

Googling Art: museum collections in the Google Art Project

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the Google Art Project, a division of Google that gathers and curates digital reproductions of museum and gallery holdings. Using the collections of the McCord Museum and Royal Ontario Museum to focus the discussion, I examine the Art Project's practices of collection. Drawing on scholarship in museum and archive studies, digital media and software studies, as well as on the theoretical work of Michel Foucault on the archive and the heterotopia, I argue that the Art Project occupies the positions of hybrid and heterotopia. From this position, I examine the ways that the Art Project re-orders and interprets the items it collects.

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INTRODUCTION

Google and the collection of collections

Google's reach is such that it seems to have tendrils in nearly every area of information on the Web. Among other things, Google is a search engine (Google Search), a video sharing platform (YouTube), email provider (Gmail), office software suite and cloud-based storage (Google Drive), Internet browser (Google Chrome), library and book seller (Google Books), art gallery and museum (Google Cultural Institute, Art Project), cartographer (Google Maps), translator (Google Translate), networking service (Google Groups), smartphone operating system (Android) and much more besides. Google is self-avowedly universal in its goals and seeks to organize *all* the world's information. Google's activities are largely about the aggregation of information. Its crawlers cache copies of countless webpages to be searched by users. Data about each search is logged, including the sequence of clicks or “clickstreams” once the user has left the search results page (Durham Peters 2015). This collected data for those who know how to read it holds a vast amount of knowledge. As John Durham Peters put it, “Much of what has been plotted, wondered, desired, hoped, or shopped for in the past decade is housed on Google's servers” (2015, 326). Google's collecting does not stop at information born of the web, but extends to such domains as the contents of libraries and museums through its Books and Art Projects.

For the most part Google does not generate content, the webpages it indexes and the data it collects are all produced by Internet users. Google's business model is essentially the monetization of third-party content, primarily through advertising. Google's collection generates

billions in the sale of advertisement space. Advertisers bid in auctions in order to have their ads featured alongside Google search results. Google's protocols insist that in order for ads to appear in search results they must correspond with the search terms entered by the user. In this way, Google trades in user attention. The advertiser reaches the user (read potential consumer) at the moment they are most likely to buy the service or product advertised. The breadth of information it holds ensures that Google captures the attention of a vast number of Internet users. Google tracks and records where exactly this attention is directed. Each and every search made through Google is saved as is any subsequent navigation away from Google's search engine (Durham Peters 2015). This knowledge of user attention and traffic translates into information about patterns of behaviour and desire. The potential insidiousness of this level of tracking is disavowed through the language of convenience and of the “useful.” As Eric Schmidt and Jonathan Rosenberg (Google's executive chairman and advisor to the CEO respectively) explain, Google is a company whose central aim is to be of service to the user, the “money stuff” comes second (2014, 5). This is a company whose motto is “Don't be evil,” and presents itself as a business by necessity. In Schmidt and Rosenberg's vision, Google is a business only because it needs to generate enough money to be able to make the very convenient services and products we use every day (Schmidt and Rosenberg 2014).

The present thesis engages specifically with the Google Art Project.¹ In the simplest terms, the Art Project is a website that gathers together high quality digital images of art works and cultural objects from the holdings of museums, galleries, and other collecting bodies. It is a collection of collections, which allows users browse through artifacts, take virtual museum tours, and save images in personalized “galleries.” Launched in 2011, the Art Project is under the

¹ The Art Project website: <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/project/art-project>

auspices of the Google Cultural Institute which works to digitize the collections of an ever-increasing number of cultural institutions world wide, and to bring these digital collections of “cultural treasures” online. The Art Project site hosts images of objects from the holdings of more than 600 international art galleries, museums, and other art collecting bodies. The Art Project collection is impressive in its size and amounts to several hundred thousand high resolution images with new institutions and their holdings added continuously. Images of objects in museum collections are indexed and sorted in a variety of ways, and users have a limited ability to influence their arrangements. As well as being able to sort images into personalized galleries, users are also able to compare two images from any collection side-by-side. While Google has put measures in place to discourage the download of images from the Art Project, images can be shared via email and social media sites.

The Art Project is separated from other Google assets like Search or YouTube in the sense that the content is not user-generated. Google Search's content is user-generated in the sense that Google merely provides links to sites created by various other users, and YouTube hosts videos created by the site's users. In contrast, the Art Project's content is predetermined by Google and the institutions that own the objects pictured in the Project. The personalized user galleries and the social media sharing function in the Art Project do generate new content arrangements and a great deal of data about user traffic, but users cannot add any new images or comments to the Art Project site. Users can work with what is already there, but cannot add to it unless representing an institution. The Art Project's edges are undefined in the sense that new collections and exhibits are continuously being added, but it is always already selective and authorial.

Many of the institutions that have contributed collections to the Art Project had digitized

collections before joining the Project, some of these including the McCord Museum and Royal Ontario Museum which are the subject of closer examination here, were also available online before the Art Project launched. Participating institutions have said that making their collections available through the Art Project increases their reach and audience (Widmer 2015; Woods 2015 personal communication). This suggests that there is a difference between making information available online and making it accessible through Google. The arguments of Siva Vaidhyathan, as well as those of Ken Hillis, Michael Petit, and Kylie Jarrett about the position that Google occupies on the Web speak to this point. Hillis, Petit and Jarrett argue that online search is an activity with its own set of practices and expectations and that Google has become synonymous with this activity (2013, 4). Vaidhyathan argues that Google as a search engine is a status authoring system because of the way that its algorithms calculate and rank the popularity and longevity of sites in generating search results (2011, 7).

Google and the position it occupies in the cultural activity of search depends on the assumption that “*everything* that matters is now on the Web...and *should*, in the moral sense of this verb, be accessible through search” (Hillis et al. 2013, 6). There is then a moral injunction towards being able to find things on Google, and this is a notion that is tied to what has been called a “network effect” in which a service increases in value the more users it attracts (Vaidhyathan 2011, 19). I would add that in the case of Google, there is value added the more information that is accessible through it, the more it can collect. So taking the moral dimension of search and the value of networked scope in combination, there is a sense in which Google has been designated or “consecrated” to be keeper of digital information (Hillis et al 2013, 8). Thus it is not surprising that Hillis et al. characterize Google's relationship to the vast amount of online

information it touches as “something like a hybrid steward-owner relationship to a global universal index or archive” (Hillis et al 2013, 5).

In addressing the role of Google in digital art collecting, I have been forced to contend with what Durham Peters calls its “singularly vague features” (Durham Peters 2015, 347). It is, I believe, a phenomenon that emerges from, in Chun's formulation, the “simultaneous ambiguity and specificity” of software materializations (Chun 2011, 11). Google is at once a corporate body and a set of products that double as pseudo-public services (Vaidhyanathan 2011), as well as a short-hand for the cultural ethos of Internet-based search (Hillis et al. 2013). Google and its service-products have become so naturalized that they fade into the background of daily life and in investigating Google, its services and projects, one has to contend with the very familiarity that causes phenomena to recede from view. It is an invisibility born of increased familiarity and of Google's tendency to operate in secret, announcing plans once products and projects have already launched, requiring non-disclosure agreements of all third parties it works with.

The question then becomes: how does Google's ambitions for universal collection and useful indexing of digital information affect the collections in the Art Project? In order to begin answering this question, the present thesis takes first a global view of the Art Project in order to situate it within the context of Google as a cultural force and practice. The focus of the study then narrows to examine more closely the composition and organization of images within individual collections in the Art Project. Two collections in particular serve as the ground for this investigation – these are the McCord Museum and Royal Ontario Museum collections in the Art Project. These two collections were selected because they are social and cultural history museums, and together they represent a particular kind of museological collection and use of the

Art Project. For the purposes of this thesis, it is important that neither of them is a fine arts institution. While the Art Project does host many strictly fine arts collections, the inclusion of collections like those of the Royal Ontario and McCord museums suggests something about what it is that Google believes itself to be collecting through the Art Project. It suggests that “art” and “cultural treasures” are broad categories whose vagueness is useful in expanding the collecting capacities of the Art Project.

The kinds of institutions that the Art Project works with, including the McCord Museum and Royal Ontario Museum, invite comparison of the Project to other kinds of collecting bodies such as museums and archives. The scholarship on museums and archives exposes the ways that collecting and imposing order on collected items are not neutral activities. They are embedded with expectations and assumptions about the “natural” or “obvious” order of things (Stoler 2009). Collection and organization in this sense are statements of inclusion and exclusion, and they are statements of the conceptual orders to which the collected items are understood to belong (Bennett 2013). How then do the governing logics of museums, archives, and Google shape understandings of items in the Art Project?

The comparison of the Art Project to museums is perhaps more immediately obvious because the Project gathers images of items in museum collections. Museums, generally speaking, have mandates that prioritize the maintenance of a physical collection and the public display of that collection in order to transfer information and knowledge (Latham and Simmons 2014). While the Art Project does not directly deal with physical objects, it is preoccupied with their display, and it is a display that assumes a direct indexicality of images to objects. As Suzanne Keene (2005) has observed, museums have been making digital versions of their

collections available via the Web as a way of reaching audiences and increasing their public outreach. In the Art Project the public-ness of display is complicated by Google's dubious status as a public entity (Vaidhyathan 2011). Though the Art Project is widely accessible and allows people to see cultural collections online without having to travel great distances, Google remains a private corporation. In the Art Project it is difficult to identify the explicit transfer of knowledge because there is very limited interpretative text explaining the conceptual threads that tie items together.

