operate as a machine'. And it gives all these people opportunities. They felt they were investing in more than just art, they were part of a society, a culture that they identified with. And they got a tremendous sense of pride out of it ... You're making a commitment.

This account again underscores the unique ability of collection care practitioners and their work to simultaneously communicate the micro and macro realities of the museum; demonstrating how the collaborative work of highly skilled individuals contributes to the enormous task of running a national institution. Surprisingly, it also seems to change staff perceptions of those who fund Tate.

9.3.2 Artists

The perceived benefit of strengthening relationships with artists emerged in three interviews. Despite Tate's involvement with the contemporary art world – both as a collector of artworks and supporter and collaborator with artists - I was struck by apparently how little artists were able to access the workings of the institution. With regards to collection care, a conservator described how the compartmentalised nature of museum work – particularly within the collection care division – is 'abstract from the perspective of the artwork' and is 'baffling to artists'. The participant is alluding to the disconnect between operational processes in a museum and the realities of contemporary artmaking, whereby the mixed materiality of works might test the way that museums traditionally separate conservation departments.⁶³

A second conservator agreed and explained how Reshaping the Collectible provided the time, funding and institutional support to work over an extended period with the artist Ima Abasi-Okon in order to understand the complexity of her work and the ways in which it challenges conservation processes. What the conservator described as an embrace of 'slowness' allowed for the two to work collaboratively and more

⁶³ This is a core strand of investigation in the Reshaping the Collectible project.

equally. Allowing the artist to fully articulate their concerns made visible to the conservator the opaque operational practices of Tate and enabled them to be modified to suit the needs of the artist. When aspects of this research was incorporated into the *Lives of Artworks* display, which sought to trace the expanded networks of actors that determine the trajectory of Okon's works, a Public Programmes curator suggested that other artists might also benefit from thinking about an artwork through the prism of a 'life':

I think also just thinking about how the artwork is cared for and stored maybe poses more of an interesting – I think it would be actually quite interesting for artists thinking about what happens to a work after it's been made, where it sits. I think it - I'm not an artist, so I can't say for myself - but actually thinking about this thing as an internal being and what that means for the work, I think that in itself can potentially transform - like, change art discourse.

In this way, opening up the links between collection care practitioners and artists, giving them the space and time to collaborate and learn from one another (to engage in boundary encounters whereby a joint practice is established (Wenger 2008), and sharing these practices and processes in public materials, was seen as a potential benefit by members of staff to strengthen the relationship between artists and Tate, build trust and redress power imbalances.

A Curator of Young People's Programmes highlighted the connection between young adults and artists, describing a 'Venn diagram' of relations between learning, artists, collection care, and young adults, and noting that many members the communities she worked with were interested in becoming artists. The participant wondered if knowing how to interact with conservators, and thinking about the future 'life' of their own work, might empower young adults in the development of their careers:

Collection Care colleagues might be working with artists in a certain way that might also lend itself to opening up to engagement or opening out those practices.

They anticipated that young artists might have questions around 'content, authorship and ownership' that collection care practitioners would be best placed to answer. Making this knowledge visible to young adults, the Young People's Programmes

Curator thought, offered a plethora of potential – and as yet untapped - opportunities for collaboration and skill sharing.

9.3.3 Summary

This section looked at the ways communicating collection care practices might shape Tate's relationship with some of its core stakeholders. Strengthening relationships with donors, funders, sponsors and politicians was identified as a perceived benefit, with the ultimate goal of ensuring support and much-needed funds. Tate's close relationship with the field of power – through regulations, financial support, and institutional structure – was made visible in public facing documents. This provides evidence for how Tate is held to account by the government and must demonstrate its worth; making visible collection care work was shown to be an effective way to do this.

A member of the Executive Office gave insight into how tours of the conservation studios were used to connect with politicians whilst an Art Handler recounted their experience of giving talks and tours to Tate Patrons. Both examples demonstrate different means of connecting with stakeholders. The former used a private tour to show the minister work to replace the frame of a masterpieces in Tate's collection. A sense of wonder and curiosity, sparked by a close encounter with the work of art and the highly skilled nature of its care, enabled the stakeholder to appreciate the complexity of Tate's task. Here a related and more unexpected anxiety emerged: the jeopardising of relationships by keeping the museum a sealed 'black box'.

An Art Handler meanwhile showed how direct contact with practitioners had the ability to recast the museum as a 'community' of dedicated individuals, of which patrons and donors might consider themselves a part of. It had the effect of strengthening emotional ties between stakeholders and the museum and making them feel like active participants. Implied by this discussion is the need for Tate to communicate the *right* and *most effective* stories to powerful stakeholders. Seeing people and spectacular processes of care and maintenance were preferred over showing more complex and less visually impactful processes related to time-based media works. It also adds further evidence to the argument that there is an inherent tension between providing exclusive and inclusive experiences.

A second group of (albeit less powerful) stakeholders were identified as artists. The impenetrability of Tate to apparent artworld insiders was revealed. Again, direct contact with collection care practitioners and knowledge of techniques was shown to have the perceived benefit of strengthening relationships with contemporary artists. Whilst relationships with powerful stakeholders were strengthened by providing exclusive experiences, encounters between artist and practitioners were cast as emancipatory in nature, helping to shift power from institution to artist. Crucially, a mediator between the museum and young adults revealed the inclusive potential of facilitating connections between prospective artists and Tate's collection care staff, but her observation was speculative, suggesting that whilst access for powerful donors was well established, young adults and artists were still 'locked' out of certain areas of the museum.

9.4 Balancing Relations with the Art Market

Tate's unescapable entanglement with the commercial art world was another area of concern for the institution, revealing in the process the impact of flows of cultural and economic capital from external stakeholders in two fields – the art market and contemporary art field. This section concerns itself with a single anxiety: showing proximity to the art market.

Making collection care work visible, particularly as it related to the monetary value of artworks, seemed to be particularly fraught as it tested Tate's standing and identity as a public body. These anxieties emerged in three interviews. When reflecting on their work assembling the audio tour, a collection care researcher sensed the threat that art market proximity might pose to Tate's core remit to be a public institution. They described what they felt was an occasional 'resistance to go digging' into the relationship between Tate and the market, which they thought might be related to 'probably a resistance to being seen as a commercial enterprise'.

The stakes attached to revealing the cost of works was confirmed by an anecdote from a Curator, who chose to relay, unprompted, the furore over Tate's purchase of Carl Andre's *Equivalent VIII*, a conceptual artwork comprising an arrangement of 120

bricks, acquired in 1972.⁶⁴ Following the release of Tate's annual report in 1976, the *Sunday Times*, and subsequent other titles, published articles that oscillated between outrage and ridicule at the cost of the work to British taxpayers (Simpson 1976:53; and Tate n.d.4).⁶⁵ Tate acted quickly to put the work back on display but it was vandalised by a visitor later that month and removed for restoration (Tate n.d.4). The context here is important; whilst Tate's annual accounts are 'transparent' in their presentation of the amount of money spent each year on acquisitions to the collection and archive, these figures become meaningful to the general public only when they are attached to the lives of individual artworks and woven into narratives about their material composition. With *Equivalent VIII* it is the rupture between the value of bricks as building material vs their value in the field of contemporary art that causes anger and alienation from the apparent excesses of the art museum.

The Curator and Collection Care Researcher reveal one significant point of difference between an 'art museum' and 'contemporary art gallery'. Their accounts imply that this is partly located in the idea of art as commodity. Here, Herrero's application of Bourdieu's notions of the economic and symbolic value attached to art objects becomes helpful (Bourdieu 1993, Herrero 2009). She explains that an artwork accrues symbolic capital through its integration into a prestigious museum or private collection, which Bourdieu locates in the 'field of restricted production'; whereas economic value is gained through commercial success in the 'field of large-scale production' – i.e., the realm of the dealer, the auction house, and the commercial gallery (Herrero 2009:914). These two forms of capital are not mutually exclusive but Tate, as a public body and national museum that emphasises art practice, learning, and public engagement with a collection of national importance (Tate Vision 2020-25), must emphasise the symbolic rather than economic value of its collection. To make knowable the monetary value of artworks is to undermine Tate's mission as a public museum. The episode is a reminder of the scrutiny placed on publicly funded museums as they spend taxpayer money to expand collections that must benefit the nation. This task becomes fraught when the (seemingly

⁶⁴ Carl Andre, *Equivalent VIII*, 1962. Firebricks, 127 × 686 × 2292 mm (Tate Collection, T01534).

⁶⁵ Tate spent £2,297 on the work in 1972. See Colin Simpson, The Tate Drops a Costly Brick, *Sunday Times*, February 15, 1976, 53. For an overview of the controversy see Tate, n.d.4. *The public: The Bricks controversy and 'Save the Stubbs'*, part of Archive Journeys. Available at: https://www.tate.org.uk/archivejourneys/historyhtml/people_public.htm [accessed 15 September 2023]

fantastical, to outsiders) economics of the art market rub up against matters of public taste, conceptions of authenticity, and judgements of artistic expertise.

The inherent tension between Tate's identity as a public museum and the extreme wealth attached to artworks at the level of contemporary art field arose again in my interview with a member of the Digital team. They explained that whilst their department 'didn't have as many hang-ups' about making collection care work visible – indeed, they felt it was a good way to make Tate more accessible – they also sensed 'I wouldn't say resistance, but an uneasiness around sharing things behind-the-scenes' from senior members of staff. Although they couldn't identify the source of this uneasiness, the participant later revealed a glimpse at one fundamental tension at the heart of the art museum, which may offer a partial explanation:

P: People seeing what happens when the museum is closed, I think really excites people. It's that whole kind of night at the museum thing as well though. There's a real kind of joy around the museum being a kind of closed repository of expensive works of art, and I think that - I think that it's hard to underplay the money side of things as well. I know a lot of people ask around value, and there's a lot of things that like - people holding paintings – a lot of comments on YouTube around don't drop it, you know, that kind of stuff.

I: Yeah.

P: So, I think that's quite an interesting angle and not something we've done too much about for many reasons, and I think there will be a lot of pushback around doing anything around cost of an artwork and the more kind of the economics of the art world. But that is something that we've talked about when we're thinking about social economic barriers to visiting Tate or interacting with our content and kind of bursting the bubble of that elitism or actually acknowledging the elitism, I should say but I don't think that's going to happen anytime soon.

The Digital Producer clearly articulates the irreconcilable position in which Tate finds itself: part of the allure of 'behind-the-scenes' content is predicated on the idea that the art museum houses a collection of priceless, hidden treasures waiting to be discovered, yet this hoarding of objects - that in the 'outside' world is synonymous with wealth, luxury and elitism – is what makes art museums simultaneously alienating and exclusionary (Jung 2014).

9.4.1 Summary

In this subsection I have addressed an anxiety that emerges from Tate's reluctance to be associated with the contemporary art market. I presented observations from staff that indicated that discussion of artwork acquisition and repair costs risked undermining Tate's identity as a public institution. Whilst Tate does not hide its yearly expenditure on acquisitions, attaching this information to individual works suddenly brought connections between Tate and the market into stark relief. Focusing on the economic value of the artwork was feared to detract from its symbolic value – and an anecdote from a curator seemed to support this. Indeed, the press at the time of the *Equivalent VIII* saga was able to harness the perceived overvaluing of the work as a way to call into question Tate's commitment to the public and paint it as an exclusive bourgeois institution out of touch with public notions of taste and value.

This had a knock-on effect on how collection care stories were encoded. When communicating the way an artwork lives in the museum, a researcher wondered whether there was resistance to including the part of a work's life that reveals its entanglement with the market. In addition, collection care's proximity to the maintenance of valuable works and the perception of the behind-the-scenes world as a vault of treasures was shown to be both the subject of public curiosity and a point of exclusion. As Jung has demonstrated, it is precisely the proximity of art museums to wealth that further alienated those excluded from the museum on socioeconomic grounds (2014). Thus Tate – and any art museum – finds itself in a bind between exclusivity and inclusivity. Where there is art with symbolic capital there is economic value, and where there are historic or modern art collections there are inevitably dealers, collectors, buyers, and lenders who reel the museum into the 'field of large-scale production' and the flows of capital that wash through it (Herrero 2009; Bourdieu 1993).

9.5 Protecting the safety and security of the Collection

I have demonstrated in the previous chapter that collection care practitioners operate in a high stakes environment in roles that encompass significant risk and responsibility – and are by their nature concerned with the preservation and longevity of the artwork. As such it was no surprise that the safety and security of artworks

necessitated the shielding of certain collection care processes from public view. In this instance preventing damage or loss presented as an ‘anxiety’ but must also be considered somewhat more tangible and measurable than the other categories discussed in this chapter; the consequences are clearly the theft, loss, damage or deterioration of physical objects.⁶⁶ Seven participants, spanning a range of different disciplines (collection care, mediation, decision making roles) directly referenced the careful considerations that had to be made in order to protect the collection.

A key decision maker in Collection Care noted the difficulty in giving audiences *physical* access to behind-the-scenes spaces, such as Tate’s stores, despite their desire to be more transparent:

It's actually quite difficult because of all the security issues to really bring people into collection storage.

They later added:

How do you show all of that whilst also, you know, continuing to function, to be secure, to reassure everybody that your known consignor status is not going to be breached?

In these extracts the participant exposes a fundamental tension between wanting to provide access and the measurable risk to the collection and, again, the government regulations and standards that Tate must adhere to. In this way we see how the safety and security of the collection, and the works currently under its care, is understandably a priority for Tate but also a means of tracing further connections with external stakeholders such as the government or lenders, who need to know that the nation’s collection, or their loans, are in safe hands. It is important, however, to determine what is meant by visibility in this instance. When reflecting on the interview in my research diary I wrote:

‘I was struck by the focus on the physical and the tangible. The role of the building and the physical spaces emerged as key actors. Our discussion was rooted in the material. What does this mean for ‘unruly’ artworks?’
(Research diary, 7 June 2021)

⁶⁶ In the 2022-23 *Board of Trustees of the Tate Gallery Annual Accounts*, a principal risk listed in the risk management section of the document is ‘Damage to or deterioration of Tate’s collection or works in Tate’s care leaving us in breach of our statutory rights’ (Tate 2023:45).

Visibility in this context thus appears to refer to the act of seeing the hidden spaces of the museum and physically encountering the collection and the people who work with it ('it's not easy to do because of our physical barriers and limitations'). Tate's sites (the four galleries and storage facility) are designed with security (amongst other factors) rather than visibility in mind and this is something that hamstrings Tate's ability to provide in-person experiences of the behind the scenes beyond a select few (e.g. Members, Patrons, politicians, researchers) at any given time. As one conservator put it when I asked them where the lines of visibility are drawn at Tate:

I'm just seeing the door. If you're at Tate Modern you have the door to the Art Handling, which is sort of a grey door next to the shop by the bridge, and you go through it and it's sort of like a portal to a different dimension. And of course, you know the building is just a reflection of who built it.

Risk of physical damage and breaches of security was less of an overt threat in RTC's materials that focused on making visible the more intangible aspects of the life and expanded networks of 'unruly' artworks; yet safety and security remained an ever-present concern. Whilst working on the *Lives of Artworks* display, I noted that we had to be alert to the processes and tools we showed in installation photos, lest any expose information that could potentially jeopardise the security of artworks. This inevitably curtailed the stories we could tell; as one mediator explained, during the audio tour edit, certain details about the transportation of an artwork were cut: 'We could speak about moving it around the gallery, but not kind of getting it places'. Such concerns have a knock-on effect on how materials are encoded and who is made visible. Two further mediators similarly described the limitations of showing the details of art handling work and how this had prevented them from featuring these departments more often. Anxieties around security thus make certain practitioners more difficult to surface and acknowledge – such as Registrars, Collection Management and Art Handling – and restrict the stories that can be told about their practice.⁶⁷ In my conversation with an Art Handler, for example, their extensive skillset became clear, encompassing an understanding of the material and

⁶⁷ I acknowledge that voices from members of these departments are also underrepresented in this project as I found it hard to recruit members from these teams. This may also indicate the high risks attached to their work.

conceptual nature of artworks, familiarity with engineering principles, and an extensive situated knowledge of the unique characteristics of the building ('anyone can pick up an object and move it around but you have to be - it's about knowledge really').⁶⁸ Perhaps due to their proximity to safety and security risks, it seems that art handlers, technicians and registrars are often not afforded the same complexity of representation which conservators receive. The intricacies of their work and the technical processes and tools used to achieve this, as well as their art historical knowledge and direct collaboration with artists, are wrought with institutional anxiety and thus often remain somewhat obscured.⁶⁹

9.5.1 Summary

This section detailed the important issue of ensuring the safety and security of Tate's collection and the artwork in its custody. This was shown to be a tangible and pragmatic threat for the gallery to consider when producing any kind of activity that communicated collection care activities and the world behind the scenes of the museum. Yet restrictions caused by the need to preserve and protect the artworks in Tate's custody had more complex effects than simply prohibiting certain content. Security concerns brought Tate's connections to external actors further into focus, with documents showing how the security of the collection and the care given to it were integral to the terms of Tate's relationship with the government and lenders. A member of the executive group explained the physical restrictions to providing access to the behind the scenes, leading me to consider how the buildings within which Tate operates are actors in the process of maintaining states of (in)visibility. I then reflected on my experiences as part of *Reshaping the Collectible*, and how anxieties around security and safety similarly shaped the content we produced. This determined, to some extent, how collection care work was encoded in mediational content, with those more closely involved with risk management and high-risk

⁶⁸ Laurensen has written that time-based media conservators must possess not only technical expertise but also 'an empathy with the work of a given artist' (2013:41). I add that art handlers also require a combination of artistic knowledge and technical expertise (though in different ways), yet they are often subject to more one-dimensional presentations in public facing content.