The Art Project might also be compared with archives. There are two bodies of theory that are being engaged in the way that “archive” is being engaged in this study. The first addresses archival preservation as a profession and governs the specific spaces of archives, while the second accounts for the archive's position in culture and the human sciences. The two bodies of theory are not always easily distinguishable as the word “archive” has come to mean a great many things. As Francis Blouin and William Rosenberg explain, conventionally the plural “archives” is used by professional archivists to describe such repositories as local record offices, while “archive” in the singular is used to indicate the broader socio-cultural understandings of the archive (2011, 4). It is a tenuous linguistic distinction and it illustrates the slippages that often occur between conceptualizations of the archive(s). The Art Project behaves as archive in both the plural and the singular sense. It behaves similarly to archives, in the plural, in the way that it treats the individual collections. The items in the Art Project are primarily arranged according to the institution that contributed the collection. For example, all the items from the McCord Museum and the Royal Ontario Museum are grouped together according to their respective institution. That is to say that the contributing institution serves as the collection's provenance.

Provenance in this context refers to an archived object's source of origin and is the most common organizing principle for documents in archives (Craven 2008; Blouin and Rosenberg 2011; Ridener 2009). Provenance in traditional archival terms traces an object's trajectory from its creation through various ownerships to its induction in the archive. For the Art Project, items are treated as though they originate in museum collections. Documents in archives are also usually described and arranged in ensembles which means that not every single document is indexed allowing for serendipitous discovery (Widmer 2015, personal communication). While all the items in the Art Project are grouped according to the museum or institution that contributed them, within each of these collections the items' arrangement is far less structured. The arrangement of items within each collection is algorithmically generated and encourages browsing and serendipitous discovery. These algorithmically generated arrangements produce juxtapositions of items that do not exist within museum spaces.

The Art Project also belongs to the order of the archive, in the singular socio-cultural sense because it is part of Google, which occupies a significant position in the culture of information gathering and the culture of online search (Hillis et al 2013). The Art Project shapes what can be found and therefore known about the collections of museums. Scholarship on the "archive" singular is largely shaped by the work of Michel Foucault (2010). Foucault conceives of the archive as a set of relations that determine the functioning of statements. The statement here is that which is said to be known as fact. In Foucault's work the statement is not fixed to the time or place of its creation (first utterance), but nor is it subject to all potential movement and modification. Instead the statement has "a certain modifiable heaviness" and a "constancy that allows of various uses" (Foucault 2010, 105). The archive is a system and set of practices that

allows “statements to both survive and undergo regular modification” (Foucault 2010, 130). This conceptualization of the archive allows for objects to be at once historical and contemporary. It allows objects to endure in new forms. In the case of the Art Project, the items are at once the physical objects in the museum spaces and the digital images in the Project, and as such seem to be the embodiment of a “modifiable heaviness” (Foucault 2010). The Art Project's items are historical by virtue of belonging to history museums and they are made contemporary by their digitization via the newest of Google technologies.

While the Art Project does respond to some of the exigencies of the categories of museum and archive as described above, it does not quite meet all the criteria for either. Rather the Art Project occupies a hybrid position between the two. This hybridity and failure to fully meet the definitions of either category is in large part due to the Art Project's digital nature. Both museums and archives traditionally rely on the singularity of the physical objects they collect for their unique cultural positioning. They also rely on the physical stability and permanence of their collections. A permanence that is always precarious but that is cited in the preservation mandates of archives (Craven 2008). Because it is digital, the Art Project's records always exist as copies – they are fundamentally reproducible and simultaneously exist on many screens. Digitization efforts have long been treated as extensions and improvements on the permanent preservation of archive and museum collections. However, as Wendy Chun argues, the digital only has a semblance of permanence that emerges out of what she terms an “enduring ephemeral” (Chun 2011). By this she means that digital files are continuously saved and re-inscribed on computer hardware such that their ephemerality endures (Chun 2011). So while object-oriented collections are never truly permanent, the addition of digital ephemerality of the Art Project increases the

precarity of that endurance.

In addition to decreasing the stability of preserved items, digital technologies have introduced a large and complex set of questions into the operations of museums and archives. These questions include the nature of the collection and its activities. In response, museums and archives have introduced digitization of their collections and increasingly have responded to expectations of internet searchability by making these collections (or portions thereof) available online. As Louise Craven has commented, visitors to archives now expect to be able to access an online catalogue (Craven 2008). Suzanne Keene predicts that museums of the future will become processes and experiences that include online presences, rather than self-contained buildings and physical spaces (2005, 139). In a similar vein, but about libraries, Jeffery Schnapp and Matthew Battles have argued that a remixing of digital and analogue is the most plausible scenario for libraries of the future (2014, 36). At present, “the physical and the virtual, the offline and the online, are intertwined with increasing intimacy” (Schnapp and Battles 2014, 36). There is evidence of this intertwining in the ways that the McCord Museum and Royal Ontario Museum collections claim to use the Art Project. Those responsible for the museum collections are very conscious about the nature and quality of reproductions and the ways that these reproductions act as promotional tools for the original object collections. That is to say that a clear distinction is made between physical object and digital reproduction. However, at the same time there is a conflation of object with image in the way that access to collections is discussed. In putting collections online, the difference between original and reproduction is rarely, if ever, discussed. Digital collections are thus both promotional tool for physical collections and points of access to the collection *tout court*. The implication is then that there is a permeability between the registers

of original (physical) object and digital reproduction.

Google's cultural and economic positioning has a decided effect on the nature of the collecting in the Art Project. What does it mean that it is Google that is the platform that “brings the world's cultural treasures online”? As several authors have pointed out, an unindexed site falls into a kind of Internet limbo, it falls off the map of the web (Hillis et al. 2013). Does it hold true for collections? If they are not indexed by Google are they in limbo? Nested in this last question are several others. Many if not most of the museums and collecting bodies represented in the Art Project have their own institutional web sites that make digital versions of (parts of) their collections available. These museum sites appear in Google Search results, they are indexed by Google. Why become part of Google if the institution's site can already be found through Google? One partial answer is that the reach of collections is increased by becoming *part of* Google rather than just being indexed by it.

As much as the Art Project resembles archives and museums in its treatment of items, it also resembles Google. The Art Project bears traces of the older collecting practices of museums and archives, but does not settle on either of these collection models, in part because it also incorporates the ideals of Google. Google is most evident in the selection of the contributing museum as the unifying thread for the organization of items in the Art Project. Such things as an item's subject matter or use function do not figure into the organization of items, rather items are grouped according to the institution that contributed the image. It seems then that the Art Project treats items as *information* to be indexed, sorted, searched, and shuffled. The main concern for these information items in the Art Project is their accessibility.

The hybridity and lineages invoked by the Art Project's collection and classification

practices, also evokes Foucault's description of heterotopias. Heterotopias are utopias, or “fundamentally unreal spaces,” that are in fact locatable in real (read physical) space (Foucault 1986, 24). Heterotopias are spaces that represent, contest, and invert the sets of relations found in other real spaces (Foucault 1986, 24). The Art Project is a virtual space, but it does reflect and represent several real physical places that are themselves geographically locatable. The museums represented in the Art Project, Google's servers, as well as Google's corporate offices exist in geographically locatable buildings. And this does not even begin to account for all the physical material infrastructure necessary for the functioning of the Internet. Thinking of the Art Project as a heterotopia allows it to remain an in-between and mixed space that encompasses the lineages of older collection models and Google's organization of information without necessarily choosing between them. Considering the Google Art Project as a heterotopia allows it to be at once archive, museum, and digital platform. All of these categories can be encompassed and held in suspension in the heterotopia, allowing the various conceptual orders imposed on collected articles to come into contact with one another and be disrupted. The Art Project then becomes a point at which these orders imperfectly come together and expose one another.

One of the ways that heterotopias mirror and distort cultural orders is through the disruption of the usual sequential experience of time, or “heterochrony” (Foucault 1986, 24). The museological lineage of the Art Project and the kinds of items it collects makes the heterochronic dimension of the heterotopia significant. According to Foucault's argument, museums are heterochronic because of the totalizing way they treat time (1986, 24). Museums attempt to hold infinite time in finite space, and in so doing become a “timeless” place – a place of arrested time. The items in the Art Project collections of the McCord and the ROM, as part of historical

museum collections, have a similar relationship to time. As the work of Bal and Bryson (1991) and of Keith Moxey (2013) suggests, cultural objects have pluralistic relationships to time. These objects must be contended with in the present while also accounting for the alterity of their pasts (Moxey 2013). The suspension of objects between past and present also figures in the work of Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood (2010). Nagel and Wood argue that cultural objects respond to two models of time. The first of which insists that the original material of the object must not be altered so that it may attest to the passage of time by its deterioration. The second model confers a primordial meaning onto the object which does not change or diminish no matter how often the object's materials are repaired or replaced. Cultural objects are suspended between these two models of time (Nagel and Wood 2010). Accounts of cultural objects must address the object as it is now and as it was in the past. Thus items in the Art Project are at once digital images and physical objects in museum spaces. The inclusion of *Death of General Wolfe* from the Royal Ontario Museum's collection as a "gigapixel" image in the Art Project is a particularly compelling example of the plurality of an item's context. It is both a singular historical object in the museum and it is a technologically advanced digital image in the Art Project. In their heterochrony items relate the spaces of museums, their original contexts, and the technological abilities of Google in the space of the Art Project.