⁶⁹ The materials produced by *Reshaping the Collectible* and the *Caring for Art During Covid* film do try to overcome this, but one collection care participant thought they nevertheless struggled to find a place for complex risk management work.

activities appearing less regularly and in more one-dimensional ways that flattened the complex nature of their work and knowledge.

9.6 Summary: profiling the anxious museum

This chapter presented a series of benefits and anxieties, often paired, that pertained to Tate at an institutional level, helping to answer research question one. A tension emerged between a desire to become more inclusive by showing Tate as permeable and accessible with the need to give exclusive experiences for those who provide the museum with financial support ('balancing inclusivity with exclusivity'). Tate also sought to be a more open and transparent institution, but this desire was counterbalanced by a fear of reputational damage and opening itself to questing, resulting in a disjunction between staff calls for radical transparency and Tate's efforts to exert epistemic and pragmatic control through dashboard transparency. Closely related was the way making visible collection care processes offered ways to strengthen relationships with various key stakeholders, which necessitated the careful crafting of curated glimpses into the behind the scenes. Tate's difficult relationship with the art market was also a source of anxiety, intertwining with collection care during moments in an artwork's history where its economic value threatened to eclipse its symbolic value. Finally, I considered the important issue of protecting the safety and security of the artworks in Tate's care, a more pragmatic risk that created invisibilities and shaped what was seen in more subtle ways.

10. Phase 2: Decoding ‘behind-the-scenes content’ with young adults

In the previous chapters I outlined how (in)visibility operates at Tate, arguing that it becomes a currency of cultural capital between individuals and departments within the institution, who in turn advocate for themselves and their practices. From the perspective of Tate, efforts to communicate hidden work and disrupt established conditions of (in)visibility unfolded against a backdrop of pressure from external stakeholders at the level of different fields, which in turn provoked anxious responses from the museum. Yet communicating collection care also presented many benefits, providing opportunities for Tate to shape its identity and send positive messages to key stakeholders. Taken together, these findings described the conditions under which mediational materials are encoded by Tate. This chapter builds on this foundational analysis of Tate’s operation as an institution to explore the relationships between young adults and Tate and the impact that greater access to behind-the-scenes knowledge has on the young adult’s perception of art museums.

This chapter deals with how the young adult participants in this project interpreted (decoded) the materials presented to them (RQ3). To do this I combine three strands of theory to interpret the data. The overall scope derives from Hall’s model of encoding/decoding in order to understand the alignment between Tate’s intended messages and how young adults receive these (RQ3). I use the theories outlined in chapter 5.1 (elements of conservation theory and epistemic objects) to understand what is seen, particularly the relationship between people and artworks and how this is presented in the materials (Muñoz Viñas 2002; Knorr Cetina 2000). Following Hall’s logic that viewers decode meanings through their social context, I bring also bring in learning theories, using aspects of Wenger’s Community of Practice theory, particularly the actions that happen at the boundary of communities of practice such as ‘brokering’, ‘participation’ and ‘boundary crossing’, and Bourdieu’s concepts of Habitus and Cultural Capital to understand how participants’ relationships with each other, individuals and the museum might shape their readings of the materials (Wenger 2002; Bourdieu 1990).

This analysis is arranged into two sections. In the first section, I will briefly discuss the media presented to the young adult participants. Images can be found in Appendix II and their selection criteria is detailed in chapter 7 (Research design and Methodology). Hall describes how ‘tightly coded ‘rules’ exist whereby stories of a certain recognisable type, content and structure can be easily encoded’, and through this lens I will demonstrate how certain tropes about collection care work emerge and in some instances are subverted in Tate’s video and audio content (Hall 1973:6). This will help answer research question one: What does Tate believe it is providing audiences with behind-the-scenes content?

The second part of the chapter is organised into 2 subsections, aligning with the categories of ‘readings’ found in Hall’s encoding/decoding model (1973): negotiated readings, in which the viewer partially identifies the encoded meanings but combines this with their own interpretations; and oppositional readings, in which the viewer adopts a position against the intended meaning (ibid). Within these categories I combine discussion of the meanings identified by the participants in the materials with the context through which they arrive at these interpretations. For example, I found that many of the oppositional readings emerged from moments of tension with the museum, particularly when the participant sensed anxieties on the part of Tate or interpreted the context through the lens of their own relationship with the museum and experience of the art world. In short, this chapter deals with what is ‘seen’, how it is ‘seen’ and the effects this has on the young adult participants.

10.1 Encoding: the meanings and form of ‘behind-the-scenes’ content

Building on my identification of perceived benefits and anxieties, I contend that the forces applied to Tate through the intersection of various fields and the stakeholders that inhabit them also shape the encoding process and create the conditions for the production of new initiatives to increase transparency. To understand what is intended to be ‘seen’ and the messages attached to this, I reviewed the content of the videos and audio materials and used context provided by interviews with staff, documents and reflections drawn from my research diary. I then created categories to identify the actors involved in each video; the concepts of intersubjective and objective conservation from conservation theory to understand how collection care

work was presented in the materials (Muñoz Viñas 2002), and key ideas from my literature review, such as the notion of doctor/patient relationships, to understand the narrative arc of the materials (Brooks 2012). These categories can be found in Appendix VIII.

10.1.1 Core actors

I identified the people in the films that actively shape the meanings encoded. This included ‘speaking roles’, such as curators and conservators explaining their practices, as well as installation teams and visitors who although, only briefly glimpsed, still form part of the assemblage of actors that contribute to the narrative of the media and often ‘invisible’ actors such as a deceased artist or the Rothko vandal. Nonhuman actors presented a more complex group, chiefly because of their number and diversity. I determined the selection criteria to be those that most actively contributed to the ‘story’ being constructed in the film, exhibition or audio content. For example, this included the artworks themselves as well as scientific tools and technology used in conservation processes; the spaces of the museum such as laboratories, studios, stores and galleries that indicated the journey of a work from backstage to frontstage; and nonmaterial actors such as acquisition processes and webpages. The purpose of this process was to determine whether certain actors later played a more outsized role in determining how the young adults decoded the materials.

10.1.2 The relationship between people and artworks and approach to conservation

The two categories of the ‘relationship between people and artworks’ and the ‘approach to conservation’ are somewhat intertwined but nevertheless express different and important aspects of the encoding process. The former refers to how the human actors are shown to interact with and assemble around the artwork. The latter, meanwhile, describes the approach to the work carried out on an object regarding questions of authenticity and expertise. Taken together these categories determine the way collection care is portrayed.

The need to determine the presentation of collection care emerged from my literature review. I identified the films *Restoring Rothko* (2014) and *Conserving Lichtenstein’s*

Whaam! (2018) as displaying an objective approach to conservation, whereby care takes place in the closed realm of experts who ‘listen to the object’ in order to determine the process of conservation (Muñoz Viñas 2002:155-157). Yet despite the general scope of the care being one that is carried out by specialists in order to return the artworks to a more stable state that is as true to the original as possible, the two films depict a different organisation of the relationship between practitioners and artwork. The Lichtenstein film deploys the more dominant communication trope of a doctor/patient relationship between conservator and object, which Brooks argues presents the conservator as a ‘fix-it’ person rather than an active contributor to meaning making (Brooks 2012:333 and 335). The doctor-patient relationship implies a contained process, with a beginning and end; in the case of Lichtenstein, it is the process of cleaning the painting – albeit through ground-breaking nano-technology – to return the artwork to a state closer to its original, true form. For *Rothko*, however, in its durational approach that follows the work of conservator and scientist as they develop a strategy to repair and conserve the damaged painting over a period of 18 months, presents a very different relationship. Drawing on the work of Knorr-Cetina, Laurenson interprets the relationship on display in the Rothko film as that between practitioner and ‘epistemic object’, whereby through being the focus of scientific research the artwork becomes ‘open, question generating and complex’ (Laurenson 2016). Nevertheless, the overall arc of the film still ends with a return to the ultimate state of stability and originality.

The materials produced by RTC presented collection care as collaborative, expansive and unresolved; these were categorised as depicting networks of care, a concept first applied to net art conservation (Dekker 2014) and later expanded to explain how some contemporary artworks require lasting connections with ‘non-institutional stakeholders’ whose ‘distributed knowledge outside existing institutions’ is needed to ensure their preservation’ (Schäffler 2019:87). This distributed and porous vision of care often corresponded with a conservation approach that was intersubjective in nature, that positions the conservator as one of a number of actors who care for an object (Muñoz Viñas 2002:151-153; Sully 2007:40).⁷⁰

⁷⁰ The *Caring for Art During Covid* film presented an interesting anomaly in that it depicted an expansive and collaborative process of care for the wider collection but nevertheless presented a closed network, situated within the museum. To explain this, I opted for the category ‘closed network’, which I felt best described the collaborative but bounded and non-porous nature of the work.

10.1.3 Connotative meanings

The category connotative meanings is directly derived from Hall's discussion of the layers of meaning that exist in televisual media. If denotative meaning is what the film literally shows – i.e. the restoration of a Rothko painting – the connotative meanings are those which are 'structured enough to signify' but are more 'open-ended' than denotative codes (Hall 1975:13). In this project I have interpreted this as the layers of meaning, shaped by Tate's relationship with different stakeholders, that the museum encodes into the materials that make collection care visible. These were identified through interviews and fieldnotes. For example, a member of the executive office suggested that the Lichtenstein and Rothko films gave Tate an opportunity to celebrate the cutting-edge work of its conservation scientists; to represent this messaging I used the code 'pioneering research'. Similarly, my interview with a digital producer revealed that the *Caring for Art During Covid* film was intended as a way to build trust with audiences ('building trust'), to be open about the difficulties faced by the museum ('empathising with the museum') and its efforts to overcome them ('adaptable museum'). Meanwhile the codes 'complexity of artworks', 'managing change' and 'contributorship' are drawn from my research diary and pertain to the ideas at the heart of the Reshaping the Collectible project which run through many of the films and displays produced by the group. Each mediational material analysed comprises multiple connotative meanings; exploring whether the young adults' readings align with these meanings, oppose or extrapolate beyond them will help me understand how they interpret these materials, what they expect to see and where they and Tate might be aligned or in tension.

10.1.4 Summary

The analysis outlined in this section summarises evidence found in staff interviews, notes from meetings, and my own close reading of the media to present a summary of the context of production for the mediational materials and their encoded meanings on a denotative and connotative level (Hall 1975). This information is used as a basis to understand how young adults interpret (read) these materials and lays the groundwork for extended analysis of the social context of these readings and the relationship between participants and Tate. This will enable me to answer research

questions 3, which concerns how young adults respond to making collection care visible and what they expect.

10.2 Decoding meanings with young adults

The data analysed in this section was generated from my discussions with four young adult participants, each of whom were interviewed three times. I have taken a social constructivist approach to understanding the perspectives of the participants, which posits that the way individuals make meaning is influenced by their social and cultural contexts (Hohenstein and Moussouri 2018:26). This enables me to give a thorough account of the individual and deeply personal ways in which they interpreted the materials. Indeed, their personal interests and real-world experiences of participation through Tate's outreach schemes proved to be important factors in how they decoded content.

The contents of these interviews and the process of analysis are outlined in the Methodology chapter (See chapter 7 and Figure 7.2). Briefly summarised again here for context, the process of data collection comprised an initial interview to determine each participant's interests, background, and relationship with Tate; after which I shared the mediational materials with the participants to watch in their own time; this was then followed up by a second interview to discuss their responses to the materials. In our final interview we recapped on our discussion, and I presented the ideas and themes that I had identified in the first round of coding for their consideration, asking which they thought were the most important. Mind maps from my research diary are included in appendix VI, describing the ideas that emerged with each participant.

Taking into account their feedback, I returned to the data and incorporated the initial themes with my own second round of coding and sorted these into broader analytical categories, then organised under the headings 'negotiated' and 'oppositional' readings.⁷¹ For example, with Participant 1 we discussed the idea of 'accessing the museum' as something that was important to her and that she located in the

⁷¹ Turner argues that preferred readings rarely occur as they require the viewer to take the meaning of a text 'full and straight' by decoding the message 'in terms of the reference code it which it has been encoded' (Turner 2003:75). Most people, instead, produce negotiated readings (ibid). My findings concur with this statement, with participants operating between the positions of negotiated and oppositional.

Reframing Constable film whilst Participant 3 noted that visiting the *Lives of Artworks* display made her think about the idea of ‘seeing complexity’. To this I added my own data driven category ‘seeing the mechanisms of display’. combining these categories I developed the overarching theme ‘seeing the machine’ to describe how the processes and infrastructure of Tate became visible to the young adults, leading them to interpret Tate as an institutional machine of representation.

Reading type	Theme	subcategories	Instances
Negotiated	Seeing and understanding processes	• Future thinking • Futureproofing	3 2
	Relationship between art and science	• Process and experimentation • Seeing the ‘underbelly’ • Bridging in the gap between art and science • Intrigue and surprise	6 1 7 3
	Uncovering and celebrating staff	• Hidden skills • Seeing networks • Seeing collaboration	7 5 6
	Seeing the Machine	• Accessing the museum • Seeing complexity • Seeing the mechanisms of display	4 3 8
Oppositional	Mismatched temporalities	• Lack of/slow pace of change • Lack of urgency	2 3
	Seeing boundaries	• Secrecy • Surface vs depth access	4 2
	The institution doesn’t like to seem human	• Celebrating staff (lack of) • ‘The institution doesn’t like to seem human’ • Seeing the brand	2 5 4

Table 8. Thematic codes discussed in chapter 10 (See Appendix VII for a table detailing the coding categories and their origin)

10.2.1 Negotiated Readings

Seeing and understanding conservation processes and concepts in contemporary art

In the materials produced by RTC, which predominantly aimed to communicate the major themes of the research project – namely that artworks can be thought of as having lives; that they can be described as unruly presences in the museum; that they require networks of care to live; and that they cause us to rethink ideas of authenticity and stability – the participants were often able to describe and understand aspects of these core ideas. I found that the RTC concepts that the participants read and found meaning in tended to correspond to their cultural tastes, were sometimes conditioned by their relationship with Tate, and their understanding was enhanced by cross-comparing the materials. This analytical category emerged from bringing together Participant 1's idea of 'future thinking' and Participant 4's interest in 'futureproofing' and places where I noted instances of the participants 'understanding conservation concepts and processes'.

Participant 1 explained that in the Tony Conrad video the key meaning they took away was the idea of 'legacy':

P1: So, the Tony Conrad [...] So, with that clip I thought that the main kind of [...] - what I got from it was this whole concept of legacy. And enabling the art to be transmitted throughout generations. That was something that - information that I really – that stuck with me. A few things that really stuck with me from watching that, yeah, it was definitely how artwork is transmitted and what else did I write? And how it's transmitted through new generations and how then you still keep the artist's spirit in mind when you are thinking about the future and how this work is going to last, once you are not there or once the artist is not there - still allowing their spirit and their touch to be there and completely, you know, at the forefront of the work - but also understanding that as time goes on, things do deteriorate - but still holding on to the legacy of the artist. So, through the music because that was - it was a very different clip - all the clips were unique in their own ways, but this one I found to be interesting because it was from a music perspective. So that was like, then, a different way of kind of understanding, trying to pinpoint how to preserve a piece of work through sound.

Their identification of 'legacy', and the idea of conceptual and immaterial notions like the artist's 'spirit' or intentions, seems to be facilitated by their interest in music. The

participant describe how this passion was their initial route into the content, and in our first interview I noted that their definition of art was wide-reaching and multidisciplinary: 'I've always been into art; not specifically fine art, but art in a fashion aspect and a music aspect'. This expansive view of culture is in keeping with other studies that note how young adults' define art in ways that are broader and more flexible than museums (ART31 2018; Hughes and Moscardo 2019; Mason and McCarthy 2006). In Participant 1's description it is not the musical instruments themselves, or indeed the spectrum of individuals involved in the project, through which they describe the core ideas of transmission, change, and the plasticity of authenticity. Instead, it is the *sound* of the artwork that they see as its essence and through this the participant identifies a way to connect with and know the artist's intentions. In this way their cultural interests and the broad way that young adults often define 'art' is a way 'in' to the content, and perhaps facilitates their reading of the complex conservation ideas.