Beth Lord has extended Foucault's analysis of museums as heterotopias by arguing that not only are museums heterochronic spaces, but they are also spaces of representation and interpretation (Lord 2006). It is the difference between objects and their conceptualizations in the work of interpretation that are of interest to Lord. That is to say the gap between things and the words used to discuss and explain them. The arrangements of objects in museum exhibits are

themselves interpretative because they reveal the implicit conceptual links between objects as they are understood by the museum (Lord 2006). Thus by extension the way that items are organized in the Art Project and in particular the collections of the McCord and Royal Ontario museums is indicative of the ways they are understood and interpreted. Considering the Art Project as heterotopian makes it possible to discern the points of contact between two sets of assumptions about the things that are collected within the Project. Assumptions that on the one hand, position items as witnesses to particular points in time and space whose arrangements in museum spaces produce history, and on the other hand take items to be so much digital information whose value resides in the ability to retrieve it.

The thesis takes the form of three core chapters bracketed by this introduction and a conclusion. Chapter One provides an overview of the literature that grounds the study. This includes scholarship in the fields of archive studies, museum studies, digital technology and software studies, as well as the emerging field of Google studies. Chapter One also presents the methodological framework of the present study, and grapples with the challenge of trying to write about something that refuses to remain stationary. Chapter One attempts to develop a framework that allows for statements that are specific to the Art Project but without being so specific that they will cease to be applicable as soon as they are committed to paper (or rather PDF). The framework must tread the line between generality – to remain viable even as the Project shifts – and specificity – to give the study traction.

Given the ephemeral and shifting nature of online entities including the Art Project, Chapter Two is largely descriptive and is an exploration of where the edges of the Art Project lie. Since the Art Project cannot readily be separated from other Google products and services, it is

useful to map out with as much exactitude as possible (while keeping in mind that total certainty is not possible) what is meant and understood in the “Google Art Project.” Chapter Two seeks to understand the Art Project's position relative to the larger practices of the Google company. It also seeks to understand Google's role in the cultural practices bound up in Internet-based search.

Chapter Three deals more specifically with the collections of the McCord Museum and the Royal Ontario Museum. It is a closer examination of the way that items and collections are interpreted within the Art Project. Chapter Three uses the digital collections of the two museums available through their institutional sites as points of comparison for the collections in the Art Project in order to discuss the conceptual assumptions of each.

CHAPTER ONE

Staking ground

This chapter provides an overview of the scholarship and the methodological framework that grounds the research for this thesis. The Art Project is primarily a collection and is treated as such. Given the Art Project's relationship to Google and given the kinds of institutions whose collections it gathers, this thesis positions the Art Project within the fields of museum studies, archive studies, and digital media studies including the emerging sub-field of Google-based studies. These fields of scholarship are evoked by the questions guiding the research regarding the nature of the Art Project as a collection and the knowledges bound up in the act of collecting. What are the implicit assumptions about material culture and history embedded in the activity of collecting digital versions of the collections of cultural institutions? How does Google affect the collections in the Art Project with its history of totalizing collection and indexing of digital information in general? It should be noted that the nature of public collecting – be it archive, museum, or library – has been complicated by digitization and Web-based databases. The Art Project is at the centre of these intersecting concerns about public-ness, collection, and preservation.

Literature review

On archives and museums

One of the questions guiding the research for this thesis has been how the Google Art

Project compares with other types of collections, and in particular with archives and museums? There are large bodies of literature for each of these collecting institutions. I propose to begin with archives and their intersection with digital technologies given the digital nature of the Google Art Project. Digital technologies and the possibilities they bring for rethinking the way historical research is conducted has brought archives under intense discussion and scrutiny. It is at this point of questioning, re-imagining, and refiguring that I wish to enter into the fray of archival literature. This is not to say that I wish to focus exclusively on scholarship that challenges the established concepts and understandings of archives. However it does mean that ideas about archives will be engaged through these moments of change and of challenge because these texts underline both the established archival modes and their challengers. This course was decided on because of the ways that Google and the Art Project challenge or alter the expectations of digital information, its collection, and its storage. It also seemed pragmatic as a way of ordering the engagement with a rapidly growing body of literature (see Steedman 2002, Burton 2005, Spieker 2008, Ridener 2009, Stoler 2009, Blouin and Rosenberg 2011, Duranti 2012, Ernst 2012, van Alphen 2014). In light of digital challenges to established practices, professional archivists have written about the restructuring of archives to accommodate new digital processes and the consequent changes in the roles of archives and archivists (Craven 2008, Blouin and Rosenberg 2011). Some of the issues raised by the introduction of digital tools include the changing nature of what may be archived, as well as the resulting change in purpose and reach of archives.

The nature and function of archives and, by extension, the role of archivists have become points of intense discussion with the increased use of digital tools in archival processes.

Generally, an archive is understood to be “a body of records generated by the activities of a specific individual or organization and commonly located (although not always) in a repository housing similar or related collections” (Blouin and Rosenberg 2011, 4). Craven offers a slightly narrower definition by specifying that an archive holds only those records selected for permanent preservation (2008). According to Francis Blouin Jr. and William Rosenberg, archivists are increasingly more involved in the bureaucratic management of digital records than in the evaluation of the possible histories they may provide (2011). As John Ridener (2009) and Louise Craven (2008) have argued separately, the decline of the archivist as historian and appraiser of records began with Sir Hilary Jenkinson in 1922 and has been exacerbated by the contemporary digital moment. This is particularly true of archives of born-digital records wherein records are collected at the moment of their creation (Blouin and Rosenberg 2011). With digital records everything is saved, and the management of sheer volume becomes rather urgent (Blouin and Rosenberg 2011; Craven 2008).

Professional archivist Louise Craven discusses digitization efforts as essential to providing archival service, and suggests that the availability of digital copies of archive records have become an expectation of visitors to an archive (Craven 2008). Scholars in the humanities including Claire Warwick (2012), Hussein Keshani (2012), Christine Sudnt (2013), and Diane Zorich (2013) view digitization projects as having the potential to enrich research and fill out understanding by increasing the access scholars have to information. Though many authors refer, in almost utopian terms, to the possibility of increased access to digitized objects (as compared to analogue archives), most do not specify how digital records are to be accessed. The implication is that the records will be made available over the Internet, and as Wolfgang Ernst has argued,

access via the Internet is the principal strength of digital archives (Ernst 2012). In some ways the Art Project with the reach of Google seems to be a response to these assessments of expanded access.

However, the availability of digital records has led to a great deal of institutional anxiety about the ability to control access to and circulation of digital objects for economic and legal reasons. As the work of Susan Corbett (2013) and Ben Lewis (2013) demonstrates, digital reproductions fall into several legal grey zones, particularly in regard to copyright law. As Siva Vaidhyanathan observes, on the Internet the default is that everything can be copied until copyright owners report infringements, whereas those who wish to copy off-line texts and objects must first seek out copyright permissions (2013, 167). Enrico Bertacchini and Federico Morando have produced economic studies that suggest digital reproductions increase the demand for the original object, to which institutions control access thereby increasing their profit margins (2013). Digitizing and disseminating elements of a collection seems to be a form of advertising.

The introduction of such tools and processes as digital finding aids and the digitization of fragile collections has created much discussion around the new possibilities for archival processes. In their study of professional preservation, Karen Gracy and Miriam Kahn note that with the introduction of digitization processes such as scanning and photography, fragile collections are more often physically moved off site and digital versions kept in the main space of the museum (2011). They also note that preservation professionals engage less in object-oriented custodial activities and increasingly in digitization and digital curation (Gracy and Kahn 2011). Authors such as M. Pappas et al. (1999), Hussein Keshani (2012), Christine Sudnt (2013), and Diane Zorich (2013) perceive the benefit of digitization projects and digital archives to be their

ability to preserve and facilitate the study of delicate objects. M. Pappas et al. present a design for a digital database management system specifically for the archiving of paintings and other analogue art works. Among its other features, this database system enables the storage of “multi-modal” images – visible light, x-ray, ultraviolet, infrared – that are linked to a single item entry (Pappas et al. 1999, 23). Pappas et al. present their work as the solution to most preservation problems without addressing the fact that the analogue object will continue to degrade while only the digital information is “preserved” in the digital archive (1999). The archive of the painting in question becomes the multiple digital images rather than the analogue object itself. Though the design that Pappas et al. present is more than fifteen years old, digital archiving tools are still often presented as the final preservation solution (Chun 2011). As formats become obsolete and the migration of information becomes necessary, there are anxieties expressed about the longevity of digital information (Gracy and Kahn 2011). Archivist Kenneth Thibodeau has argued that with digital archiving it is necessary to choose whether to preserve the format of a record or the information contained within it (Duranti and Shaffer eds. 2012). That is to say, a decision must be made between preserving the hardware and the file encoded on it. Luciana Duranti (Duranti and Shaffer eds. 2012) and Louise Craven (2008) have argued that the provenance of digital records, and therefore their authenticity, is difficult to prove. This according to Craven, decontextualizes the record and potentially destabilizes the archive (2008).

Even as the collecting activities of Google and the Art Project invite the comparison to archive collections, it cannot be ignored that the Art Project is more obviously museological. If nothing else, the institutional origins of its items would indicate its museological lineage. As Keirsten Latham and John Simmons (2014) argue, a museum is never just any one thing, a

museum is at once a physical collection, exhibition space, and set of narratives about the collection. Within museum studies the working definition of a museum as developed by Suzanne Keene (2002) and adapted by Latham and Simmons is, “a system to build and maintain an irreplaceable and meaningful resource and use it to transmit ideas and concepts to the public” (Keene in Latham and Simmons 2014, 10). As with archives, museums have undergone re-definition with the introduction of digital tools. In the accounts of authors such as Keene (2005), Latham and Simmons (2014), and Timothy Ambrose and Crispin Paine (2012) the procedures of museums have shifted significantly with the use of digital catalogues, and the digitization of collections. Not only do the daily operations of museums change with digitization, but so do the boundaries of collections. For example, focus has shifted from local place-based physical exhibits to the more direct transmission of collections online (Keene 2005, 140). Indeed the digitization of collections in some ways allows museums to expand their public mandate by providing increased access to collections and increasing their audience online (Latham and Simmons 2014; Keene 2005). The availability of collections in digital version also troubles the central position of the *physical* collection in the definition of a museum (Latham and Simmons 2014). Keene predicts that museums of the future will be processes and experiences moving into the communities they serve (Keene 2005, 139). This outreach, she argues, will be chiefly achieved through digitization projects that make provisions for unexpected use by communities exterior to the museum (2005, 152). The current use of digital technologies that only allow access to collections through the museum's interpretive framework preserves the presumed unidirectional transmission of information and narratives about cultural objects (Keene 2005, 139).

Museums often have huge portions of their collections in storage and these stored artifacts

far exceed the possibility of exhibiting them (Keene 2005). There is then a duality to the museum collection represented by exhibit and storage, Keene has characterized these as “communication and collection...voice and memory” (2005, 87). The stored collection is not very different from an archive in that it is removed from view and deemed important for the preservation of collective memories (Keene 2005). In the case of the McCord Museum there is an archive that forms its own collection area within the museum in addition to the larger stored collection. In addition to raising questions about the functioning of individual types of collecting institutions, digital technologies have also begun to blur the boundaries between collecting institutions such as archives, museums, and libraries. Latham and Simmons discuss the increased convergence of museums, archives, and libraries (or “LAM”) through digital systems designed to share information across institutions and offer more unified services (Latham and Simmons 2014, 20). The distance between museums, archives, and libraries is shortened by digitization efforts and the sharing of collections online. There is concern about shifting boundaries, edges, and jurisdictions common to museums, archives, and libraries that comes with digitizing and uploading collections to the Web (Schnapp and Battles 2014). As Jeffrey Schnapp and Matthew Battles (2014) argue in the context of libraries, the forms of books and libraries have been re-imagined many times over and they are perpetually in a state of transition. They also argue that a remixing of analogue and digital in the form the library takes next is the most likely scenario (Schnapp and Battles 2014, 36). This perpetual transition and remixing of analogue and digital is useful in thinking archives and museums together in the Art Project.

Michel Foucault's work on the archive is an apt theoretical frame for the digitally shortened distances between types of collecting institutions, for these institutions now have to

contend with the migration of objects across analogue-digital lines and across various digital file formats. These migrations pose challenges to the endurance of objects and their supposed ability to attest to times past. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (2010), Foucault presents the archive, in the singular, as a set of relations that governs what can and cannot be said (129). It is a system for the functioning of statements, statements that are not fixed, but that can within limits be modified and repeated (Foucault 2010, 105). The archive also comprises the rules of practice “that enables statements to both survive and undergo regular modification” (130). These sets of relations and practices open onto an understanding of time that is shaped by what is said of a given history rather than the “truth” of past experience (127). We cannot study our own archive because it is from within that same archive that we work (130). So then any study of the archive involves a region of time that is close to our own, but different enough that its discourses cease to be ours (131). It is in this slippery region of time that is not quite the present and not quite the past – a transitional border – that heterochronies and heterotopias may be found.

Foucault's essay “Of Other Spaces” (sometimes translated as “Different Spaces”) presents heterotopias as sites that bring together several spaces in a set of relations that makes strange, challenges, or inverts the relations internal to each of the spaces brought together (Foucault 1986, 24). Heterotopias are essentially enacted utopias – unreal spaces that can in fact be located in real, physical geographic space (Foucault 1986, 24). The Art Project is a virtual space and thus non-place that is also physically and geographically locatable in far-flung locations from Mountain View California to the 9th arrondissement in Paris. Heterotopias reflect and disrupt the conceptual orders of the culture to which they are linked. In the case of museums, Foucault argues that the conceptual order of time is disrupted because museums seek to accumulate in one

finite space the entirety of time in material form (2010). Foucault refers to this configuration of endlessly accumulating time as “heterochrony”. Beth Lord (2006) extends Foucault's discussion of museums by arguing that museums are heterotopias not only because they re-configure time, but also because they are spaces of representation and interpretation. Lord reminds her readers that heterotopias are spaces of difference and that interpretation always involves the imperfect straddling of a gap between objects and language (Lord 2006, 5). Julia Petrov argues that museum exhibits are interpretive because they lift objects out of their original (ordinary) contexts in order that they might represent those same contexts in the museum (2012, 219, 229). She further argues that exhibits are interpretive statements constructed via the placement of objects in carefully crafted relationships (Petrov 2012, 221). In the same vein, Tony Bennett (2013) argues that the ways in which museums structure the relationships between objects creates different object types. An object is produced as “art” or “national heritage” via its collection and placement with other similar objects (Bennett 2013). In the sense that the Art Project imports museum collections to its platform, it participates in the interpretation of objects. However, the placement and treatment of items in the Art Project is different than in museums and so by extension is the interpretation of those items. Heterotopias are spaces that subvert expectations of cultural order, and naming the Art Project a heterotopia makes visible the ways it challenges the cultural orders of museums, and the reciprocal ways the museums challenge the order of Google.

On looking at and making sense of images

The Google Art Project is predominantly visual in the way it presents items from museum collections, which makes the work of Keith Moxey (2013) and Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson

(1991) on practices of viewing relevant, especially as these are related to the interpretation of images. Moxey describes the study of images as necessarily anachronistic, in that the meaning of the image in the present must be negotiated in light of its meaning in the past (2013, 156). There is a tension between “the aesthetic demands of the object in the present...and the need to register the alterity of the past” in the study of art works (Moxey 2013, 158). Bal and Bryson have argued along the same lines, suggesting that a work’s meaning cannot be determined by analysis of only the historical circumstances under which it was created (1991). The context in which the work is encountered by the scholar in the present is equally as important as its historical significance in the negotiation of meaning (Bal and Bryson, 1991). The work of these art historians suggests some of the ways that the items in the Google Art Project might be understood. Google and the Art Project become the conditions under which digital images of much older cultural objects are encountered in the present. It is also worth mentioning that the reason images of these objects find themselves in the Art Project is because of their respective histories and the conditions under which they were made.

Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood in their book *Anachronic Renaissance* propose that artworks have the ability to move between two conditions of time (Nagel and Wood 2010, 13). The first of these conditions involves a primordial meaning conferred on the art object through ritual and labelling, no matter how often the materials are replaced or restored (13). The second condition is that unless it is the original material that is left to attest to the passage of time through weathering and deterioration, it is not interesting or important as an artifact (13). The authors go on to argue that the art work's ability to hold the two incompatible models of time in suspension without deciding is its “anachronic” quality (18). Nagel and Wood's articulation of the

anachronic character of art works describes the tension that Moxey and Bal and Bryson identify in negotiating present and historical contexts.

On Google

There is a growing number of studies that engage directly with Google and these are helpful in providing context for the Art Project (see for example Hillis et al. 2013 and Vaidhyathan 2013). While there are several scholars who have produced studies of Google, there are very few who have engaged specifically with the Art Project. For the most part, the Art Project has been the subject of cultural reviews rather than of sustained scholarship. The Art Project has been reviewed alternately as a technological platform and as an art exhibit. Reviews of the Art Project appeared in such popular publications as the *New York Times*, *PC World*, *Information Today*, and *Art in America*. While the cultural standing and reputations of these publications is widely varied, the reviews of the Art Project are surprisingly consistent. Articles by Roberta Smith (2011), Carly Berwick (2011), and Thomas Pack (2011) published the same year as the Art Project's launch emphasize the high quality of the images on the new site. The increased access to images of art works was also prominent in these articles. Smith makes the argument that the Art Project does not reproduce the experience of being in the physical space of a museum in front of an art work (Smith *New York Times* 2011). She argues that instead the Art Project offers an improved “next best thing” (Smith *New York Times* 2011). This is a sentiment that Pack echoed in his article.

Kim Beil's article on the nature of the looking encouraged by reproductions such as those in the Art Project is a notable exception to the usual review-style discussion of the Project (Beil

2013). Beil's argument is that the aesthetic norms of the digital reproductions in the Google Art Project such as brightness, sharpness, and high contrast influence the expectations that patrons have when faced with the original physical art work (2013, 26). In her words, “the perceptual training we gain through interaction with Art Project encourages us to look at actual works differently than did earlier forms of reproduction, whether graphically or photographically produced” (Beil 2013, 23). The Art Project's high-contrast and ultra high-resolution “gigapixel” images allow works to be viewed in incredible detail – details that cannot be seen by the un-aided human eye. This kind of virtual looking perhaps alters expectations of what is visible in the original works, which I will discuss in further detail below.

Many of the studies that engage with Google belong to the fields of software and technology studies or “new media” studies and tend to focus on products such as Google Search, Google Maps, and Google Books. All of these studies examine the various cultural impacts of Google and fit into what Richard Rogers calls “googlization studies” (Rogers 2013). Rogers describes googlization studies as a field of scholarship that examines Google's ever increasing media concentration based on a service-for-profile business model (2013, 84). Rogers conceptualizes the service-for-profile business model as a shift from consultational to registrational interactivity in which user history and preference affects the web content that search engines return as results to each user (2013, 85). Rogers also suggests that googlization studies are useful in thinking through the kind of status engineering functions that Google-the-search-engine and Google-the-company perform. As an example, Rogers suggests that the links at the top of the first Google search results page are indicative of the current status of an issue as well as the perceived authority of the sources featured in the top results (2013, 82). The kinds of

studies Rogers is describing are closer to political-economy in their engagements with the concentration of media and digital information under the Google banner than what is being presented here. However, the cultural force of Google that is being placed at the centre of these studies is relevant to understanding the Art Project. The studies that Rogers is describing provide the scholarly context in which a textual analysis of the Art Project is possible.