Whilst Participant 1 didn't make it to the end of the *What are Internet Artworks* film because they 'lost curiosity' due to its subject matter ('internet and tech ... it doesn't spark anything for me'), Participant 4 was able to accurately describe the core idea of networks of care in the life of net artworks after watching the video:

P4: The net-based art is kind of looking at understanding the use of tech and what are we really conserving. And we've touched on this in the conversation previously, but it's like what are you conserving? And before they were looking at conserving the brushstrokes, trying to understand how the artist created this artwork but also for example the constraints were the materiality, temperature, looking at more of those ways of conserving artworks. But now we have something digital on the internet space, so now we're looking at more of conserving networks. And the value of these networks and the security behind these networks.

They find meaning in the notion that net art requires a new set of conservation skills and approaches to ensure its longevity, and that much of this depends on preserving intangible networks and operating in a space beyond the museum. Participant 4's focus on the digital space, rather than the increasingly obsolete physical technologies that hold these artworks in the gallery, is, like Participant 1, in keeping with their personal interest in NFTs, VR technology and the advancements of AI.

However, it is also necessary to reflect on how their positionality on the periphery of Tate might impact their ability to read and apply these concepts. As part of the mentorship programme for young people, Participant 4's access to the workings of Tate was enabled through one-on-one contact with a staff member, which might be described as a 'boundary encounter' in community of practice terms (Wenger 2008:113). As they continued to talk about the net art film, Participant 4 described a conversation they had with their mentor about the conservation of VR artworks, and it became clear that having access to someone within the time-based media conservation 'community of practice' enabled Participant 4 to see how these processes might relate to their own professional goals and interests. Wenger describes how 'accompanied artefacts stand a better chance of bridging practices'; having prior conversations with their mentor about some of the key questions facing time-based media conservators was perhaps able to help Participant 4 better 'interpret the document and negotiate its relevance' to their own life (Wenger 2008:112). Indeed, as they later commented in our final interview, 'I've been through quite a few mentorships and what's different about this one is it's more focused on what I want to be and what I want to do'. In other words, it allowed for a true situated learning experience (Lave and Wenger 2002). Taking this into account it seems that access to a mentor, coupled with their interests and digital literacy, allowed Participant 4 to connect with the core ideas of this film, enriched their prior understanding, and opened this out, through the lexicon of conservation terminology, to enable them to question the fragility and instability of the digital world in a way that was meaningful to their own identity as a creative operating outside the museum.

Also important to note is the way all the participants cross-referenced the materials they engaged with and how this enabled them to better understand and differentiate between conservation disciplines. As I provided them with a list of content to choose from, it is unsurprising that they would draw comparisons and that this would influence the way they interpreted and formed ideas about different conservation practices. Participant 4 demonstrated this most explicitly as we continued our discussion of *What are Internet Artworks*:

P4: But I kind of found it interesting how, with Restoring Rothko, what kind of similarities and changes in process do we have in comparison to net art? So, it was a completely different set of I guess skillsets, which was interesting to

see and how, you know, we're going to start seeing an influx of kind of programmers into the art space. But not in the sense of, Oh, people who code or generate art, but rather restoring these artwork, which is really interesting as a sector itself.

Viewing the films in dialogue gave Participant 4 the space to tease out the different techniques and ethical considerations for paintings and time-based media conservators. Of additional significance is their reading of the networks of care holding internet artworks as more permeable, opening up the museum to people hitherto unconnected with artmaking – a distinct area of adaptation in the care of time-based media works.

I found similar instances of cross comparison between the material processes of paintings conservation and the more intangible qualities of time-based media care in my interviews with Participants 2 and 3, who both expressed an interest in performance works, which influenced their choice to listen to one of the audio tracks (*Conserving Uncertainty*) and watch the *Tony Conrad* film respectively. These negotiated readings raise the question as to whether engaging with a single film or audio clip in isolation would enable the same degree of nuance in understanding and alignment with the encoded meanings related to conservation concepts.

As Participant 1 discussed their responses to the audio clips, they indicated that considered side by side, the materials prompted them to think about the future of artworks, and the museum, in a more expansive way than they had previously considered; Participant 1 later called this 'future thinking'.⁷² Cross comparing materials then led the participant to identify some fundamental questions that they might take from the mediational materials and apply to their own work:

P1: Were their intentions for this to last forever? Like was that the intention? And then how do you keep that memory? How do you keep that just that whole intention of the art the – artist's intentions still in spirit.

I: Do you think – sort of thinking in that way that you're describing, do you think that would kind of impact now how you might work with or like, you know, with like artists who are working now, can you like see a sort of link with that?

⁷² Participant 1 couldn't remember which audio track she listened to, but instead referred to them as a curated group of content.

P1: Yeah. I definitely think it would definitely 100% help and support the relationship I would have with artists. This and the questions I would now ask and their hopes, I suppose, for their work in the future. And not just thinking the future in like 10 years, like really thinking into a whole new century - just not even a century, not 10 years like a hundred years. Like, is this something that you can - they really want to [...] - is this a long-time thing or is it just a temporary thing? What is the impact that you want to make years and years down the line when no one can speak for you anymore? Yeah, I think that was something that was mentioned in the Rothko clip, was that he didn't keep any records of his techniques, so that's what they found even harder when they were trying to restore it was that they just had to - that was the whole experimentation process, because they didn't know.

It is in the idea of an uncertain future – and the questions conservators must ask as part of their practice - that Participant 1 finds a toolkit of themes for their own work with artists. This indicates that perhaps they hadn't considered these ideas before and offers a glimpse into the potential benefits that making the approaches and ethical considerations of collection care practitioners visible might offer young people who pursue arts careers. Falk et al. explain that individual learning results from a combination of prior and new experiences (1998:mp); in the context of the care of contemporary artworks we see meaning making happen as a result of the ethical questions conservators tackle and the multifaceted nature of the artworks themselves, which are more closely aligned with the way participants engage with culture outside the museum.

The relationship between art and science: seeing art through conservation science

All of the participants commented that they were struck by, and interested in, the presence of scientists and scientific practices in the art museum. Moreover, themes that touched on the presence of science in the art museum were determined by three of the four participants as important to them in our final interview. This analytical category was developed by combining the themes discussed with participants that included 'processes and experimentation' (Participants 1 and 4), a sense that it was the laboratories that offered a glimpse of the real 'underbelly' of Tate (Participant 2), a desire to 'bridge the gap between' art and science (Participants 3 and 4), as well as a general sense of intrigue and surprise. In addition

to these co-constructed categories I added 'seeing the stakes' and 'connecting with the artwork'.

It was the Rothko film - which presented the most extensive view into the conservation science laboratories - that ignited the strongest responses in this category. The film proved to be a rich source of engagement for all of the participants, resulting in readings that suggested a multi-directional benefit of demonstrating scientific practices to an arts focused audience whilst simultaneously offering new ways of understanding the artwork through the scientific analysis of its materiality. Although the participants expected scientific processes to be involved in the conservation of paintings, there was a general sense of fascination and sometimes surprise around how intertwined science and art might be:

P1: I feel like maybe as a society you have such a kind of straight maybe like narrow minded idea of what is considered to be a scientist and maybe you don't always associate it with art. You maybe just associate it with health or space, for example. But when you include it within like the whole realm of art it comes in - it becomes something really interesting. So, I found that that really stood out to me.

For Participant 1, quoted above, this manifested as a way into science – considered through the lens of artmaking, it became more meaningful and perhaps more relatable.

It soon became clear that it was the narrative techniques and the relationship between people and objects seen in the Rothko film that resonated with the young adults and enabled them to read the film in ways that became meaningful to them. The sense of drama turned what was a comparatively long piece of content into a riveting narrative that effectively communicated the high stakes for the museum. Participant 2, for example, initially put off by the length of the film, became consumed in a storyline that kept them hooked in a way that was familiar to the way they consumed popular culture:

P2: It was very dramatic. It kind of reminded me actually a little bit of like a - like a crime scene, like a true crime programme for example.

Whilst this narrative structure worked to keep the young adults immersed in the content and engaged with the scientific practices, it also effectively communicated

the high stakes of the care work, both for the individuals involved and Tate itself, indicating how seriously the museum took its task to care for the collection.

Within the tense story arc, all four participants seemed to pay close attention to the physical tools and technology of science. When I asked them to describe what they watched, many recounted the processes and equipment used by the conservation scientists in the repair process in a way that was absent in their descriptions of the other films, which tended to focus on artists, the artwork, and ethical questions. Participant 4 said that their favourite part of the video was the new techniques they were made aware of, particularly the suction process used to pull the ink through the layers of painting, whilst Participant 3 was intrigued by the aging process used to create test strips of canvas that mimicked the original 1950s materials (Figures 10.1 and 10.2). This, Participant 3 said, conjured an image of ‘the underbellies of Tate Modern’ where there were ‘mad conservator scientists and like conservation scientists bubbling and brewing’; a very different Tate to the one they were exposed to as a Tate Collective Producer.

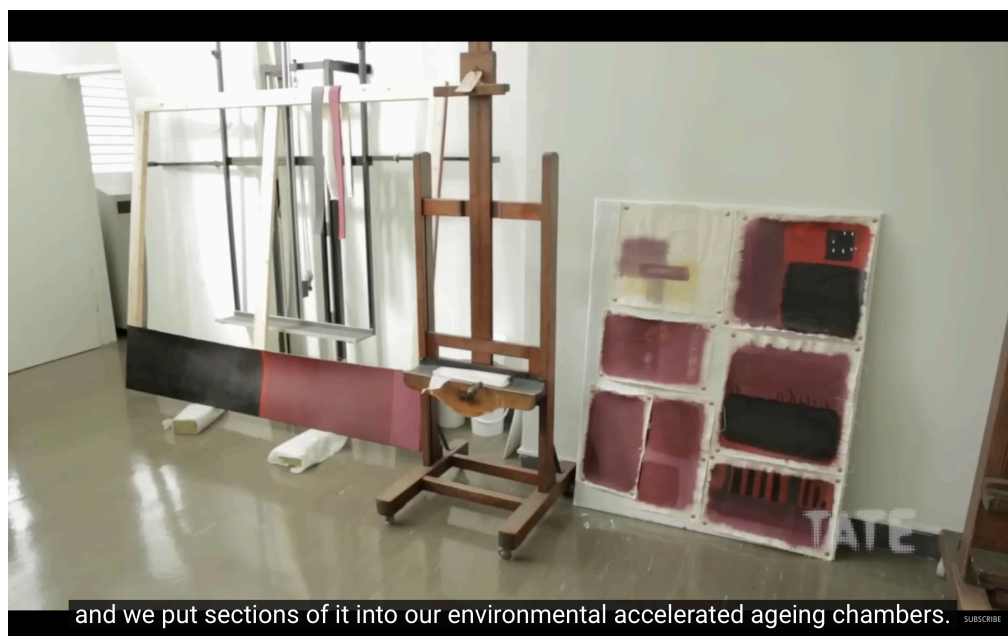


Figure 10.1 Screenshot from Tate, 2014. *Restoring Rothko* (00:02:40) Tate YouTube channel, 2014.



Figure 10.2 Screenshot from Tate, 2014. *Restoring Rothko* (00:02:43). Tate YouTube channel, 2014.

The convergence of all these themes is perhaps best demonstrated in an extract from my conversation with Participant 3, who, like their fellow participants, was absorbed by the Rothko film. As I prompted Participant 3 to discuss the content of the film and what interested them, an interplay between material, practitioner and emotion emerged:

I: And so, what would you say were the key points, the main sort of structure of it?

P3: Well, obviously the – I think it was the conservators figuring out the materials that went into Rothko's painting and also the ink and how they would interact with different solvents and stuff, and I thought it was really interesting because I didn't realise they made so many different samples of the work and aged it and stuff like that to test out the solvents on.

I: So, what was – what did you find interesting about it and was there anything that was new to you as well?

P3: Yeah so, I thought it was really interesting how it kind of seemed like conservators were in the – like bridged the gap between art and science because they had to be so considerate of the way the artist worked and how,

you know, they'd used the solvents etc etc. And I thought it was interesting how like all of the microscopes and you'd see so far into the painting, I thought it was really cool. Yeah, and they all seemed so – it seemed so important to them, and I feel like that's very – because it seems like they feel like part of the artwork because they – because it's so important to them, restoring it.

I: When you say it seems so important to them, do you mean the artwork, or their job or-?

P3: Kind of both because it seems like they're really passionate about restoring the artwork but also it seems like they have such a strong knowledge of all of the processes that Rothko used or that they didn't know he used. Yeah, and I think because they get so close to the painting, they're so intimate with it, like that woman that is so close to it every day, working on it, it feels like it's probably due to that personal connection with it

This extract presents a number of important interpretations. What begins as a description of the painting and its hidden material properties soon turns to the practitioners and their relationship to the artwork as a route in to finding meaning in the video. Seeing the work as part of an experimental and collaborative knowledge-making practice is in keeping with Laurenson's reading of the film as presenting the artwork as an 'epistemic object', a concept developed by Knorr Cetina in which objects of scientific experimentation become epistemic when they are transformed into open and unfolding entities around which expert knowledge is constructed by multiple subjects in a way that challenges the previous assumed stability of the object (Laurenson 2016; Knorr Cetina 2000). For Participant 3, the 'epistemic' work of the conservation scientist and conservator becomes a gateway through which to connect with an artist no longer able to speak and to feel a unique sense of intimacy vicariously through those that handle the objects. Seeing the conservators as 'part' of the artwork also suggests that Participant 3 connects with the clear demonstration of 'object love' that conservators feel (Geoghegan and Hess 2014). This is perhaps heightened through the directorial decision to present a parallel journey through hidden worlds – the viewer into the 'underbelly' of the museum (as Participant 2 described it), and then alongside the practitioners into the material 'secrets' of the artwork - that a connection is built between insider and outsider. In this way the staff, through their relationships with the artwork and their colleagues, become bridges between realms: that of science and art, novice and expert, artist and publics.

Uncovering and celebrating hidden staff

The participants all decoded the intended message to uncover and showcase the work of hidden staff at Tate. Within this analytical category I have included the theme of 'Hidden Skills' discussed with participant 1, and my own categories of 'Seeing Networks' and 'Seeing Collaboration'.⁷³ Although it was Participant 1 that explicitly identified this as an important theme in our final interview, all of the participants displayed indications that they found value in seeing a spectrum of roles at Tate and, equally importantly, how they interacted. Their interest seemed to operate on three levels: from a professional perspective, as a demonstration of the different roles that exist within an art museum; in reference to their own existing relationship with Tate through a sense of being able to see more fully how departments interlinked; and the idea of creating community and giving credit and elevating hidden people with valuable skills whose contributions might otherwise be overlooked.

For all the participants there was a general sense that seeing collaboration across departments was initially surprising and prompted positive responses. The audio trail episode *Installation as a Team Sport*, perhaps unsurprisingly, effectively communicated the idea of collaboration to Participant 4:

P4: This was really nice because it shed light on the efforts of installation teams and how many people are needed. So, for example, there's even an official, you know, kind of, outline of how many people are needed to handle artwork, and it's like two people are holding the artwork and the other is there to guide them. So, it's from the jump it's already team-based and kind of communication based. So, what's nice is it explored all of the kind of stages in just handling the artwork. Because I think in that first instance you think it's just moving artwork onto a wall but it's more than that because it's also context considered, lighting, everything. So, it's nice because you see this amalgamation on sectors coming in to solve one problem.

In their answer Participant 4 shows that he understands that installation is collaborative but also that it is part of an invisible *network* of activity; the highly skilled

⁷³ In my mind maps in Appendix VI, the theme of 'celebrating people' is also included – this led to an oppositional reading which will be explored in section 10.2.2

work of the human actors intersects with non-human actors to create the conditions of display. In other words, what is made visible to the participant is that knowledge production happens as the result of a communal and networked effort (Sutherland and Acord 2007:126). Furthermore, it appeals to their interest in a more interdisciplinary consideration of art: in our first interview Participant 4 indicated that they felt museums were too narrow in the way they categorised the world, with art museums in particular presenting art as something bounded and discrete from other disciplines. Seeing networks shows 'other sectors' coming together, which better reflects Participant 4's understanding of how culture is constructed. Furthermore, their reference to communication and problem solving perhaps also intersects with the participant's interest in digital networks and creating community⁷⁴. Indeed, I found that Participant 4 and both TCP members (Participants 1 and 2) referred a number of times, across all their interviews, to the value they placed in building communities with their peers at the periphery of the museum and acting as 'boundary crossers' and 'brokers' for those outside the institution (Wenger 2008). Interested in this idea of creating networks, elevating those who they felt were excluded from the museum and finding points of permeability, it seemed that seeing truly collaborative work where non-art historical disciplines were highly valued, was particularly meaningful and a point of connection with the content.

Participant 2, however, provided a slightly different reading of the same audio material. Although they too appreciated gaining a greater understanding of the collaborative nature of installation work, the participant found the metaphor of a football team jarring:

P2: And then yeah, the other one which was about art handling and yeah again them talking about how art handling is a team sport [laughs] and relating that to like football. I was like, OK, cool yeah.

I: What did you think of that analogy?

P2: What, football as an analogy?

I: Yeah.

⁷⁴ My use of community here is intended to align with Wenger's definition that a community is formed through a shared and interrelated engagement in practice (Wenger 2008:76).

P2: I mean what it made - what kind of jumped into my head at first was the preconception of what - who an art handler is. They're normally like straight men.

I: Yeah.

P2: So, I was like of course you're going to use football as an analogy here, aren't you? But removing football as the analogy and just saying it's a team sport or it's a team - it's a collaborative activity sure, 100%.

Participant 2's critique acts as reminder that not all network metaphors are successful or, for that matter, inclusive. Where the encoded message is intended to create a familiar image of teamwork, Participant 2 is alerted to the traditionally masculine nature of art handling, creating a barrier. Their perceptiveness to the gendered nature of the work recalls my conversation with an Art Handler (Section 9.1.1), who had taken action to make the profession less male dominated. Both their on the ground experience and Participant 2's reading are testament to the need to consider where existing barriers to participation lie (with the acknowledgement that each division of collection care presents a different set of exclusions) and design narrative codes that work to address this rather than uphold barriers.

Positive responses to seeing collaboration seemed to be magnified by the lack of access the young adults had to collection care. It was the image of a group of staff members working together to install a painting that stood out to three of the four participants in *Caring for Art during Covid*. For Participant 1, it was the metaphor of installation work as orchestral in nature that was most striking:

P1: There was a quote that someone said about how he felt as though he was like leading an orchestra. Everybody had their own role to play, but everybody's part was so necessary in order to keep like the music flowing and that was something that I really - I really liked to hear and it just kind of made everything fall into place. But that idea of collaboration, I think, is so paramount to the process of conserving artwork. It's not just one - one person, it's when you consider like the media side or the sculpture side, or like the fine art, there's so many different professions that have to come in order to really, successfully preserve a piece of work.

It is notable that even as a TCP, with a considerable amount of privileged access to Tate's processes compared to other young people, this sense of collaborative care work was new to Participant 1. I found a similar pattern in my interviews with

Participants 3 and 4, who both expressed an interest in collection care work and had general assumptions of what the work entailed but had not been able to fully appreciate the depth and breadth of skills required to install an exhibition.



Figure 10.3 Screenshot from Tate, 2020. *Caring for Art During Covid* (00:02:06). Tate YouTube channel, 2020.

Later in our conversation, when I asked Participant 1 how they, as a producer, might go about communicating collection care work, their answer focused on celebrating the people of Tate rather than communicating any particular practices or techniques:

P1: I feel like they're always in the shadows. Maybe that's like what - how it is and there's no reason for them - that's how the institution feels, like they - that's their space, and they know that they're comfortable and you know, really, being the cogs and the mechanics of everything behind the scenes. But I just feel like being a visitor coming to the gallery, there's never an appreciation shown or like comments or just at least like a section dedicated to the conservationists [sic] regarding the amount of work that they put into that's made this happen. So that would be nice to see from the Tate; to see more of an appreciation but an outward appreciation, not just like an in-house. Because I feel like from me being involved in the art world for the amount of time that I have, and I still didn't know a lot at all about this part of the industry. Who is to say that somebody just visiting because their favourite artist is

exhibiting, is going to think about how it got to where it is? So, I think it would be great as well as like an educational tool to just let people know [...] that this is something that exists and it's not just staff getting builders in to put up a piece and just to hammer up a nail and hang up, you know, a frame on the wall, but there is actually a whole team of people working to ensure that everything is done precisely and how the artist would have wished.

Participant 1's answer reveals the importance of seeing people in the mediational materials and their desire for more staff-lead content. They display a nuanced understanding that practitioners may be uncomfortable with being on show but nevertheless think there should, and could, be ways to give credit and 'appreciate' their work. Again, we can read this as related to the shared interest among all the young adults in community building and uplifting people. The lack of TCP access to collection care is mentioned explicitly, indicating that a barrier exists. Participant 1's mention of the artworld – which we might read as the field of art more expansively – hints at an additional barrier originating beyond Tate. Again, we see evidence of visibility playing a part in cultural capital accumulation for practitioners. If collection care practitioners are often invisible and perhaps imbued with less cultural capital at the level of field, it is of no surprise that young adults involved in the culture industries are unfamiliar with their practices. The solution that Participant 1 envisions is a way to remedy this power imbalance, from the inside out.

Seeing the 'machine': understanding Tate's role in shaping knowledge

This final category pertains to the notion that communicating collection care work contributes to the ability of the museum as a whole to be legible to the young adults. Included here are the themes, 'accessing the museum' (Participant 1) and 'seeing complexity' (Participant 3) and 'seeing the mechanisms of display'. This analytical category is strongly linked to the previous discussion of celebrating hidden staff and work, and at times explicitly intersects, but refers to a wider sense of the processes and infrastructure (physical and nonphysical) of the museum itself. Rather than just a network of people, it pertains to the way the young adults read the mediational materials as revealing something about how the art museum operates as 'a machine' that produces what we see as 'art' (Dominguez Rubio 2020). In other words, it indicates moments where 'black boxes' come into view.

Participants 1, 2 and 3 interpreted mediational materials in ways that caused them to extrapolate out into considering the wider environment of display and reconsidering their place within it. After watching a sculpture conservator talking about the difficulty of preserving the organic props used in Rose English's performance *Quadrille*, Participant 2 began to wonder about the ways Tate displayed works:

P2: it's the same in Tate, it's the same in the British Museum, they have - well especially in the British Museum - they have artifacts that are over 1000 years old and they're in display cases with like heat sensors and blah blah blah. And I - like, we're always super curious about, you know, what's happening in this box. How do you contain this object in a particular environment? Why does it need that - blah, blah? I want to know all these things.

The participant indicated that they felt the film could have gone into more detail and they wanted to know more about the processes of preserving such unusual materials, a view that is indicative of her concern with 'surface vs depth' insight, a subject to which they returned in both our second and third interview. It is notable that they makes connections between Tate and the British Museum, positioning Tate as part of a larger museum-scape that keeps and displays objects in a 'black-boxed' infrastructure of display that is never wholly explained to visitors.

Participant 3 also became more aware of the physical structure of the museum, its layout, conventions of display and behaviour. They was able to visit the *Lives of Artworks* display and it was here that Participant 3 realised the 'complexity' of an artwork. Rather than the content of the display, however, it was the overall effect of the room that communicated this to them (Figure 10.4):

P3: It's like it's quite a testament to how complex artworks are if it takes a whole room just to explore one of them.



Figure 10.4 View of *The Lives of Artworks* display (wall diagram) (Photo by Ellen Pavey).

Although they spent time in the display, and visited the installation by Ima-Abasi Okon, Participant 3's answers indicated that it was the somewhat overwhelming *feel* of the room that shaped their reading of the display, which was not the intention of the project. After spending time in the display, they did find two of the core concepts interesting ('future lives' and 'intellectual lives') which in turn led them to consider the way art museums have set ways of displaying and prompting visitors to think about art:

P3: Yeah, I like the thought of the 'future life' of an artwork, as well. I guess that's kind of linked to conservation as well. And I hadn't thought of the importance of the space in the [inaudible] artwork as well, and I liked how it felt like a space for discussion, that room. Because I think that's kind of lacking in some art galleries because I feel like art should be discussed. There

are so many different ideas that come from one artwork, but art galleries don't really enable that generally.

Participant 3 later explained that their reading of the space as discursive referred to the presence of handwritten/drawn cards created by visitors in response to prompt questions provided by the RTC team (Figure 10.3).⁷⁵ Their observation is important for this analytical category because it reveals a negotiated reading that understands one of the core research threads that artworks have lives shaped by the ideas people project onto them, but also makes visible the way that art galleries fail to encourage this or provide the scaffolding or tools – in the exhibition signage or the structure of the gallery itself - to think about individual works in this way.

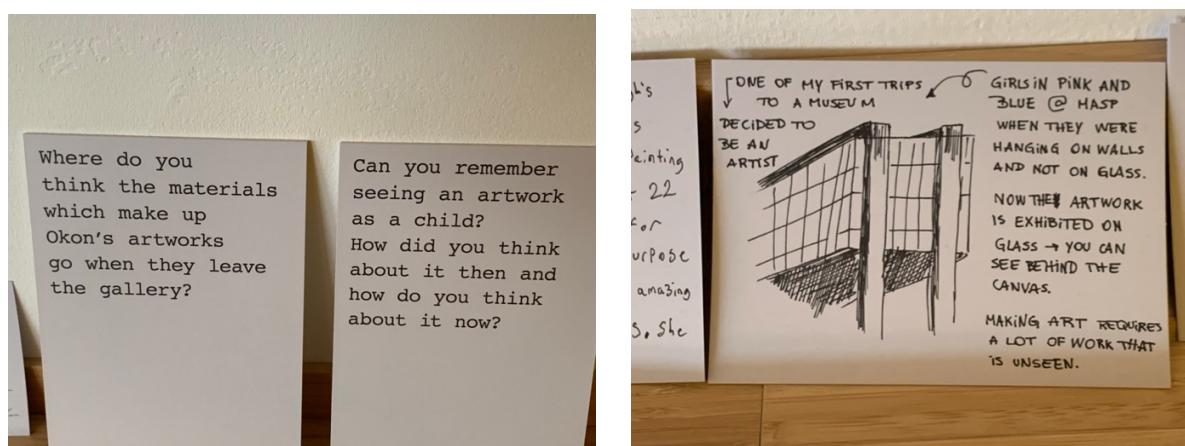


Figure 10.5 Questions from the RTC team as part of the 'future life' section of the *Lives of Artworks* display and an anonymous visitor response. (Photo by Ellen Pavey).

Participant 1 was also inspired to reflect upon the mechanisms of display and extrapolated out from this to think about their own physical experience in the space of the museum. After watching the *Rose English* film, I asked Participant 1 if they'd previously thought about how performance works interact with the museum. They

⁷⁵ Whilst the example card included in Figure 10.3 represents a response that directly engaged with the questions, I noted in my research diary that the majority of cards featured drawings or musings that were disconnected from the display. Although this indicated that many visitors didn't respond to (or even read) the prompt questions it did speak to a general desire to share and communicate ideas about art between visitors, corresponding to Participant 3's reading.

explained that it was a completely new idea for them and, crucially, it prompted reflection on what a museum *is*:

P1: I think it's quite easy to yeah, just have the perception of a gallery, museum being a very still place that you walk around, and you observe, and you don't necessarily watch something, you just look. I think the difference between watching and looking, I haven't really thought about too much, but then yeah, this short film, I think you can definitely start to wonder how do you still give such a performance piece like that a space in the gallery where it's not going to be performed anymore? How do you still build that excitement or give credit to a performance piece that's not going to be performed? It's now like in the gallery to - for people to observe. But how do you kind of recreate that energy on the day, in a still place?

Participant 1 describes the fundamental elements of the life of an unruly artwork in the museum, and through this, reflects back on the relationship between viewer, object and space. Their focus on the museum as a place of apparent 'stillness' is important and reveals something of the ways unruly artworks could offer possibilities of disrupting the very aspects that make a museum feel intimidating or unknowable. In our first interview, Participant 1 explained that being a TCP was important to them because it had made the art museum 'more fun'. They previously thought Tate housed 'structured art that doesn't really reflect or relate to us as individuals', particularly as members of minority groups, but through participating in the TCP programme (read as a community of practice operating at the boundary of the museum) they learned ways of looking, interacting and analysing the collection 'that are more relatable to us'. This contextual information suggests that Participant 1's use of the word 'still' might represent the ways in which museums are intimidating and uncomfortable (i.e. not 'fun').

The extract above was matched by a wider tendency by Participant 1 to use the materials to reflect back on their own physical experiences in the gallery, as if seeing the infrastructure anew despite the time they'd already spent at Tate. At times the participant guided our discussion towards thinking about the invisible relationship between themselves and the artwork and describing how they became alert to the way the museum 'frames' (literally and figuratively) its collection. This emerged most explicitly through the theme of damage in both the *Rothko* film and the audio clip that dealt with the restoration of a damaged Picasso painting:

P1: It makes sense to me now why there's so many like signs up like 'Don't touch this' or you know, why things are kept in glass cabinets or, you know, they have the little guards around them, because just by being in that space and breathing, it's affecting the work.

In this response Participant 1 describes a version of 'seeing networks' that includes themselves as a contributor to the 'life' of an artwork, simply through her existence in the museum space. Interestingly this reading is not unrelated from RTC's intentions to alert audiences to the wider networks within which contemporary artworks exist, but it is unexpected in that it is partly inspired by a video produced long before the project's inception (Restoring Rothko). Their new attention to the way artworks degrade, to their vulnerabilities and materiality, is strongly reminiscent of Domínguez Rubio's discussion of the inherent, invisible 'thingness' of works of art and their uncontrollable, inevitable trajectory of decay – which all museums must fight against and conceal (Domínguez Rubio 2020:4). We can interpret the examples in this theme as pertaining to making visible the art museum as a 'machine' of sameness, dedicated to the constant maintenance required to keep objects as works of art and not 'things' (Domínguez Rubio 2020:5 & 10).

10.2.2 Oppositional Readings

Although all of the participants showed instances of interpreting the materials in ways that aligned with the intentions of Tate, Participants 2 and 4 took oppositional positions at times. This was not unexpected; Turner explains that reading positions are not discrete and that 'texts can change meanings and be worked on by their audiences' (Turner 2003:76). I found that the participants might occupy more than one reading position during our conversations, moving from a negotiated interpretation of a single film or particular concept (such as understanding conservation practices) before pivoting to an oppositional reading of more expansive messages, such as seeing barriers where Tate intended to highlight entry points into the museum. Thus, the oppositional readings that emerge in this section should not be viewed as contradictory to the negotiated readings presented in the previous section, but rather as further insight into the multifaceted way that the young adults make meaning from the materials, which is in turn connected to their often-ambivalent relationship with Tate.

Mismatched temporalities

A sense that Tate moves too slowly was common to Participants 2 and 4, who both linked the materials they saw to wider issues of change and stasis in the museum sector. This category combines the theme 'lack of/slow pace of change', identified by Participant 2 as one of their most important issues, and the 'lack of urgency' that emerged as a category in my conversation with Participant 4. This was in direct opposition to Tate's intended message to show itself as a place of pioneering research that was managing and adapting to change. During our second interview, when I asked Participant 4 to tell me about the materials they watched, the participant concluded by reflecting on the general sense of slowness they found across all of the materials:

P4: And its interesting, one thing I didn't find in the video – in any of the videos – was the urgency in conservatorship [sic]. I feel like the videos expressed a very slow pace. And I feel like that makes sense in a marketing side to express this calmness associated with Tate and galleries etc. But like to really get a message across, I think you have to touch upon the pain points of like, yeah, the technology is advancing, what then happens – what if that technology is too expensive for institutions to even access?

The point of opposition here arises in the participant's recognition that a deliberately slow pace is emphasised in many of the materials, which they find jarring in comparison to the urgency of many of the issues facing the creative sector today. Furthermore, Participant 4 reads the calm and deliberate tempo as evidence of the Tate 'brand' trying to manage the narrative in a way that upholds the image of the gallery as stable, authoritative, and in control – and perhaps even indicative of a state of denial (anxiety) on Tate's part (avoiding the 'pain points'). In our third interview I presented the theme of a lack of urgency or dynamism as one that had emerged in my initial round of coding and asked for Participant 4's feedback. They agreed that this was important, adding:

P4: So, I think with the overtones of a majority of these videos is it's a very calming – it's a very like slow process. Even when I look into the editing of it, it's like you know there's – on YouTube I actually sped it up to 1.5 and it's like it was just taking a long time to get to the point. So, I feel like they spent a lot of time trying to portray like it is a story and it is a process, but I think what's

lost in that is this message of urgency. Like is that even a message you want to portray? What is even the decision making before making these kinds of videos to explain a process? Shouldn't there be an opportunity to send a message with these videos and kind of like highlight like issues for example of urgency. And I think the big – the conversation here really is how important is conservatorship [sic] to institutions? That's really the differentiating factor here, whether an institution decides to put it as a main issue or not.