Ken Hillis, Micheal Petit and Kylie Jarrett's *Google and the Culture of Search* (2013) and Siva Vaidhyanathan's *The Googlization of Everything* (2011) are two important examples of googlization studies as discussed above. Vaidhyanathan's central argument is that Google, as a company, has uncritically been given an enormous amount of access and control over digital information (2011). He further argues that many of Google's products occupy positions that might be better filled by publicly funded services (Vaidhyanathan 2011). Through his critique of Google, Vaidhyanathan is not claiming that the company does active harm, rather that its current activities need to be critically examined and perhaps publicly regulated (2011, 4). Part of Vaidhyanathan's concern is that Google refracts and orders information on the Web according to biases towards popularity and longevity that are not necessarily made clear to users up front (Vaidhyanathan 2011, 7). The filters in place by Google as defaults to "clean up the web," including "safe search" filters, create a kind of censorship, because as Vaidhyanathan claims, most users neither change the default settings nor click past the first page of search results (2011, 15, 30). These behaviours then amount to tacit agreement from users to Google's ordering and regulation of the web (Vaidhyanathan 2011 15). While censorship may be less of a direct issue for the Art Project, the site does have its own set of default settings that include logging the user in through their gmail account. Presumably then the user's activity on the site is linked to their gmail

profile.

Vaidhyathan also discusses Google's position as a “platform,” as a facilitator of exchanges, and the objections that some content providers and copyright holders have raised about a “free ride” whereby Google is able to make a profit from the content provided by users without generating any of their own (2011, 167). José van Dijck describes the way that platforms such as Google track and code the relationships between people, ideas and things into algorithms that allow the company to commoditize those relationships (2012, 11). This discussion of Google as a platform is much more directly applicable to the Art Project because of the way it presents its mission as a vehicle for worldwide access to museum collections. The discussion of Google Search as a platform and the monetization of third-party content similarly resonates in much of the discussion around the Books project. There were concerns raised about the potential privatization of knowledge, copyright infringement, and the monopolization of the digital book market (Vaidhyathan 2011, 153-155). Jean-Noël Jeanney, president of the Bibliothèque Nationale in France, also raised concerns about the decidedly American focus of the project, as well as the form that reading would take through Google Books (Jeanney 2006). This last point about the Books project is also applicable to the Art Project in that the form of cultural works are potentially altered as they pass through Google. As Beil (2013) notes, the form and expectations of viewing art works are changed by the Art Project.

Hillis, Petit, and Jarrett's work examines Google's position in relation to a broader culture of search, a culture that assumes that all information is on the web and that everything should, in the moral sense of the word, be retrievable through search engines (Hillis et al. 2013, 6). This argument has also been put forward by Lev Manovich who claims that, “Because of the

popularity of the search paradigm on the web, we now assume that in principle we can – or will be able to in the future – search any media” (Manovich 2013, 114). Even though for some types of digital media it is extremely difficult to integrate a search mode, for users this does not matter. “[A]s far as they are concerned, all types of media content acquire a new common property that can be called *searchability*” (Manovich 2013, 114).

Hillis, Petit, and Jarret extend their argument to say that Google, as a company and as a search engine, occupies a consecrated position within the culture of search (Hillis et al. 2013, 8). They argue that Google's immense economic success and the multitude of uses to which it is put has collectively transformed it from a useful tool to “a sacred portal of information, the communion wafer of contemporary do-it-yourself life” (Hillis et al. 2013, 8). Google, and more specifically Google Search, is “a fulcrum through which the world of facts and the world of desire comingle” (Hillis et al. 2013, 16).

The authors often slip between references to Google as a global company and to particular services offered by that company (ie Google Search or Google Books). This slippage is perhaps related to the second part of Hillis, Petit, and Jarrett's overall argument, which is that Google's brand depends upon a kind of corporate messianism (2013, 7). The way it presents its services and its corporate ethic suggests that it views itself as a moral force bent on changing the world for the better (Hillis et al. 2013). That is to say that in terms of the Google brand there is no useful distinction to be made between the company and the services it offers. This is a position, that according to Hillis, Petit and Jarrett is taken up by users in their daily interactions with Google (2013).

On software and digital media

As has been discussed above there have been several efforts to critically engage with the effects of Google and its cultural force. However, as the conflation between Google-the-company and its products suggests the study of the Art Project would not be complete without an attempt to account for what Google is – as an Internet-based software application. What do you see and where do you go when you google something or visit the Art Project? It is on these points that the work of scholars such as Lev Manovich (2013), Alexander Galloway (2014), and Wendy Chun (2011) is invaluable. These scholars investigate the nature and cultural positioning of software, as well as user interactions with its varied interfaces.

Lev Manovich makes the claim in *Software Takes Command* that software is “a layer that permeates all areas of contemporary societies,” and that consequently all studies that deal with contemporary culture must also contend with the roles that software play (2013, 15). Manovich uses the phrase “cultural software” to mean those types of software that support cultural activity, including the creation and sharing of images, videos, etc. (2013, 21-23). In these terms the Art Project is a cultural software application. As Manovich observes in his introduction, software applications on the web are in a mode of perpetual change – for example, the Google Search algorithm gets updated a few times a day and is never really “completed” (2013, 1). Expanding on this observation, Manovich notes that “when a user interacts with a software application that presents media content, this content does not have any fixed finite boundaries” (2013, 36). This is, in part, because the content is often not predetermined and is subject to frequent updates. For example users of Google Earth, Google Books, and the Google Art Project are likely to encounter a slightly different “Earth,” “library,” or “gallery” every time they access these applications.

Manovich also argues that distinctions need to be made between different kinds of digital data and that analysis should be adapted to the particular properties of each data type (2013, 110). For example text, vector images, audio, and 3D models have their own set of techniques for generating, modifying, and viewing data. Which is to say that each type of data requires and enables different kinds of software capabilities (Manovich 2013, 151). To call media digital is insufficient as it is the software's treatment of data that is more important (Manovich 2013, 149). It is these software capabilities that are most relevant to those users who are not software engineers, who do not look at source code. As Manovich writes, "Different types of digital content do not have any properties by themselves. *What as users we experience as properties of media content comes from software used to create, edit, present, and access this content*" (2013, 150, emphasis in the original). So then a textual analysis of the Google Art Project must take into account the properties particular to the software that makes it accessible.

Alexander Galloway's work in *The Interface Effect* (2014) makes the essential argument that interfaces are themselves zones of negotiation of meaning rather than the transparent mechanisms that allow the person on one side of the screen to unproblematically access the content on the other side of the screen. According to his argument, interfaces are not objects or stationary boundary points, rather they are processes, zones of activity and effects (Galloway 2014, vii). Rogers echoes the sentiment in observing that studies of google inquire into the ways that subtle interface changes imply a politics of knowledge (Rogers 2013, 91). This important observation is the basis for the discussion of the interface of the Art Project. If as Manovich argues, the software layer must be accounted for, then the way we interact with that software must also be accounted for. As Wendy Chun has argued, it is difficult to definitively distinguish

between software as code and software as expression, as interface (Chun 2011, 5). Interfaces are a means of navigation, they are in Chun's words, “mediators between the visible and the invisible” (Chun 2011, 8).

Interestingly for the objects that have been digitized in the Art Project, Galloway argues that computer media follow a model of synecdoche in which parts are scaled for the whole (2014, 9). Our investment in the minutiae, in data mining, in scanning, is the precondition for creating digital worlds in which the world is abstracted into pattern and information (Galloway 2014, 13). “The promise [of digital worlds] is not one of revealing something as it is, but in simulating a thing so effectively that “what it is” becomes less and less necessary to speak about, not because it is gone for good, but because we have perfected a language *for* it” (Galloway 2014, 13 emphasis in original). The thing no longer exists on its own terms, no longer speaks for itself, but rather is spoken for in a language of our invention. So then, what happens to the objects that have been digitized through the Art Project? Are the original objects important, or is it enough to consider just the images in the Project?

Johanna Drucker in *Graphesis* (2014) tackles graphical user interfaces (GUI) and their innate interpretative quality that is obscured by our increasing familiarity with them. Drucker argues that the design of GUIs is task-oriented and focuses on feedback loops that minimizes frustration for the users performing these tasks (141). Writing about the development of GUIs, Drucker says: “Visual conventions quickly established the language of interface iconography, first as a vocabulary of recognizable pictures of things, then as cues for their behaviour and use” (Drucker 2014, 141). Interfaces, Drucker claims, are simultaneously expressions of content and sets of instructions guiding user actions and behaviours, it is as much what we read as how we

read it (143). Neither characteristic can be usefully considered in isolation, an interface is “a provocation to cognitive experience, but it is also an enunciative apparatus” (Drucker 2014, 147).