In returning to the theme, Participant 4 pushes their observation further, drawing a link between urgency and systems of institutional value. They move beyond reading the content of the films to consider the decision-making process involved in their production. They see the decision to present conservation as a slow process to be indicative of Tate's designation of conservation as of lesser value within the institution. This is in direct opposition to the assumed benefit of making the invisible visible as a way to elevate the status of conservation and collection care work. Interestingly, Participant 4's objection to the way conservation is portrayed shows the value they places both on the work of this department and the relationship with their Collection Care mentor, whilst simultaneously revealing a tense relationship with Tate as an institution; particularly in the way it seemingly functions as a monolithic arbiter of value and taste.

Participant 2 had a similar relationship with Tate, remarking many times that they felt the museum was too slow to react and change and that this was a source of frustration. Rather than in response to a particular material, this was a theme that developed throughout our conversations and was the frame through which Participant 2 experienced Tate. In our final interview they summarised this succinctly when I asked what they thought a more transparent museum might look like:

P2: Tate couldn't do it because it's far too big. There's just way too many cogs in the machine. So again, going back to the conversation about change, like that's it: it's so slow, so slow. We're just going to leave that, like, 'you do your thing, you'll catch up when you catchup'.

The sense of mismatched temporalities that the participants describe adds another dimension to Mason and McCarthy's argument that museums fail to align with the ways young adults experience the world and consume culture (Mason and McCarthy 2006).

Seeing barriers

For Participants 2 and 4, the materials sometimes brought the barriers they experienced at the boundary of Tate into sharper relief. Common to both participants was the perception that a sense of secrecy and impenetrable barriers of access surrounded Tate and the artworld more broadly. This was in contrast with Tate's intentions to show the museum as open, trustworthy, or caring. Participant 2 spoke about this at length in our final interview (the theme of 'secrecy' arose 4 times in our conversation). Reflecting on seeing the 'underbelly' of Tate in the Rothko film, they then steered the discussion towards the wider theme of secrecy. The films, Participant 2 thought, gave us 'just a hint' of what went on behind the scenes:

P2: I was just wondering and thinking why that is and I think again about this idea of - of the institution, what is the point of the institution and the gatekeeping of the institution? It is exactly that, to be honest with you. These places of higher power, I guess, are wrapped in secrecy and there's this air of mystery that they like to keep in order to definitely have people come back.

Secrecy, they perceived, was a conscious decision. Because of its deliberate nature, the best comparison was to 'magicians':

P2: they're not going to tell you the tricks of the trade because that's their trade.

It is important to discern who Participant 2 sees as the weavers of this 'blanket' of secrecy (their own choice of words). It is seemingly not conservators, nor other collection care professionals that control this, but rather a symptom of a larger institutional impulse to protect itself from criticism, guard its borders of access and prevent participation. This is reflected in the participant's choice of language: Tate is a 'higher power' and its 'trade', they seem to suggest, is knowledge construction that cannot be shared with outsiders. In short, it is the anxious museum that creates this sense of alienation.

It was the Rothko video, and the work of the team in it, that was able to reach across this divide and have a profound impact on Participant 2's thinking:

P2: This is why I'm so glad that Rothko video exists and that lives in my brain every day. And I think about it very frequently, because it does really show you the nitty gritty of how difficult this job is - like the intricacies that you have

to go down to on a molecular level in order to repair a piece of work. And I really salute that particular video because that really does show, and for me, like allows me to respect the people who do that, respect the artists a lot more. And I wouldn't say respect the institution per se, but like respect the community around that allows that to happen. Yeah, so that kind of visibility: great. But in actuality other than that, like there really isn't very much.

In this instance they positively receive the message of communal practice around an epistemic object (Knorr Cetina 2000) and the participant appreciates the skill of the practitioners and the sense of collective care that Tate staff were themselves key to portray. Yet recasting the artwork as an epistemic object also makes visible the structures of knowledge that she perceives Tate to be withholding. What is seen is merely a glimpse that conversely emphasises the blockages to their full participation at Tate. Participant 4 felt similarly. Directly following the extract quoted in the previous section - which revealed their experience of mismatched temporalities – Participant 4 added: ‘institutions are moving like a gated community and keeping their secrets to themselves’.

Expanding her discussion of secrecy, Participant 2 then considered the ‘secrecy’ that existed across the museum sector and in conjunction with the field of contemporary art. Like ‘Tate and the National Gallery’ and others, secrecy was ‘the point’:

P2: Where I am right now and what I'm trying to do in terms of the future, like it makes it really difficult to be honest with you. It makes it really difficult to understand how you're supposed to - not even supposed to, but how you could get into a place, into an institution like that when a lot of the pathways, a lot of the hierarch - I mean hierarchy is not the right word, but even just like the job roles and how everyone works and what everyone does, is so shielded [...] and very secretive.

Here, cultural capital – and the difficulty in acquiring it - comes into play (Bourdieu 1995). Participant 2's oppositional reading was shaped by their real-world experiences. In their encounters with the artworld, it was often through knowing the right people (“I knew that guy who knew that guy”) that they saw pathways open up for others. At Tate, meanwhile, the staff ‘were not secretive on purpose’ but they often received the same frustrating answer: ‘it just happened’. Participant 4 displayed a very similar sentiment in our last interview. They explained to me that they thought

transparency was just as important as inclusion for museums, but wondered how far Tate could really go, beholden as it is to the rules and conditions of the wider art world:

P4: I think that would be too conflicting because I think the art world is propped upon, you know, being hidden, isn't it? Everything being hidden, money - you know.

Their accounts are reminiscent of Bourdieu's argument that the field of cultural production (which I argue is akin to the organisational field and the field of contemporary art) 'is a site of struggles in which what is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer and therefore to delimit the population of those entitled to take part in the struggle to define the writer' (Bourdieu 1995:42). The implication is that being shut out from knowledge of the workings of the museum – and to the people in it – results in the prohibition of further cultural capital that would enable them to better navigate access to careers in the museum and artworld. If the field of contemporary art acts to limit access and participation to the creation of art, then Tate, situated as it is within the field, struggles to overcome this.

Participant 2's reflections form part of their ambivalent and, crucially, emotional connection with Tate.

P2: Tate, for me, is so personal, and it's such a space where I figured out the beginnings of what I wanted to do. It's a space of opportunity, it's a space that's given me so much opportunity. But then it's also – sometimes when I'm there I feel so disconnected to it at the same time. Because again, I still don't feel like I know what's going on.

In this revealing passage they display the complex nature of emotional currents in institutional work. Participant 2's ambivalent relationship with Tate is illustrative of Voronov and Vince's observation that marginalized agents often retain investment in the institutional order and continue to believe that the 'game is worth playing' at the level of field (2012:65). This investment appears to be tested though by the limits of visibility. The barriers to truly knowing how Tate works has weakened the participant's relationship with the museum. Although learning more about conservation work *did* positively impact their connection to Tate (they told me they thought about the Rothko video on a regular basis), but the films didn't go far

enough. Notably, Participant 2's observation is aligned with the goals of the staff interviewed for this project, who also identified a problem in access to careers in the museum and hoped that communicating the hidden work of collection care might help to remedy the very exclusions Participant 2 experiences. This indicates that integrating greater access to collection care work as part of a wider strategy of 'radical transparency' could have significant effects on strengthening the relationship between young adults and the museum, augmenting the access they already receive.

A second dimension of 'seeing barriers' occurred during moments when the participants reflected on their relatively privileged position at the periphery of Tate (despite the secrecy they encountered), in comparison to their peers. Both Participant 2 and 4 noted that whilst they had some degree of access, others were shut out. This was indicated in the category 'gatekeeping'. During our second interview, where they reflected on the group of materials as a whole, Participant 4 wondered whether they were more able to see *the invisibilities* (read: barriers) because they already had a certain degree of access to the museum. Participant 4 explicitly linked this to jobs: 'what about people who aren't in Tate Collective? What about the young kids that want to know and want to be a part of it?'. Participants 1 and 3 – although not in the form of oppositional readings – similarly expressed a desire to take on a boundary-crossing role for their peers (Wenger 1998). This might at first seem to counter the sense of 'secrecy' described above, but it should be interpreted as further evidence of the difficulty in penetrating the layers of invisibility within Tate and the participants' passion to open routes in for others.

Finally, within this theme, was the sense that the materials didn't go far enough. All the participants wanted to learn more, to ask further questions and embark on their own journeys of discovery. Yet for Participants 2 and 4, the containment of the resources they saw – the compact stories told in the films, the ostensibly bitesize and accessible introductions to new ideas – merely made visible a barrier to further knowing. Participant 2 wanted to remain 'in the moment' that the audio clips created, whilst Participant 4 thought that the materials were designed to make the viewer want to know more but ultimately 'it feels like it was just a boxing-ticking exercise'; they saw no links to further resources, no interactive or discursive content. This is somewhat symptomatic of the restrictive conditions of the pandemic and the single

list of materials I gave them, but the participants were nevertheless perceptive of a lack of joined-up audience focused content. As I noted in chapter 8, in-depth materials, particularly time-based media conservation content, tended to be circulated within a professional community of practice ('by conservators and for conservators' (Dominguez Rubio 2020:39) and, without prior knowledge of what to search for on the Tate website, were hard for outsiders to find. For the young adults, this felt like a deliberate curb on their curiosity and exploration, furthering the sense that the materials were just a token gesture of visibility.

'The institution doesn't like to seem human'

This category is derived from Participant 4's declaration that 'the institution doesn't like to seem human' (a theme that they identified as very important) and my later categorisation of instances where participants seemed to 'see the brand'.

Accordingly, it is Participant 4's testimony that makes up the bulk of this section. Many of their oppositional readings fell under this category and were seemingly caused by a perception that Tate struggled to balance 'celebrating' staff and individuals with maintaining the authority and singularity of the institution. This corresponded to many of the institutional anxieties I identified in chapter 10.

After watching *Caring for Art During Covid*, Participant 4 appreciated seeing the range of roles featured but they felt the film didn't go far enough in celebrating people. Rather, they felt the overall sense was polyphony in service of upholding a Tate brand that felt overly slick and alienating:

It showed me the different people within the institution, but it still felt very synthetic to me. It felt like they approach it as marketing.

They later added:

Why aren't there parts of the site where you can ask questions and people within the respective teams can reply to it? And it's like wouldn't that be interesting to understand if I'm trying to champion, for example, an art technician, the only way I can really champion the art technician is by giving him a voice and letting him explain.

Participant 2 somewhat agreed, noting that they preferred *Restoring Rothko* because it didn't have the 'rebrand Tate aesthetic' that they saw in *Caring for Art During*

Covid. Again, we see the encoded meanings having an oppositional effect, this time seemingly caused by the *feel* of the film and its adherence to an overall Tate aesthetic. Whilst seeing people and their different roles was welcomed by the participants, it was the smoothness, the polished finish, and the sense that staff were providing soundbites that made visible the coldness of the institution. Participant 4 wanted to ‘actually see the human aspect of this process’, preferably live and in person at Tate, not a carefully curated window in.

As our conversation about the film continued, Participant 4 made links between conservation and uncertainty, and institutional vulnerability and defensiveness:

So, it's interesting understanding the human aspect of the institution, because the institution doesn't like to seem human, it wants to seem something immortal, something permanent. And I think that's the problem here, because obviously conservation – conserving is forever – but forever doesn't exist, not yet.

In our final interview I read back the phrase ‘the institution doesn’t like to seem human’ and asked if they had further thoughts on the theme. Their answer got to the crux of many of the anxieties I had identified in phase one of the research:

P4: I think if we really reel it back and understand what a company is, they are companies of people, it is not a system. It's not an infrastructure, it's not an image, it is people. And I think what a lot of them [...] to be honest it's not even in relation to institutions - to anybody trying to support a certain group of people and it's the minute you remove the - it's as if them seeming nonhuman makes them seem less vulnerable and more powerful.

Participant’s 4’s responses on the subject of institutions are complex, nuanced and revealing. Through their eyes Tate’s construction of a polished brand, it’s careful management of voice and image, belie the humanity at its centre - and this is alienating. On many occasions Participant 4 displayed a close connection to the collection care staff and their work, stressing more than once that they felt practitioners should be ‘celebrated’ more, but this was matched by an acute resistance to the identity of Tate. Here we see a close link to the negotiated reading ‘uncovering and celebrating hidden staff’ discussed in the previous section, but in this instance, opposition emerges in the way Participant 4 turns the encoded

meaning of showcasing hidden staff back on itself to critique Tate. There was a sense that they wanted and expected more from the museum, that they saw the potential for change and wanted to feel connected to its work, but that their fundamental needs were not being met. Participant 4's attention to the construction of a brand, and what they perceived to be Tate's attempts to deny its vulnerability and humanity, is indicative of what Voronov and Vince describe as a 'failure of the fantasmic frame' (2012:66-67). Mission statements, they argue, are fantasies designed to repress negative emotions that threaten the insitutional order (e.g. Tate's desire to be 'bold, open, rigorous and kind') (ibid). When the presence of the frame and its maintenance comes into view, and the institution is thus revealed to be vulnerable, then cognitive and emotional disinvestment takes place and 'the insitutional order appears less inevitable' (ibid). Building on the analysis in the previous chapter, then, we can interpret the lack of humanity (the 'lack of soul' as Participant 4 also put it) as a defining feature of the anxious museum, that fears vulnerability and loss of control.

10.3 Summary

This chapter briefly outlined the content of the mediational materials shown to the young adults and my identifications of the encoded meanings within these. I then used this as a foundation to understand how the young adults read and made meaning from them in order to provide evidence to answer Research Question 2 (how do young adults respond?) and the Overarching Research Question (how does greater visibility create opportunities for the development of inclusive practices?). The responses of the young adults were then interpreted through Hall's concepts of negotiated and oppositional readings.

Section one explored four key themes that emerged as negotiated readings of the mediational materials: understanding conservation practices and concepts; rethinking the relationship between art and science; celebrating hidden staff and work; and 'seeing the machine'. In each instance participants demonstrated a reception of some of the meanings intended to be read by Tate but in a way that saw them build on these messages and apply them to their own individual contexts. I have presented evidence throughout to suggest that these negotiated readings

emerge in part due to the participant's interests but also through their relationship with Tate and its staff, which is shaped by their positioning at the boundary of the institution and the interactions that take place in this space.

The second section focused on oppositional readings, found in some of the answers provided by two of the four participants. Hall's model of encoding/decoding places particular importance of tracing and analysing these moments of disjuncture between encoder and decoder (Hall 1975). He argues that they are the result of 'structural differences produced and determined by other social/economic/cultural forces (Turner 2003:77). I found these to become moments where exclusions at the boundary of the institution and the level of field emerged. Participants 2 and 4 often formed oppositional readings where they sensed institutional anxieties at play. The ways that Tate exerts control over uncertainties – managing the institutional voice, avoiding questioning and reputational damage through a polished brand, adopting openness without vulnerability – only served to make visible the *invisibilities*, projecting an air of secrecy and aloofness.

11. Discussion and conclusion

11.1 Discussion

Reflecting on the findings chapters as a whole presents the opportunity to form a deeper understanding of the centrality of collection care to the wider project of Tate's self-legitimation and how increased levels of visibility has the potential to both threaten and reaffirm institutional logics.

From the data analysed it is possible to understand the forces that determine the regulations, rules and behaviours that are embedded within the organisation and govern Tate's actions. Martin posits that the existence of fields can be traced through the evidence of their effects during analysis of a particular case (Martin 2003).

Through mapping the anxieties and perceived benefits of making collection care visible, the effects and contradictions of these forces is brought into stark relief. The diagram in Figure 11.1 expresses the existence of the fields within which Tate operates and I have plotted actors relative to their positioning within these fields. The design is in keeping with Bourdieu's theory that no matter the independence and specificity of a field, it always operates according to the laws of that which encompasses it, culminating in the Field of Class Relations (Bourdieu 1983:320). To represent this, the diagram accounts for overlaps in fields (e.g. I argue that the organisational field is interlinked with the field of contemporary art) and acknowledges that actors that might exert influence from more than one position (for example, the Art Market can be considered an actor in the Fields of Contemporary Art, Power, and Class Relations).⁷⁶

⁷⁶ I have also included climate breakdown and the Covid-19 pandemic. These are external forces that don't fit within a field framework but nevertheless shaped what was seen and unseen during the course of the research. For example, the impact of the pandemic was a determining factor in the commission of *Caring for Art During Covid*. Climate breakdown surfaced in my conversation with a curator, who noted that Tate was currently grappling with the ethics and practicalities of preserving and displaying its collections in the face of increasingly scarce resources and a warming planet. This, he thought, would impact the stories we tell about museum work.

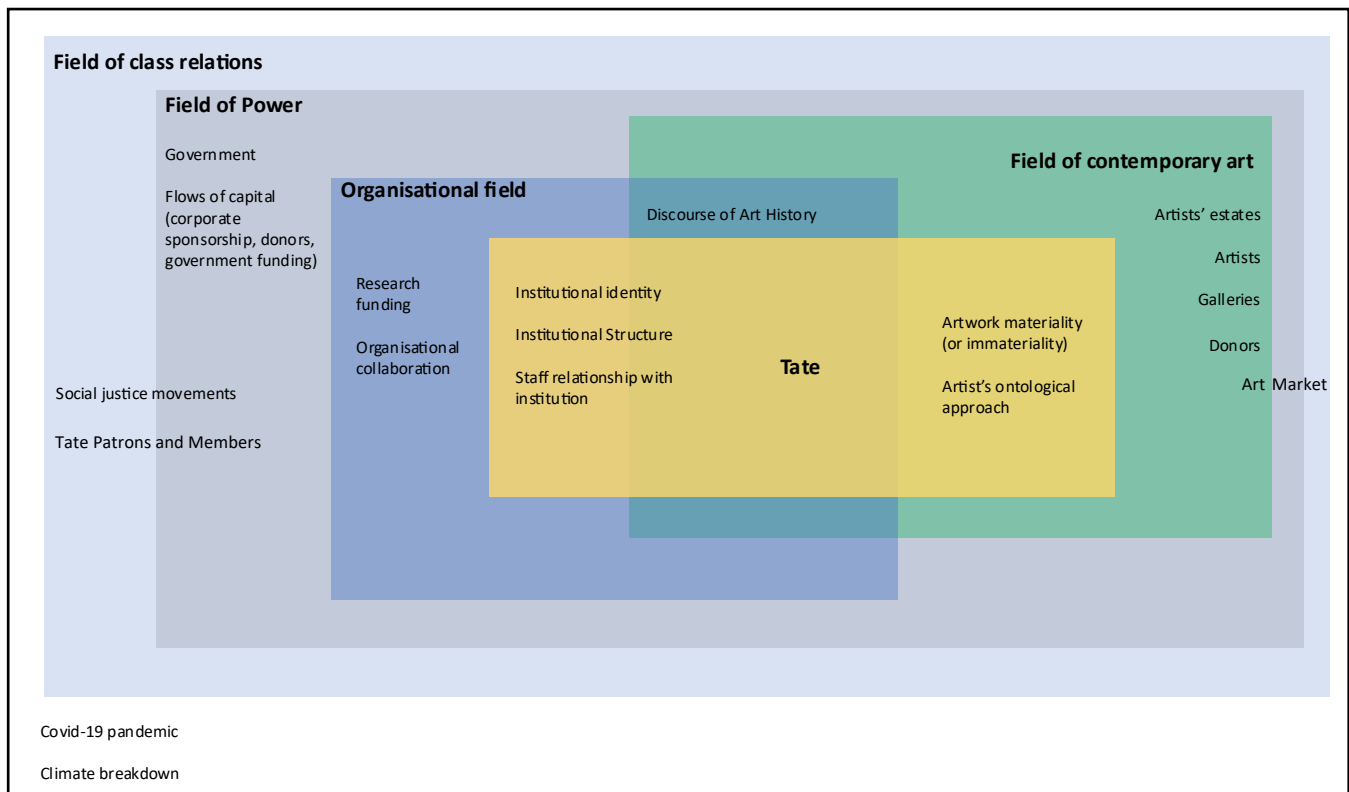


Figure 11.1 Forces influencing the production of (in)visibility.

Focusing on the organisational field within which Tate finds itself reveals how visibility is not merely a state but a force or facet of cultural capital that affects power dynamics. DiMaggio's account of the establishment of an organisational field (that of the art museum) is directly related to the rise of the 'museum professional', the result of which allowed individuals and groups 'to mobilise in the environment around organizations that employ them', thus acquiring the power to enact change (1991:282). The visibility of departments and practices, both within the institution and to outsiders, is constantly under negotiation. If Bourdieu's concepts of cultural, educational, and academic capital bestow class-based advantages in a given field (Tanner 2003;149-150), then visibility should be considered as a contributor to the way cultural capital is transacted in the struggle for professional status (DiMaggio 1991). Star and Strauss argue that many forms of 'care' work are traditionally less visible and therefore overlooked (1999). Translated to museums, we find that collection care work tends to have less visibility and therefore practitioners can feel unacknowledged and their work, I argue, is less likely to be considered as complex and knowledge producing to those outside professional communities of practice (such as time-based media research groups or art handling professional bodies).

This contributes to what Miller has found to be a condition of general ‘epistemic invisibility’ (2020:202). Here we might compare the experiences of the young adults who, in their apprentice-like roles, are also actively involved in transactions of cultural capital in the organisational field. I have demonstrated that whilst they find an affinity with the staff they considered previously overlooked, visibility of collection care work can enhance feelings of being shut out from the inner workings of the museum and its knowledge-making structures and thus stymied in their pursuit of greater influence in the field. In this way the benefits offered to collection care professionals appear to be more active than those offered to the young adults.

The effects of making collection care visible also revealed Tate to be the product of emotional attachments and impulses. Voronov and Vince suggest that to be pursue capital in a field – and be involved in institutional work – is ‘emotional and traumatic’ (2012:62-63). This research project suggests that museums are particularly emotional structures due to the nature of their work and the particular demands of their stakeholders. I have demonstrated how visibility of collection care work has the power to affect individual and group ‘emotional and cognitive investment’ in Tate and therefore whether individuals might seek to change or maintain insitutional structures (Voronov and Vince 2012:58). As evidenced in the testimony of an Executive Group member and an Art Handler (section 9.3.1), making visible the people of Tate, and the lives of artworks that individuals feel connected to (‘object love’), is a powerful tool in increasing emotional and cognitive investment in the work of the museum (Voronov and Vince 2012). As such, Tate is able to send certain messages to powerful and/or influential groups with the purpose of strengthening these relationships. Often, the survival of the institution relies on the financial, emotional and cognitive investment (individually or in combination) of these actors. Meanwhile the young adults displayed investment in what Tate *promises*, the collection, and the community of people who work there, but the *institution*, comprised of invisible infrastructure that prevents access, entanglements with the contemporary art field and the field of power, and its mismatched temporalities, tested the young adults’ relationship with Tate.

For Tate as an institution, it is anxiety that emerges as the dominant emotion. The diagram above represents a record of institutional pressures that were often at odds with one another, causing Tate to act in fundamentally anxious ways. Miceli and Castelfranchi explain that anxiety is characterised by the alternation between fear and hope (2008:295). At Tate we see a similar phenomenon: anxiety is attached to the uncertainty of what will happen if collection care processes and people are made visible – but not that it doesn't happen at all. This tension is evidence of the fundamental role that collection care work plays in producing the internal and external legitimacy of Tate. As a result, a complex reality emerges, in which attempts to communicate collection care are ultimately the result of compromise, shaped by the competing needs of different groups attached to the museum. What is made visible, then, is the result of a network of relations that are situated within Tate and at the level of fields.

11.2 Conclusion

My findings suggest that the act of 'making the invisible visible' and the encoding of meaning, is fundamentally shaped by field relations, the exchange of field capital, and relationships both within and external to the museum. These relationships exist between artworks and people, departments, staff and institution, and institution and external stakeholders. I outline below five key findings that expand this.

11.2.1 Visibility becomes a central component in cultural capital transactions across the institution and the organisational field

I observed how a number of the perceived benefits of communicating collection care at individual and practice-based levels (acknowledging authorship, challenging hierarchies, survival, skill sharing, and opening up the field) were all associated with efforts to reposition the various divisions of collection care work as a profession of equal value and status to more visible departments such as curatorial. Doing so was shown to ensure the safety, longevity, accessibility, and rigour of collection care work. Participating in research and public outreach initiatives was thus a way to

accrue visibility, with the former making practitioners more visible to the museum and the latter to the general public.

The accumulation of visibility by individuals and departments is played out within a wider set of field relations to which Tate is subject. That museums respond to the pressure of external stakeholders is well documented. Indeed, Macdonald provides a historic account of the various ways that the Science Museum has been shaped by the government, trustees, public attitudes to science and other societal shifts and currents in *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* (Macdonald 2002). In this research project, I have found evidence of forces of influence that pertain to the *specific* context of the contemporary art museum.

11.2.2 Making the invisible visible causes institutional anxiety

One of the core theoretical developments from my research is the concept of the anxious museum. Building on Miceli and Castelfranchi's identification of epistemic and pragmatic control as responses to the feelings of uncertainty and threat that characterise anxiety (2005), I argue that these impulses can also be traced in how Tate handles 'making the invisible visible'.

Anxiety is a useful concept through which to understand risk and its effects. Although some risks identified in the data are related to knowable consequences (e.g. the security of the collection), other risks presented as anxieties through the uncertainty of the outcome. Anxieties could be located at the individual and practice-based levels, often in relation to 'being on show', jeopardising reputations, and compromising practice and artworks (e.g. 'threatening authenticity' and undermining the 'seriousness' of the profession). Typical of anxiety is the mixture of hope and fear, creating a state of 'restless wait' (Miceli and Castelfranchi 2005:294; Walklate 2018:223). For conservators and collection care practitioners, anxieties were tightly interwoven with perceived benefits in ways that were difficult to reconcile. For example, accruing visibility also ran the risk of undermining the very fundamentals of collection care work itself, which is often measured by the effectiveness of its invisibility.

At the level of the institution, various interconnected causes of anxiety emerged. The theme of reputational risk and, relatedly, the need to stave off questioning, was identified by many participants as a fundamental concern for Tate that strangled its capacity for transparency and openness – affecting its ability to become a more inclusive institution. These categories prompt speculation as to who Tate fears will judge and critique it, and by what standards? And what might the result of this be? Through exerting epistemic and pragmatic control, the museum tries to reduce its vulnerability.

These questions are further complicated by the competing and often conflicting demands placed on Tate by its relationships with internal and external actors; often Tate finds itself in an irreconcilable position. For example, Tate must balance the need to provide exclusive experiences for donors and patrons with its institutional commitment to openness and access to the collection. A fundamental characteristic of institutional anxiety is that it simultaneously creates, and is amplified by, tensions in relationships. In this way it can be seen as cyclical in nature. Although Tate and its staff share a desire for access and openness, Tate's anxiety over becoming vulnerable to questioning leads to a compromised state of 'dashboard transparency' that falls short of staff ambitions for 'radical transparency' (Marstine 2103). Tate's anxiety tests its relationship with staff, causing further anxiety to the institution.

Walklate argues that museums are characterised by anxiety, but when acknowledged, this emotion has the power to be a positive and constructive force for change (2018). The model of anxiety that I have constructed somewhat supports this. Indeed, the very fact that the issue of transparency is a topic of contestation, reveals the deep commitment of Tate staff to the future of the museum and the project that is 'Tate'. If the museum is the site of struggle, there remains emotional and cognitive investment in the institution.

11.2.3 Moments of visibility are the product of compromise and negotiation

Taken together, the discussion in this section and the findings presented in chapters 8 and 9, demonstrate that materials that communicate collection care are

fundamentally the product of compromise and negotiation between individuals, departments and the museum. They are traces of the investment of staff and the dedication to their practices, the craft of the digital teams that produce the materials, and the ambitions of the institution to transmit messages to different stakeholders, from the public to the field of power. Thus, every moment of visibility, every film, audio and display analysed in this project - and the meanings encoded therewith - can be interpreted as the product of relations and the striving for the accumulation of visibility, an expression of devotion to the collection and its longevity, and as documents of anxiety.

11.2.4 Negotiated readings demonstrate some potential for developing greater inclusivity

My conversations with young adults were organised into negotiated and oppositional readings according to Hall's model of decoding (1973). My findings from this phase of the research suggest that materials that uncover collection care work do hold potential for the development of more inclusive practices, but greater visibility of collection care practices is not an adequate catalyst for change in and of itself. Most notably, negotiated readings emerged as a result of the way the films, audio and displays recast the relationship between people and artworks. Scaffolded by the participants' experiences of engaging in legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 2004) through Tate's young people's programmes, and their personal interests, the young people interpreted the materials in ways that took the encoded meanings and recast them to be relevant to their own lives.

However, engaging with these materials also produced strong oppositional readings in two of the four participants. In these moments Tate as symbol of art world exclusivity, power, and class relations emerged. Just as Star and Strauss argue that (in)visibility exists in a matrix-like relation (1999), I too found this to be the case in the perceptions of the young adults. Tate's efforts to make collection care practices visible conversely served to bring into sharper focus the barriers that the participants *felt* and navigated in their situatedness at the periphery of Tate. Practitioners hoped that greater visibility of staff might lead to increased diversity in the museum, and the young adults felt connected to these previously hidden members of staff, it is difficult

to conclude that simply *seeing* a diverse group of staff led to a greater sense of 'belonging', as defined by Hall, for those currently on the periphery of the museum (1999).

What emerged was ultimately a kind of transparency that falls somewhere between 'dashboard' and 'radical'. Whilst these materials might imbue the young adults with a greater understanding of the way a large museum like Tate functions and significantly increases knowledge about artworks and practices of care, it does not meaningfully distribute power to outsiders. This is partly because the 'revelations' (to use Marstine's term) are not fully 'situated' (Marstine 2013:14). The mediational materials analysed in this thesis are generally not 'audience specific' and nor do they encourage reciprocal 'equitable knowledge sharing' (Marstine 2013:3 and 14). If collection care work is central to the wider project that is the legitimisation of Tate, then it's visibility should be framed through a wider, museum wide policy of radical transparency.

11.2.5 Recasting human /object relations

I hypothesised at the beginning of this project that presenting conservation and collection care work as a networked and social practice might offer new ways in to 'outsiders'. When viewed as more than just the domain of the expert (as in objective conservation approaches (Muñoz Viñas 2005) and glass walled laboratories) I wondered whether young adults might see the possibilities of participation and, by extension, recast collection care work as more creative and more than just a 'fix it' practice (Brooks 2012). Reflecting on the young adults' negotiated readings presented in chapter 10 reveals this to be partially true, although other, more surprising findings also emerged.

Common to all the negotiated readings was a sense that they the young adults' perception of Tate as consisting of atomised departments arranged in a deeply hierarchical structure had been challenged. In the mediational materials, the relations between people appeared reset, with collection care work often recast as collaborative, highly skilled and at the centre of the museum's functioning. In the materials produced by the RTC team, so-called 'unruly' artworks were recast as the

product of more equitable networks of care, provoking a recalibration of relations that changed the fundamental assumed qualities of an artwork. As the result of 'seeing networks', the young adults saw collection care staff as part of the creation of the work and naturally placed themselves within these networks, leading Participant 1 to wonder whether even her breath might shape the work. This aligned with my assumptions that making visible the intersubjective nature of conservation work offered new routes in to understanding the discipline.

The category 'seeing the relationship between art and science' prompted a different recasting of the artwork that affected participants in ways that I hadn't anticipated. Whilst considering the content of the *Restoring Rothko* film I described it as presenting the painting as an epistemic object, placed into a linear doctor/patient narrative. Yet despite the focus on the ostensibly closed and elite world of science and laboratories, populated by small teams of experts, this film, above all others, provoked the most positive responses and made participants feel invested in the work of Tate. Knorr Cetina describes how research rearranges subject/object relations that cause a dissociation between the researcher and the object of focus, creating space for interruption and reflection (2000:184). In these spaces, the emotional nature of research work blooms (ibid). This engrossment, when portrayed in the Rothko film, becomes an expression of object love (Geoghegan and Hess 2014). In other words, when artworks become the unfolding objects of science, worked on by researchers that display a deep emotional connection to the work, it provokes a similar feeling of emotional investment in the viewer. Epistemic objects, then, created connections to museum work and routes into the discipline of collection care that were just as powerful as the metaphor of networks of care.

11.2.6 Participation shapes meaning making

This research is interested in the experiences of young adults who undertake what Lave and Wenger term activities of legitimate peripheral participation at Tate as they attempt to forge careers in the museum world. What emerged throughout was the significance of boundary encounters to determine whether readings of the materials resulted in the adoption of negotiated or oppositional positions. This was particularly

evident in the theme 'seeing and understanding conservation processes'. For example, participating in situated learning, as Participant 4 did with their mentor, enabled them to better envision the application of the techniques represented in the films to their own life. The significance of this relationship represents a boundary action that Wenger identifies as 'brokering'. Individuals who engage in this, like the Tate mentor, create connections that 'introduce elements of one practice into another' (Wenger 2008:105). Connotative meanings such as skill sharing, managing change, and open networks were thus received and considered at length. The mediational materials acted to support the learning that was already taking place in this relationship – and allowed for greater connection with the materials in return. We might also infer that in the art museum, having the opportunity to engage in legitimate peripheral participation enables the acquisition of cultural capital that in turn helps individuals better 'understand' art.

Participants who didn't have access to a mentor but instead participated in the TCP programme saw the boundaries that encased collection care CoPs as more explicit but not, crucially, unnavigable. Rather, seeing collection care work as social and watching other TCP's learn techniques in the Constable film made these boundaries appear as potential loci of peripheral encounters – although they questioned why these opportunities had not been offered before.