Wendy Chun in *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory*, makes the argument that software is difficult to fully understand because it is encountered through interfaces and because it relies on metaphorical explanations (Chun 2011, 2). As she observes, the experiences of using computers and software programs are ephemeral; the paths of execution seem to happen in a state of simultaneous visibility and invisibility, which makes information “neither quite present nor absent” (Chun 2011, 133). Information is externalized and thought of as a “thing” as software is perceived less as a service carried out in time and increasingly as a product (Chun 2011, 6). Information is thus no longer thought of as embedded in processes and human memory – it can be separated out. In the final chapter of *Programmed Visions* Chun makes the argument that computer memory is an archive that both regenerates and degenerates constantly, and thus opens the possibility of new modes of human intervention and responsibility (Chun 2011, 10). The reason that the metaphor of the archive is effective for the analysis of computers is because, as Chun argues, computers have conflated memory with storage – ephemeral memory has been conflated with enduring storage (Chun 133). “The paradox: what does not change does not endure, yet change – progress (endless updates) – ensures that what endures will fade” (Chun 2011, 137). She further argues that by bringing together and exchanging memory and storage “we bring together the past and the future” (Chun 2011, 133). The constant refreshing and regeneration of computer memories makes for an enduring ephemerality that permits the storage of programs that drive these same computer memories. This conflation of memory and storage in combination with the externalization of information seems to create a belief in the greater

permanence of machinic memory. For all of software's ephemerality, Chun does insist that information is not wholly immaterial since it does leave permanent traces on hard drives (when saved), and to read software code with a computer is to write somewhere else (Chun 2011, 170).

In sum, the analysis of images in the Art Project is grounded in practices of viewing that place the tension between past and present at the centre of art historical and visual studies. I am embedding these engagements with viewing within archival and museological studies and a Foucauldian understanding of space and time. To this I am adding the complications of digital media and software. And all of this is wrapped up in the simultaneous specificity and ambiguity of Google.

Methodology

The methodology for this thesis is built around a discursive analysis of the Google Art Project. Following Manovich's argument that to read media as merely digital is insufficient since it is really the software that is encountered, the analytical work here is attuned to the specificities of Google and the properties enabled by the software of the Art Project. That is to say that the Art Project is not only considered as a repository for digital information, but also as a particular set of ways for encountering that digital information. Wendy Chun has indicated the need to “grapple” with software's “simultaneous ambiguity and specificity,” and this description is particularly apt for the methods that have been adapted here for the Art Project (Chun 2011, 11). Google as an ethos for online information creates some ambiguities around the way that the Art Project fits in with other information sharing and collection undertaken by Google. At the same time, the specificity of the Art Project as a Google service-product governs what can be achieved with the collection of the information.

With that in mind, the study takes the Art Project to be a text that continues to grow and change. As the work of Manovich and Chun discussed above suggests, analyses of software applications must contend with the ephemerality and changeable boundaries of their objects of study. Thus the present thesis must account for the flux that is central to Google and to the Art Project. The Art Project will not necessarily look the same to different users and it often shifts between visits by the same user (albeit these changes are not always immediately apparent). This flux is a result of the continued growth of the Project – the continual addition of new images and new participating institutions – as well as the algorithmic presentation of “featured items” on the Project's homepage. These featured items are also continually being added to as collections expand and it seems that they are not on a fixed loop, so that even if a user were to sit and watch all the featured items go by they would not see them repeated in the same order.

The challenge then is to construct an analysis of a text that refuses to sit still. There are two solutions employed here. The first is an attempt to impose a kind of temporary fixity through a process of inventory in which the number of participating institutions, the number of virtual tours offered, the number of featured galleries, and the number of images that received special treatment, etc. have been recorded. Screen shots and handwritten lists of featured items have also been used as inventory. Importantly, these inventories are not and could not have been complete. That is not their purpose, rather these inventories are a strategy for keeping the Art Project still long enough to have a good look at it – to examine it in detail. It is also a method to be able to view and analyze various browsing functions, filters, and viewing options side by side and offer comparative analysis. However, this imposed fixity is temporary and not insisted upon. Wherever possible I have made conscious attempts to acknowledge the changeability and flux of the Art

Project. Chapter Two in particular is in this vein, and is an exploration of the various definitions that may be applied to the Art Project and their relative usefulness. The second solution employed here is to impose a corpus through the selection of two collections around which to build Chapter Three. The Art Project is so large and its collections so diverse that the present study cannot account for all of them. So in the selection of the collections for the corpus the thesis is providing an account of a particular kind of historical collecting and its relationship with the Art Project.

The corpus is made up of the collections of the McCord Museum in Montreal and the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto. These institutions are both history museums. The McCord is a social history museum with a focus on Montreal and Canadian history, whereas the ROM is a natural history and cultural history museum. The two collections in the Art Project are of a comparable size, the McCord hosts 470 images, while the ROM hosts 313 images and a virtual tour of one of its exhibition halls. The two collections were selected because they are similar enough in their locations and mandates that they make for useful contrasts and comparisons. The two collections and institutions represent a particular use of the Art Project and a particular kind of participating institution – they represent an archival and museological approach to the Art Project. They were also selected because they are not primarily fine art museums and their inclusion in the Art Project, which presents itself as a fine art space, is provocative. The inclusion of self-proclaimed history museums in the fine art space of the Project suggests a stretching of the Art Project's capacity to encompass cultural collections and deserves investigation. There are several other uses and dimensions of the Art Project collections that are beyond the scope of this thesis, including the collections of street art organizations, that represent a different vision of the Project.

Both the McCord and the ROM have their own institutional websites that host digital images of artifacts in their respective collections. What is available through the Art Project represents a small fraction of the digital images available through each museum's institutional website. At the time of writing, the ROM's website hosts approximately 8 500 digital images of items in its collection, while the McCord site hosts approximately 118 500 digitizations of its collection. These institutional sites and collections of images have been used as points of comparison for the collections that each museum has made available through the Google Art Project. The comparative analysis between these sets of image collections is used as a way of identifying the properties specific to Google, and those specific to each museum's digital collection. The comparison of the collections available through museum websites with the collections on the Art Project also serves as a method of identifying the conceptual assumptions present in each version of the digitized collection. As Drucker writes, “The antidote to the familiarity that blinds us is the embrace of parallax, disaggregation of the illusion of singularity through comparatist and relativist approaches, and engagement with fragmentation and partial presentations of knowledge that expose the illusion of seamless wholeness.” (Drucker 2014, 179). The presentations of museum exhibits and displays are familiar, as is Google and its treatment of images and information, which means that their implicit assumptions about the nature of the collection may not be immediately evident. However, in approaching the two sets of collections as comparative and relative their implicit assumptions are highlighted in their differences. In comparing the two sets of collections, I am essentially asking why it was done one way and not another. It is a question that calls forward that which appears too self-evident to name, that which goes without saying.

The analysis of the two collections on the Google Art Project were supplemented with interviews with curators and archivists at each institution. Celine Widmer, Curator of the Textual Archives, and Stephanie Poisson, Head of Web and Media, at the McCord Museum, as well as Nicola Woods, Rights and Reproductions coordinator, and Ryan Dodge, Digital Engagement Coordinator, at the Royal Ontario Museum were generous in offering their time and experience. The interviews were invaluable in gaining insight into the rationales for joining the Art Project and the processes involved in making a collection available through the Project. The interviewees also offered insight into the digitization and curatorial practices internal to their respective institutions. These interviews have been used as reference material in building the analysis of the museum collections available through the museum websites as well as through the Art Project. References to the interviews in the thesis text have been identified as “personal communication” in parenthetical citations, for example (Widmer 2015, personal communication).

To the various layers of analysis described above, I should now add the theoretical dimension. Theorizations of museums and archives as collecting bodies that impose interpretive conceptual orders on the things they collect served as a lens through which to approach the Project. For although the Art Project is specific to Google, it also has older forms of collecting as part of its lineage. The concept of the heterotopia served to name the Art Project as a changeable space in which collection models and orders meet and are mutually challenged.

CHAPTER TWO

Google and the Art Project

In conducting the research for this thesis it has become increasingly clear that the Art Project, as an object of study, is not easily definable. As with many digital Internet-based quantities, the Art Project shifts even as attempts are made to describe it. This continuous shifting and changing is a property of the Internet and of Google. Its slipperiness is part of the Art Project's fascination, but it makes analysis rather difficult. As a remedy, this chapter seeks to sketch out and feel for the edges of the Art Project. In reaching for the edges this chapter also asks what it means to look at art reproduced as digital information “brought to you by Google”?

Most simply, the Art Project may be described as a website that gathers images of thousands of art works and cultural objects from the holdings of museums, galleries, and other collecting bodies. Users are able to browse the entirety of the collection, take virtual museum tours, and sort and save images in personalized “galleries.” While this description is accurate, it is also inadequate, not least because it fails to account for the continuous expansion of the Art Project's collection, and because it fails to account for the way that art works are experienced and understood in the Project. The Art Project is indeed a repository of images from institutional collections, but it is also a series of interconnecting networking platforms including a YouTube channel, Google Hangouts, and a Google+ page, all of which are embedded in a particularly Google vision of the Internet. These networked platforms enable users to share images and the personalized galleries they create through the Project, which makes it nearly impossible to

contain these images (that may or may not be under copyright) within the Art Project. The edges of the Art Project are blurred not only because of its networking and outreach capabilities, but also because it is difficult to point to exactly where the Art Project ends and where Google's other information collections begin – the Cultural Institute in particular.



Figure 2.1. Screen shot of the Art Project home page taken 2 March 2015. The image of a “featured item” that serves as backdrop for the home page changes every few seconds.