Where oppositional readings occurred, boundaries came into sharper focuses and took on the form of barriers rather than 'peripheries'. There was a strong sense that Tate, at times actively prevented access to understanding how knowledge about the collection was created, which is where Hooper-Greenhill argues that a fundamental power imbalance plays out (1992:7). Through attempts to make this visible in bitesize ways, the reality of their continued invisibility and inaccessibility came into sharper focus. That two of the participants considered Tate to be sustained by its guarding of knowledge is significant. They experienced this as a prevention of their acquisition of cultural capital that would enable them to better navigate the cutthroat world of contemporary art.

11.2.7 Institutional anxieties produce oppositional readings

Tate's attempts to exert control, were keenly felt by the participants. Indeed, I was surprised by the extent to which my mappings of perceptions of institutional anxieties were mirrored by the participants. The oppositional readings of 'seeing the brand', 'secrecy', 'surface vs depth' and 'the institution doesn't like to seem human' are in direct tension with Tate's intentions to communicate a polyphonous presentation of an open and kind institution. Hall writes that it is in oppositional readings that 'significant political moments' occur, which 'coincide with crisis points in the broadcasting corporation' (Hall 1973:18). In sensing Tate's uneasy relationship with the art market, its attention to branding and its discomfort with releasing knowledge that might threaten its reputation and status, two of the participants felt alienated from Tate. Seeing and responding positively to the 'celebration' of hidden staff and their practices only momentarily remedied this before ultimately emphasising the perception of aloofness and coldness of the institution itself. If museums use exhibitions and other forms of communication to implicitly 'sustain narratives of the museum's own legitimization', then it was the implication of this as motive that troubled the young adults (Silverstone 1988:234).

11.2.8 Reflections on decoding as discursive

It is important to acknowledge the role that I played in the process of decoding. As with any qualitative research project the responses of the participants are necessarily and unavoidably shaped by the questions devised and delivered by the interviewer. In the case of decoding, Morely warns that we should not see it as a conveyor belt process whereby a single viewer is 'fed' content (1992). Instead, we must be aware of the discursive aspect of decoding and in this case, where an interview is carried out after viewing the materials, there can be no doubt that meaning was made by the young adults through the articulation of their responses (Hooper-Greenhill 2013). Thus, there are two important moments in the decoding process that I want to acknowledge.

First is the act of viewing, which was preceded by the choice of which materials to watch from a list provided. I was not present during the participants' engagement

with the materials so have no data to reflect their real time responses, although I know that some made notes as they watched, and others were inspired to follow links on YouTube and seek out more content. To some extent their engagement with the materials was not as Tate intended (all of the participants remarked that they would not have found them without my direction), and they were encouraged to watch or engage with more than one source, which again, might not reflect a natural viewer 'journey'. Needless to say, their reading of the materials was shaped by their participation in the project, which they knew from the outset was about the subject of visible conservation amid broader issues around inclusivity. In some ways, therefore, they were preconditioned to view the materials through some of the overarching themes of this project.

Second is the discursive context of narrating their readings. Social constructivist approaches to learning stress the importance of discourse as a conduit to learning and meaning making and whilst this might happen naturally in the museum among groups of visitors, in this instance it was a semi-structured discussion between interviewer and interviewee that prompted the participants to dig deeper into their experiences (Hohenstein and Moussouri 2018:26). Reflecting on key themes generated together over the course of three interviews is a naturally discursive action that isn't mimicked in ordinary viewing conditions. Indeed, two of the participants (1 and 4), when reflecting on their participation, felt they had been encouraged to think more deeply and expansively about art and the museum than they had previously. Participant 4 remarked that 'I don't think anyone else is having these conversations in this context' – and by this they meant divorced of institutional framing - whilst Participant 1 reflected that they had been prompted to think 'outside the box' in new ways that had changed how she thought about who makes art. In short, they found engaging with collection care research issues to be surprising and in some cases (participants 1 and 2) even transformative with regards to their perceptions of museum work. These two points of consideration suggest that 1.) these media might have a greater impact when presented in chorus, allowing for cross comparison, 2.) stories about collection care practices might be made more meaningful by their presentation in a discursive setting where viewers can actively respond to or discuss their reactions with experts or peers and 3.) young adults would benefit from more

opportunities to contribute to research, and in particular collections care research programmes.

11.3 Final remarks: seeing the whole process

This thesis has presented a dialectical account of what it means to 'make the invisible visible' at Tate. It has considered the perspective of those inside the museum, and Tate itself, as well as a group of young adults on the periphery of the institution and at the beginning of their careers in the art world. From this final vantage point, we can sketch a sense of the whole process. I have demonstrated that making collection care work visible is more than a 'niche' concern for practitioners or a sporadic addition to museum programming. Instead, it is a rich and vital vein of study that confronts some of the issues that are at the heart of museum studies and museum practitioner debates: balances of power, knowledge sharing, inclusion and exclusion, human/object relations, learning and belonging.

For museums, there are some actional points that might be drawn from the research, which are summarised below:

- Young adults desire institutional vulnerability and transparency that feels genuine and permeable.
- Young adults sometimes feel that museums keep secret the mechanisms of how they produce knowledge about the collection. Showing how collection care staff undertake research, and how artworks are made and sustained by groups of people with multiple skill sets, breaks down these barriers. This also benefits practitioners by raising the profile of their work and showing young adults alternative career paths.
- Allowing young adults to take on a peripheral role in collection care research projects would further strengthen their relationship with Tate and give staff the opportunity to adopt more hands on, public facing roles.
- It is the enmeshing of people and objects, rather than considering each in isolation, that generates connection. This is achieved by making visible the various ways museum workers contribute *actively* to and become *part of* an artwork's life through their work.

As a single case study, the research seeks to lay a foundation for deeper and more focused exploration. The two theoretical developments pertaining to the existence of visibility as an important factor in the way that cultural capital is negotiated and exchanged and the model of the anxious museum would benefit from application to different types of institution; it cannot be assumed that the observations outlined here would apply to more historical or science-based collections, for example, or museums with different organisational structures. In a post pandemic world, following the process of making the invisible visible in the physical spaces of the museum would certainly add much to this area of exploration and give a clearer sense of how young adults might be able to directly learn from practitioners.

In this research project I have shown that the relationships that sustain Tate fundamentally shape the way conservation and collection care is made visible and read. What is at the heart of this case study is best summed up by a comment from one of the young adults:

I think if we really reel it back and understand what a company is: they are companies of people. It's not a system. It's not an infrastructure. It's not an image. It is people.

Opening the black boxes at the heart of the museum and moving towards greater visibility is an understandably difficult and anxiety inducing task for Tate. But when fully committed to, and developed in coordination with practitioners and young adults, it has the potential to transform the museum into a more equitable and inclusive institution. There is a fundamental alignment between Tate staff and the young adults, two groups deeply invested in the future of the museum, that calls for a more radical form of transparency that embraces vulnerability and turns barriers of access into permeable peripheries.

Appendix I

Documentary materials analysed in the project

Data	Year	Description
Financial Reports for Tate from the Board of Trustees	2004-2005 2005-2006 2006-2007 2007-2008 2008-2009 2009-2010 2010-2011 2011-2012 2012-2013 2013-2014 2014-2015 2015-2016 2016-2017 2018-2019 2019-2020	Tate's financial statements and additional contextual material. Includes museum mission (from Museums and Galleries Act), history of gallery, review of activities and achievements, objectives, visitor outreach, growth, partnerships, future developments, social policy and wider public benefit.
Tate Annual/Biennial Reports	2002-2004 2007-2008 2008-2009 2009-2010 2010-2011 2011-2012 2012-2013 2013-2014 2014-2015 2015-2016 2017-2018 2018-2019	A more audience friendly document that contains much overlapping information with the Financial Reports - but simplified and more digestible. Also includes a statement from the Trustees and Director. More focused on the presentation of acquisitions.

Previous events that engage with 'behind the scenes' style programming related to collection care activities (talks, tours, courses, workshops, conferences)	2012-2020	45 webpages advertising a range of workshops, talks, tours, courses and conferences that reference the work of Collection Care and Conservation. Compiled in collaboration with Kit Webb for the RTC team.
Tate Vision 2020-2025	2020	Contains overall objectives as well as five-year vision for each area of the museum. Includes aims for Collection Care, Audiences, Learning and Research.
Policy for Care of the Collections	2017	A document produced to provide a framework for collection care that adheres to the terms of the Museums and Galleries Act 1992 whilst incorporating Tate's mission statement and vision.
Tate Management Statement and Financial Memorandum	2017	pp. 1-13 detail the relationship between the Tate and the Government through their respective financial responsibilities

Appendix II

Mediational materials analysed and shown to young adult participants.

Videos

Tate, 2014. *Restoring Rothko*. [Online video]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGqAggmwyMU>. [Accessed 22 August 2024].

Tate, 2018. *Conserving Whaam!* [Online video]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zCzlyN2QW8>. [Uploaded to YouTube 1 March 2018, accessed 22 August 2024].

Tate, 2018. *Reframing Constable*. [Online video]. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/constable-salisbury-cathedral-from-the-meadows-t13896/in-depth-salisbury-cathedral-from-the-meadows/reframing-constable>. [Uploaded to YouTube 1 June 2018, accessed 22 August 2024].

Tate, 2020. *Caring for Art During Covid*. [Online video]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asVonbe8xPM&t>. [Uploaded to YouTube 21 December 2020, accessed 22 August 2024].

Tate, 2020. *Tony Conrad – Keeping an Artwork Alive*. [Online video]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9NpalX6CiQ>. [Uploaded to YouTube 6 March 2020, accessed 22 August 2024].

Tate 2022. *Art in Focus | Life of an Artwork: Quadrille by Rose English*. [Online video]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wikBE0Wv_3Y&t=230s. [Uploaded to YouTube 21 January 2022, accessed 22 August 2024].

Tate, 2022. *What are Internet Artworks and how do we care for them?* [Online video]. Available at: https://youtu.be/R2eVaR4kPRQ?si=OoDr0cxfgO_8EKwh. [Uploaded to YouTube 13 May 2022, accessed 22 August 2020].

Display

The Lives of Artworks, 1 February 2021 – 10 July 2022, display, Tate Britain.

(For more information see: <https://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-britain/display/lives-artworks#:~:text=The%20Lives%20of%20Artworks%20in,the%20artworks%20along%20the%20way>. [Accessed 22 August 2024]).

Audio Tour

Tate, 2021. *Audio Highlight Tour: The Lives of Artworks*. [Online audio]. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-britain/display/audio-tour-lives-of-artworks>. [Accessed 2024]

The Lives of Artworks: introduction. Available at

Recreating a Picasso Collage

Installation is a Team Sport

Conserving Uncertainty

Jacob Epstein, Sun God / Primeval Gods

Kim Lim, Intervals I / Intervals II

Susan Hiller, Belshazzar's Feast – Charity Fox

Susan Hiller, Belshazzar's Feast – Stephen Huyton

Rose English, Quadrille

Donald Rodney, Autoicon

Appendix III

Call out for Tate Collective Producers

Paid opp: 1-hour interviews for a PhD research project on the subject of making collection care visible

*****you must be on payroll*****

When: Approx. 3x 1-hour interviews at a time that is convenient for you between 15 November 2021 – 31 January 2022

Where: Online via Zoom or Microsoft Teams

Pay: 0.5 days at usual TCP rate for each interview

If interested: please email ellen.pavey@tate.org.uk

Deadline: Friday 26 November 2021

This is a paid opportunity for three to five Tate Collective Producers to participate in a PhD research project called Making the Invisible Visible in the Contemporary Art Museum.

I am a collaborative doctoral student based at University College London (UCL) and Tate and I am part of the Tate research project [Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in the Museum](#). My research explores what happens behind the scenes in art museums and how to make this public. I will be focusing on the work of the collection care and conservation teams at Tate – these are the people who care for, preserve and handle works of art in Tate's collection. My research looks at the risks and benefits of making their work public and what young adults think of these initiatives. The project asks whether making behind the scenes work more visible has the potential to make art museums more democratic and inclusive.

I am looking for Tate Collective Producers to participate in two or three informal interviews, which will take approximately one hour, at a time convenient for you. In the interviews, I will be asking for some brief details about yourself, your expectations and experiences in contemporary art museums and your perceptions of collection care work. I might also ask you to view some online content produced by Tate. Your participation in the research will be kept anonymous.

I would particularly like to talk to Tate Collective Producers who have worked with Tate's collection, are curious about how it is cared for or have an interest in particular aspects of collection care work (such as art handling, conservation and registrar work, for example). Ideally you will have some experience of producing events or other content for Tate and/or other contemporary art institutions.

If you have any access needs or require additional support in making your application or to participate, please let me know.

Appendix IV

Interview themes for Tate staff

Theme	Example questions	Reason
Routes into the art museum	Tell me a bit about your background and what drew you to working at Tate?	- To understand the lifeworld of the participant, their experience, interests and motivations. - To see if there are overlapping interests between museum staff and young adults. Corresponding research question: Overarching RQ
Inside the museum: museum infrastructure and networks of collaboration	- What does a typical day look like for you? And an atypical day? - Which departments do you work with most often?	- To understand where their work sits within the wider network of the museum. - To understand the relationship between departments within the museum and to trace instances of collaboration or barriers to collaboration. - To understand the effects of the pandemic. Corresponding research questions: Overarching RQ and RQ1
Encoding and decoding	- How do you think audiences conceive of your role? - How would you describe your work to someone who isn't familiar with collection care processes in art museums? (<i>Collection care staff only</i>) - Can you talk to me about any projects you have been involved in that have made collection care and/or conservation work visible? - Can you tell me about a time that you tried to tell a member	- To understand how moments of 'visibility' are facilitated and mediated - To understand how mediational narratives are constructed - To understand who the intended audiences are for this content - To ascertain whether different artworks impact the process of mediation - To map any risks or benefits that might be indicated

	of the public about your job? (<i>Collection care staff only</i>) • Do you think there is a place for more collection care or behind the scenes focused programming at Tate?	Corresponding research questions: RQs 1, 2 and 3
Risk, benefit and anxiety	• What do you feel is at stake for the museum in making Collection Management and Collection care work more visible? • What would a more transparent art museum look like? • Where do you think the lines of visibility are drawn at Tate?	• To understand what visibility or transparency means to different members of staff • To understand what staff believe the purpose of the museum to be • To understand the perceived risks and benefits to the individual and the institution Corresponding research questions: Overarching RQ and RQs 1

Appendix V

Coding categories for staff

Theme	subcategories	Description
Actors affecting conditions of (in)visibility and encoding process	Internal ▪ Institutional identity ▪ Institutional Structure ▪ Staff relationship with institution ▪ Artwork materiality ▪ Artist's ontological approach External ○ Organisational field ▪ Funding ▪ Organisational collaboration ○ Discourse of Art History ○ Field of contemporary art ▪ Artist's Estates ▪ Artists ▪ Galleries ▪ Donors ○ Field of Power ▪ Government ▪ Flows of capital ○ Field of class relations ▪ Social justice movements Overarching ○ Covid-19 Pandemic ○ Climate Breakdown	Actors are grouped according to fields, originating from Bourdieu's theory of practice that links together field, capital and habitus (1977; 1984; 2001). The fields of Power and Class Relations derive from Bourdieu's original theory. The concept of an Organisational Field draws on DiMaggio's study of the professionalisation of US Art Museums (1991); the Field of Contemporary Art is informed by Domínguez Rubio and Silva's exploration of object trajectories and positions in the museum and contemporary art world (2013). Subcategories are derived directly from the data. Source: documents, fieldnotes, interviews

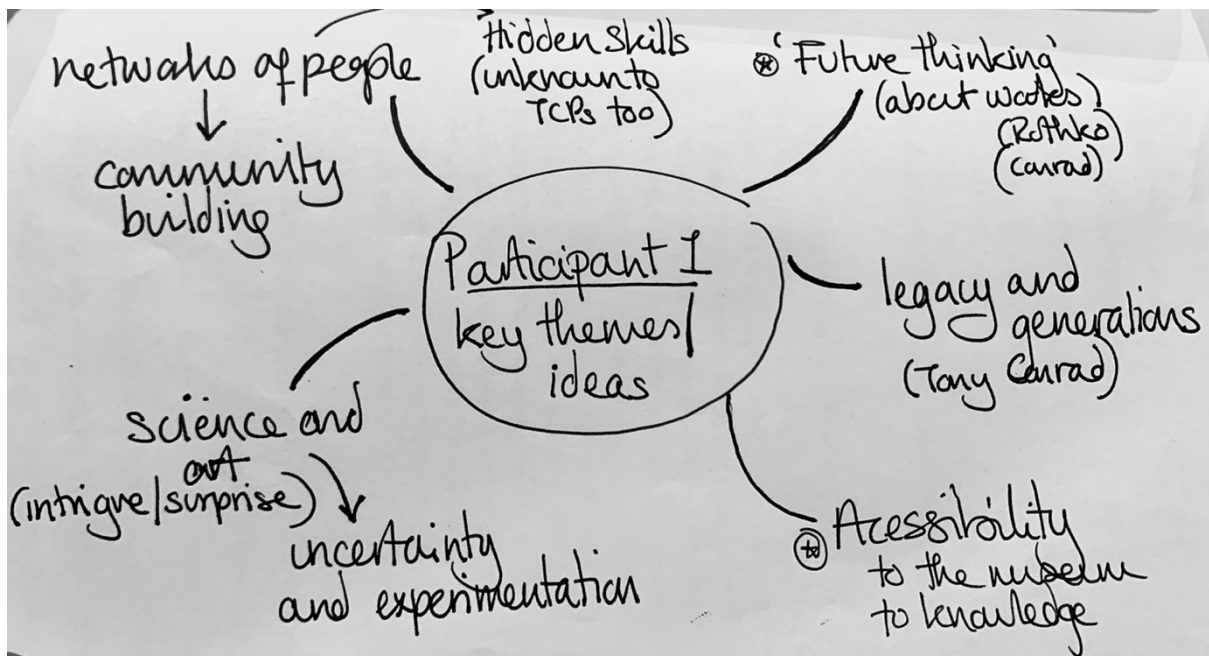
(in)visibility	Type of visibility ○ Radical transparency ○ Seeing through ○ Dashboard transparency	The theme (in)visibility is derived from the context of the research and it's theoretical framing. (in)visibility describes the interrelated state of visibility and invisibility that operates in the museum in an attempt to express that nothing is wholly visible or invisible (Star and Strauss 1999) Type of visibility is an attempt to understand how the manifestation of visibility and the intended results. The subcategories 'radical transparency' and 'dashboard transparency' are derived from the work of Janet Marstine (2013) Source: documents, fieldnotes, interviews
Anxiety	Individual ○ Professional reputation ○ Loss of safe spaces ○ Being on show ○ Personal accountability Practice ○ Maintaining seriousness ○ Threatening authenticity Institutional ○ Questioning Institution ○ Reputational risk ○ Jeopardising relationships with stakeholders ○ Art Market ○ Safety and security	The theme of anxiety is developed from my theoretical framing, drawing broadly on the work of Miceli and Castelfranchi (2005) and Voronov and Vince (2012), and informed by Walklate (2018). All subcategories are data driven. Source: interviews, fieldnotes
Perceived Benefits	Individual ○ Connecting with audiences ○ sharing excitement of the object	The theme perceived benefits is derived from RQ1 and subthemes are data

	○ Refining practices Practice ○ Authorship ○ Play ○ Challenging hierarchies ○ Survival ○ Skill sharing ○ Opening up the field Institutional ○ Diversifying workforce ○ Openness ○ Polyphony ○ Exclusive experiences ○ Strengthening relationships with stakeholders	driven, with the exhibition of polyphony which is derived from Bakhtin (1984). Source: interviews, fieldnotes
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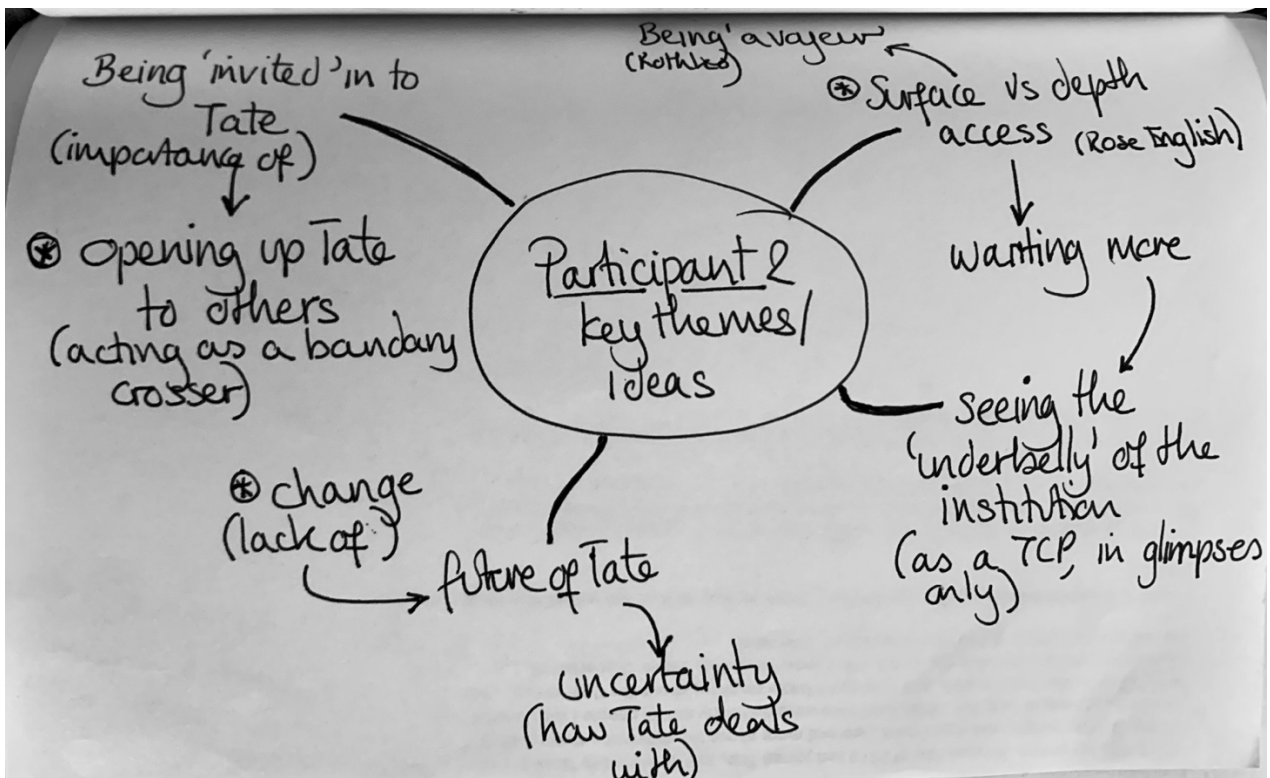
Appendix VI

Co-constructed themes with young adults

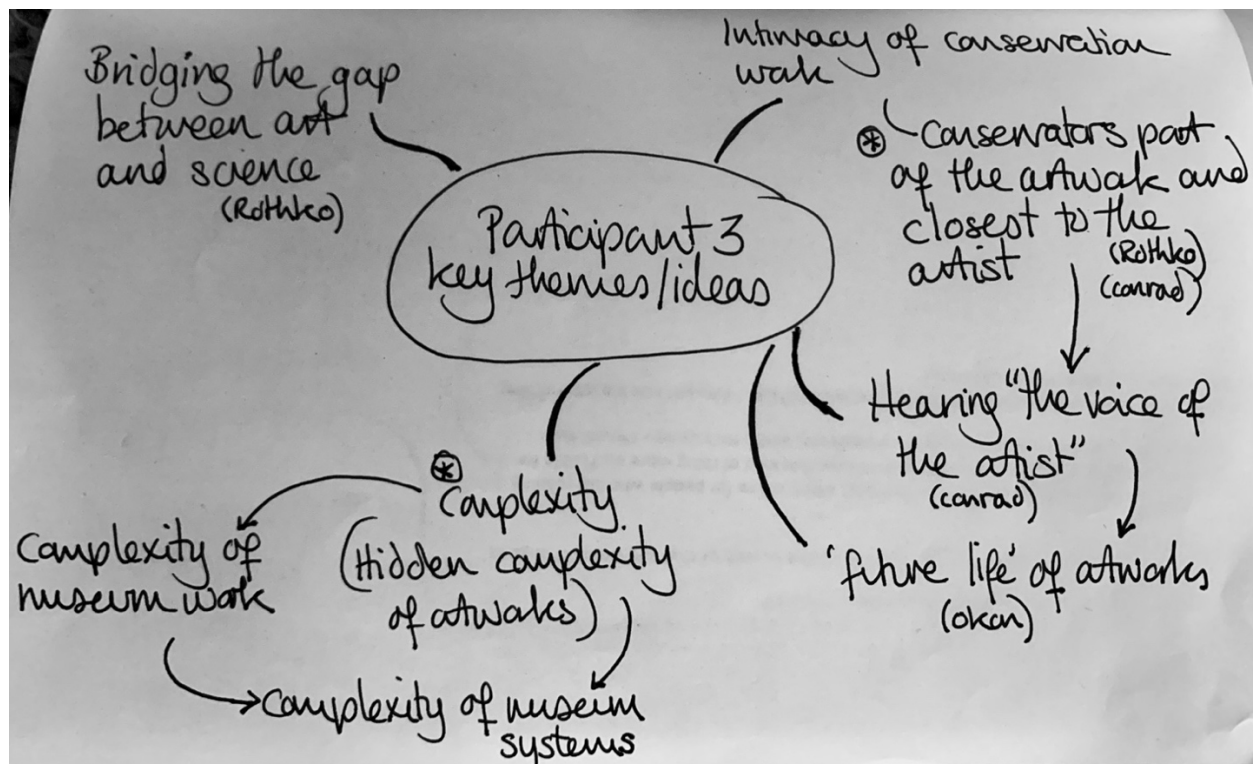
The images below are taken from my research diary and express the individual themes and ideas created from my initial round of coding of each participant's interview. These themes were then discussed in our final interview. The starred themes (*) represent the ideas that were most important to the participant.



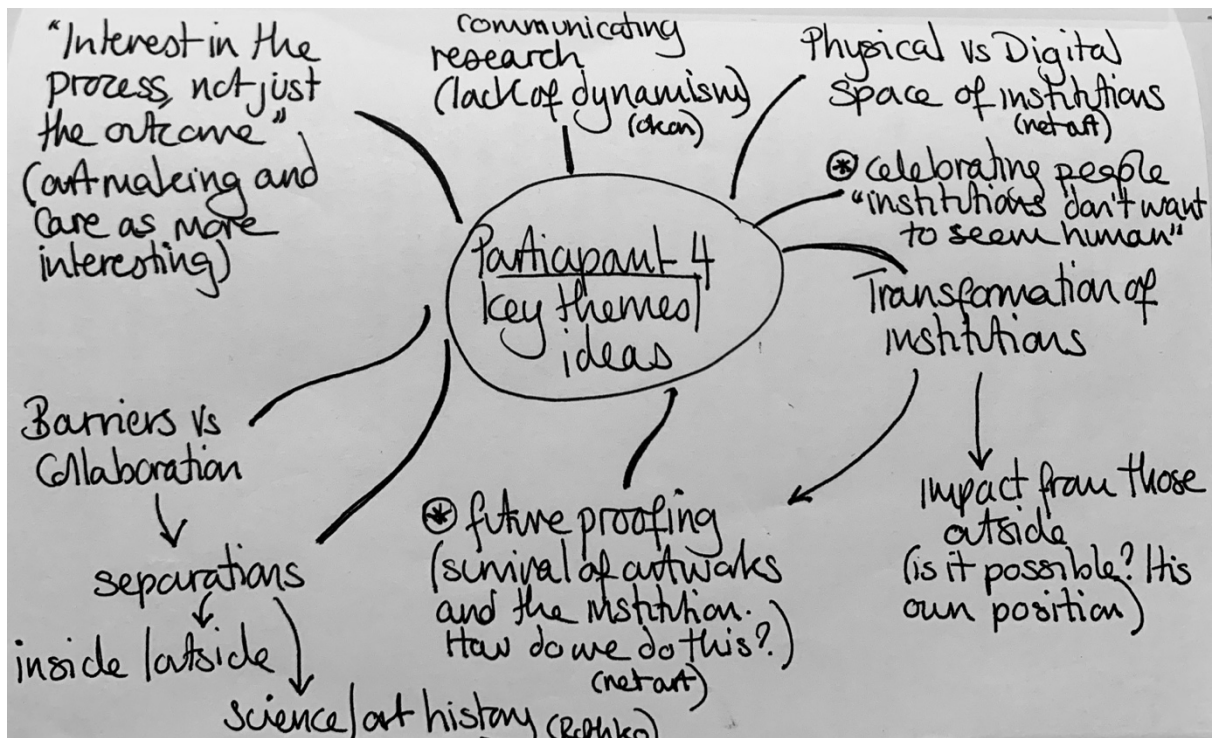
Participant 1



Participant 2



Participant 3



Participant 4

Appendix VII: Coding categories for young adults

Reading type	Theme	subcategories	Notes
Negotiated	Seeing and understanding processes	• Future thinking • Futureproofing	This is a data driven theme with subcategories constructed with participants 1 and 4
	Relationship between art and science	• Process and experimentation • Seeing the 'underbelly' • Bridging in the gap between art and science • Intrigue and surprise	This is a data driven theme with 2 of the four subcategories identified as important by more than one participant
	Uncovering and celebrating staff	• Hidden skills • Seeing networks • Seeing collaboration	This is a data driven theme, although the subcategories seeing networks and seeing collaboration are informed by ANT and the concept of 'networks of care'.
	Seeing the Machine	• Accessing the museum • Seeing complexity • Seeing the mechanisms of display	This theme is informed by my literature review – specifically the work of Dominguez Rubio. The subcategories are data driven.
Oppositional	Mismatched temporalities	• Lack of/slow pace of change • Lack of urgency	This theme is data driven and the subcategories are constructed with participants 2 and 4.
	Seeing boundaries	• Secrecy • Surface vs depth access	This theme is taken from CoP theory, with subcategories

			constructed with participant 3
	The institution doesn't like to seem human	• Celebrating staff (lack) • 'The institution doesn't like to seem human' • Seeing the brand	This theme is data driven with subcategories constructed with Participant 4. I have used a direct quote from Participant 4 as the description of the theme.

Key:

Categories developed with participants are indicated by the following colours:

Participant 1

Participant 2

Participant 3

Participant 4

Multi

Appendix VIII

Analysis of mediational materials

	Core Actors	Relationship between people and artworks (literature review & data driven)	Approach to conservation (conservation theory/ Epistemic objects)	Connotative meanings (data driven & literature review)
<i>Restoring Rothko (2014)</i>	Conservation scientist Conservators (internal & external) Artist's estate Curator Director Art handlers/installation team Conservation lab, studios & tools Artwork's materials Gallery space Vandalism event (unseen) Reporters	Doctor/patient relationship	Epistemic object	Pioneering research Scientific practices in the art museum Artworks as objects of scientific exploration Artistic genius Authenticity/aura Restoring trust
<i>Lichtenstein (2018)</i>	Conservation scientist Conservator Curator Art handlers/installation team	Doctor/Patient relationship	Objective conservation	Pioneering research Scientific practices in the art museum Artworks as objects of scientific exploration

	Conservation studios Artwork's materials Gel technology Gallery space Tate stores			Artistic genius Authenticity/aura
<i>Tony Conrad (2020)</i>	Artist (external) New performers (external) Original performers (external) Conservators Curators Researcher team Instruments Projection equipment Archival documents Performance space Studio space Audience	Network of care	Intersubjective conservation	Pioneering research Unruliness Artworks have lives Managing change Transmitting knowledge Open networks
<i>What are Internet Artworks? (2022)</i>	Curator QR codes & mobile phones Webpages (internal and external) Computer & code Obsolete technologies Tate stores Acquisition process Gallery space/display Conservator Artists (external)	Network of care	Intersubjective conservation	Pioneering research Unruliness Science in the art museum Artworks have lives Managing change Open networks Digital and physical spaces of the museum Contemporary art challenging museum collecting and display practices

	Artist communities (external) Researcher			
<i>Rose English (2022)</i>	Artist (external) Narrator Archival footage Performance costumes and documentation Gallery space/display Conservator	Artist/museum	Intersubjective conservation	Unruliness Artworks have lives Managing change Contemporary art challenging the museum collecting and display practices
<i>Reframing Constable (2018)</i>	2x Tate Collective narrators Constable painting Frames Curator Gallery space Frame conservator Workshop Framing materials and tools Art handlers and installation team	Doctor/patient relationship	Objective conservation	Artisanship Skill sharing Revealing the exhibition apparatus of the museum Museum as welcoming to young people
<i>Caring for Art during Covid (2020)</i>	Empty Tate galleries and Conservation studio Art handling team and tools Painting	Network of care	N/A	Uncovering hidden work and people Restoring trust Adaptable museum Collaboration across teams

	Personal protective equipment (PPE) Installation schedule Frame conservators & studio TBM conservator Paper conservator Gallery display equipment Preventative conservator Pest samples Lab, signage and equipment Paintings conservation studio Collection registrars Tate stores Borrowers (external) Prints and drawings room Library and archive			Caring for each other
Lives of Artworks display (2021-2022)	Network of care	Intersubjective conservation	Unruliness Artworks have lives Managing change Uncovering people and practices Tate’s relationship with stakeholders Complexity of artworks	

***Lives of
Artworks audio
trail
(2021)***

Network of care

Intersubjective
conservation

Unruliness
Artworks have lives
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