Google launched the Art Project in February of 2011 with contributions from seventeen museums distributed across nine countries (Sood 2011). The launch included one work selected by each participating museum to be given particular attention in the form of a hyper-resolution “gigapixel” image (Smith 2011; Pack 2011, 42; Berwick 2011, 23). The Art Project impressed reviewers with the high quality as well as with the quantity of images in one place (at the time of launch it hosted over 1 000 images). In many instances it was reviewed as an exhibit, as a thing

and a place to be visited (Smith, 2011). Reviews from the early days of the Art Project emphasize two features of the Art Project with revolutionary potential. The first feature is the adaptation of Google Street View imaging technology to offer virtual tours of museum and gallery spaces. In fact, in these early reviews the Art Project is primarily described as a site providing virtual tours of museum spaces. Tours that do not recreate the experience of physically being in gallery spaces, but which do provide an improved “next best thing” and “great practice for looking at actual works” (Smith 2011; Beil 2013, 22). The second feature that was hailed as revolutionary is the “gigapixel” images of the works singled out by each participating institution. These 7 billion megapixel images of works including, Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* and Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, allow users to zoom in and take a microscopic view of the works (Sood 2011). The microscopic views enabled by the Art Project were described as potentially revealing to conservators and generative of new conversations around the art works (Berwick 2011, 23).

At the time of the launch, Google made no claim to curate the images included in the Art Project. Museums were responsible for determining the number of works as well as the extent of the viewing notes to be included. The Art Project was simply to be a platform for museums to bring their collections to a wider public. Individual institutions were also responsible for seeking copyright permissions, which explains why the early Art Project collection had relatively few contemporary and modern works, and many more works that had passed out of copyright (Gordon 2013).

Since its launch, the Art Project has grown at an impressive speed. In 2012 Google introduced a major expansion of the Art Project, announcing that it was “going global,” and that the contributing institutions now spanned 40 countries (as compared to the 9 countries in early

2011) (Sood 2012). The collection of high resolution images grew from just over 1 000 to more than 30 000, while the number of gigapixel images went from 17 to 46 (Sood 2012). That same year Google also added the “Explore,” “Discover,” and “Compare” tools (Sood 2012; Adamczyk 2012). The “Explore” and “Discover” tools allow for more refined searches across museum collections according to categories such as “period”, “artist”, and “type of art work” (meaning the work's medium) (Sood 2012). The “Compare” tool allows users to select two images and look at them side by side in detail, and is described as an educational tool primarily for art students, but also interesting for the simply curious (Adamczyk 2012). It was also as part of this expansion that the Art Project added Google Hangouts and Google+ applications so that users could better personalize their individual galleries and share them online (Sood 2012). The addition of the Hangouts application allowed users to give “guided tours” of the galleries they shared with their networks (Adamczyk 2012).

At the time of writing in December 2015, the Art Project hosts images of works from the collections of some 600 participating institutions and offers virtual tours for 240 of those collections. Since the 2012 expansion, the Art Project seems to function increasingly as a repository of images rather than as a provider of virtual museum tours. Increasingly it seems to be the scale of the collection and its global accessibility that is of greater importance (Sood in Cairnes 2013; Art Project Google+ page). The virtual tours and the reproductions of exhibit spaces seem to have become almost secondary features. The images are primarily organized into “collections” according to the institution that contributed them, however it seems that the ability to explore the entire Art Project collection and compare works across individual museum contributions is where Google is placing emphasis (Adamczyk 2012). As a result, in its current

form the Art Project's search and filter functions have become highly sophisticated. A number of search and sort functions were added following the introduction of “explore” and “discover” in 2012 that allow users to call up and arrange images according to categories such as “collection,” “creator,” “medium,” “event,” “place,” “person,” “media type,” and “date”. Each of these categories is further refine-able, and in addition to searching or browsing by category, users may also search for specific works or collections using keywords (as one would expect from Google given its beginnings as a search engine).

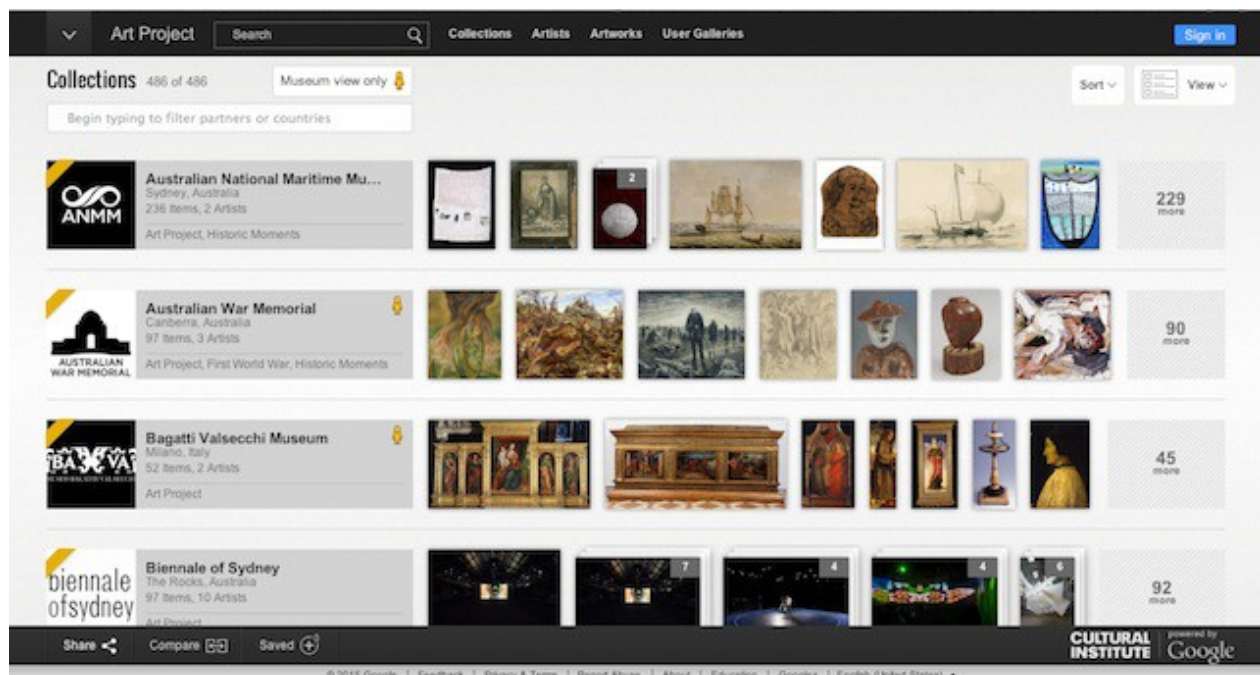


Figure 2.2. Screen shot of the “collections” page of the Art Project taken 2 March 2015. The default arrangement (shown here) is alphabetical.

The Art Project also offers browsing recommendations such as lists of featured galleries and items. Images may then be sorted and saved into personal user galleries to be published on the Art Project site. Suggested browsing is offered through the organization of images into lists of

“featured items.” If clicked on, a “featured item” will generate further suggestions of items that may be of similar interest. These kinds of recommendations for browsing are arguably a kind of curation in that the metadata creates pseudo-thematic connections between the images suggested. For example following the “similar” and “more” links from Van Gogh's *Starry Night* will bring up a series of images of Van Gogh's work hosted on the Art Project, as well as a collection of 14,925 images linked by the metadata tag “oil paintings” under the topic “medium.” In addition, many of the featured galleries published in the “user galleries” section of the site have been created by museum curators or gallery directors.

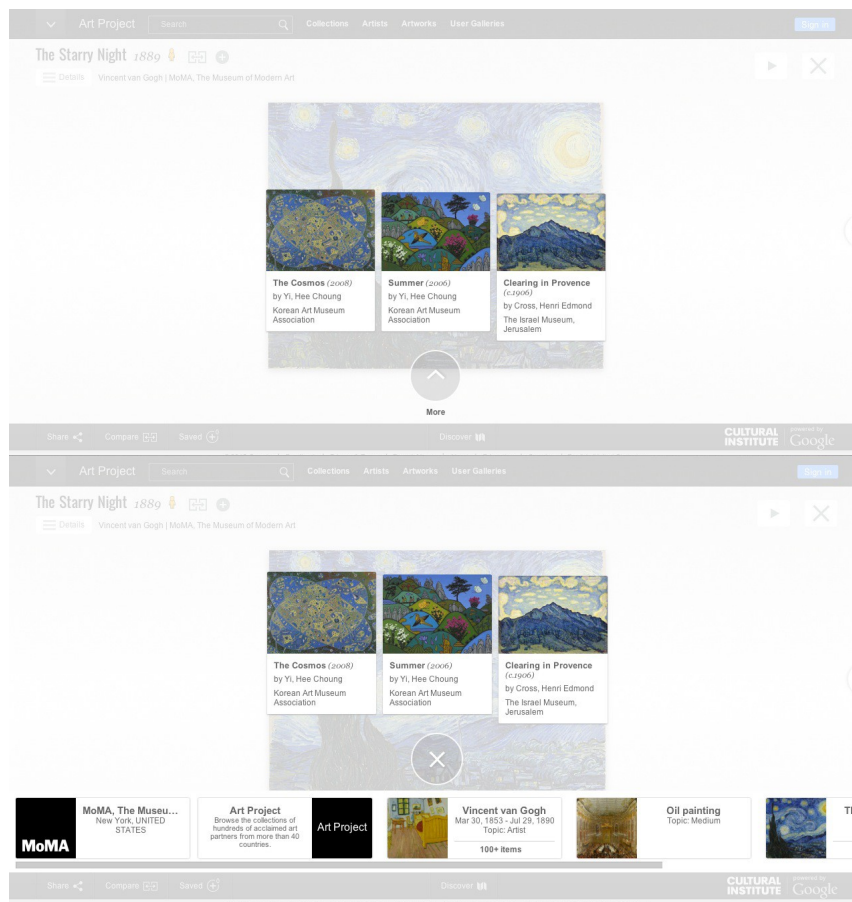


Figure 2.3. Screen shots of the “similar”(above) and “more” options from the item view of Van Gogh's *Starry Night*. Screen shots taken 2 March 2015.

The preceding description presents a fairly self-contained project, however the boundaries of the Art Project are far less well defined than the above would suggest. The above does not take into account the curated online “exhibits” organized and published by the Google Cultural Institute. This is where the edges begin to blur, particularly in respect to the division of responsibility taken for these images. The Cultural Institute was established in 2011 following the public launch of the Art Project and was intended to be an extension of the Art Project (Willsher 2013). The Cultural Institute primarily exists online (as do many of Google's divisions), but at the end of 2013 its location was concretized in the form of an office building at 8, rue de Londres in Paris, France (Willsher 2013). The Cultural Institute is headed by Amit Sood and is presented as the answer to the question, “how do you take all these different tools that Google has and alter them for the cultural sector?” (Sood in Cairnes 2013). The Institute is positioned as both a curatorial body and as the provider of tools and platforms for museums and other cultural bodies. The Institute was created “to provide a visually rich and interactive online experience for telling cultural stories in new ways” (Google Cultural Institute, Google+ page). The Institute is now responsible for the Art Project, as well as several other cultural endeavours, including the World Wonders Project and several archive exhibitions.² The World Wonders project is similar to the Art Project in that it hosts high quality images and virtual tours of heritage sites. The archive exhibits are curated from materials in both the Art and World Wonders projects, as well as from specialized collections not part of either project. Prominent examples include exhibits curated from the archives of Nelson Mandela and an exhibit on the Dead Sea Scrolls.

In creating a site for “telling cultural stories in new ways,” the Cultural Institute is

² The archive exhibits are called “Historic Moments” in the Cultural Institute's site. At the time of writing (December 2015), there are 124 “Historic Moments” exhibits.

engaging in both the making of tools for others to tell their stories as well as telling particular stories through their curated exhibits. The tools being presented here include the Art Project, which is perceived at least by Google, as an educational tool and platform (Sood in Cairnes 2013). In addition, the 2015 introduction of “Open Gallery” as a set of “powerful free tools” to help galleries, museums and archives “to bring their content online,” positions the Institute as an enabler of online cultural storytelling. “Google is building tools that make it simple to tell the stories of our diverse cultural heritage and make them accessible worldwide” (Cultural Institute, Google+ page). Even though there is a significant amount of curation that happens through the Cultural Institute, and even within the Art Project, Google presents them both as neutral, as transparent interfaces. Though as Alexander Galloway argues, interfaces are never neutral or transparent boundaries that allow access to content. Rather, interfaces are themselves zones of negotiation of meaning (Galloway 2014).

The scope of the Cultural Institute and by extension the Art Project is explicitly global. According to its information page, the Cultural Institute has developed partnerships with museums, archives, and heritage sites in order “to host the *world's* cultural treasures online” (Google Cultural Institute, “About,” 2014 emphasis added). These exhibits are meant to “tell the stories behind the archives of cultural institutions across the globe,” and to be “accessible to all” (Google Cultural Institute, “About,” 2014). The auto-description offered by the Cultural Institute positions the Projects as altruistic, public services designed to preserve and make accessible for reference the materials of a single global heritage and cultural history (Google Cultural Institute, “About,” 2014). This global scope and vision sets up a particular kind of cultural narrative, a narrative in which it is possible to gather all the world's culture as images in a single place on the

Internet. In so doing, the Art Project constricts what counts as culture and what kind of story it is possible to tell. Even though it speaks about a global cultural heritage, the Cultural Institute (and Google more generally) as Amit Sood admits, takes a “very American and European” view of culture (Sood in Cairnes 2013). As Siva Vaidhyanathan observes, “Google is simultaneously very American in its ideologies and explicitly global in its vision and orientation,” and the company “explicitly structures and ranks knowledge with a universal vision for itself and its activities” (2011, 9). So even in its self-appointed neutrality and totalizing inclusivity, Google is decidedly not neutral.

The language of universal accessibility present in the Cultural Institute's description of itself is typical of many of Google's endeavours. The company's mission is to “organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful” (Vaidhyanathan 2011, 2). This it achieves through such online platforms as Google Search, Google Scholar, Google Books, as well as the projects of the Cultural Institute. Products such as Android phones and Google Glass fall under a slightly different category of Google activity and have a different relationship to information than those parts of Google that exist primarily on the Internet. As a result, Google Glass and Android are beyond the scope of this paper. The present cannot hope to give a complete account of the Google company's relationship to digital information. Instead this section is an attempt to sketch Google's impact on the presentation and expectations of digital information collections online through two of its products – Google Search and Google Books – in order to suggest some of the ways that the Art Project may be understood.

Ken Hillis, Michael Petit and Kylie Jarrett have argued that Google's attempts to organize the world's information is an attempt to “achieve something like a hybrid steward-owner

relationship to a global universal index or archive” (2013, 5). The hybrid steward-owner is a rather apt description of Google's relationship to the information it sifts, sorts, and indexes. Google claims the role of caretaker by claiming to make information useful and offering platforms that facilitate its circulation. For all its totalizing collections and curations of digital information, Google has not claimed ownership of the information it orders. Yet the fact remains that in the cases of Books and the Art Project, Google owns the index of the digital versions of real-world objects and thus controls their access and retrievability. While Google Search does rely on the ability to make cached copies of everything it can find online in order to make the information searchable, it does not claim ownership over the information it copies. Rather it operates under the American copyright provision of “fair use.” The fair use provision in American copyright law allows for the copying of work without the copyright owner's permission for the purposes of education, journalism, criticism, and research (Vaidhyathan 2011, 160). For all protected work that exists “off-line” the burden of permission is placed on the party doing the copying while the reverse is true of material online. It is left to the copyright holder to identify and report infractions. “The default on the web is that everything can be copied” (Vaidhyathan 2011, 167). The implication is that under American copyright law, Google is considered as a research and/or educational body. This is in keeping with the way that Google presents its own products.

While it does not claim ownership, Google Search makes information retrievable and, through its PageRank algorithm, makes it relevant and authoritative. PageRank, the Google algorithm that sorts links into orderly “search results” lists, organizes links according to popularity and reputation. These calculations and rankings are designed to produce “relevant”

search results – results that match the actual query terms, but that also correspond to the particular user's search history (Vaidhyanathan 2011, 20-21). Which is to say that not everyone with the same search query terms receives the same results. In using Google Search users are not all consulting the same set of information. Google thus refracts the way information is perceived as true, useful, and relevant. Once again Google and its use is not transparent or neutral.

The relationship of Google to copyrighted material is complicated by Google Books. Google Books began in 2004 as an agreement with American university libraries that allowed Google to scan thousands of books and make them available online. Most of the participating libraries restricted the scanning to only those books that had passed into the public domain. However, some libraries like the one at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor granted Google access to the entirety of their collections, including works that were still under copyright without first gaining the permission of the authors (Vaidhyanathan 2011, 158). Google did not make these copyrighted scans available online, but the copy still exists. The larger dispute regarding the Google Books Project came from mainly American publishers. As Google Books expanded to include more libraries, it was argued that Google would effectively have a monopoly over out-of-print books and books in the public domain. As a settlement with the publishers Google agreed to offer for sale full-text copies of certain books as downloads (Vaidhyanathan 2011, 161). European librarians were vocal in their objections to the project and to the settlement, claiming that Europeans had not been consulted and that the impact of such a decision reached far beyond the United States (Jeanneney 2006). Google Books currently offers excerpts (“snippets”) of books that are under copyright and offers the option to buy these books in print or digital copy by supplying links to external vendors. Much of the concern about Google Books was, and still is, its

universalist approach and the flattening effect it has on the specificities of cultural practices around authorship and reading (Jeanneney 2006). Google has pledged to scan all known books by 2020 (Hillis et al. 2013, 162). In this sense Google Books is in line with the Art Project's and Cultural Institute's totalizing grasp for the world's culture.

In one important respect, the Art Project is different than Google Search and Books – it does not carry advertising. This is remarkable because Google generates much of its revenue through advertising. Advertisers bid in instantaneous auctions in order to have their ads featured in the “sponsored results” that appear along side the regular or “organic” results generated by PageRank (Vaidhyanathan 2011). Google Search in particular has been criticized for selling user attention as well as information about user preferences and search history to better target the ads (Vaidhyanathan 2011). This practice makes it all the more remarkable that the Art Project does not carry advertising. Indeed, Amit Sood stated in an interview with *The Guardian* that the Art Project is entirely “non-commercial” (Sood in Cairnes 2013). Apparently, it is written into the contracts that Google has with the participating institutions that Google cannot “make money” from the site's content (Sood in Cairnes 2013). The Art Project does not carry advertising and does not sell the images in its collection, and although the images may be shared electronically Google has taken steps to prevent the downloading and printing of these images. Images from the Art Project may only circulate on screens (and in screen shots). Although the Art Project's “non-commercial” status makes it appear altruistic, it is difficult to accept that Google does not benefit. It has been suggested that Google's interest in scanning thousands upon thousands of books was to gather a vast amount of data about the uses of language in order to improve their keyword search algorithms (Vaidhyanathan 2011; Lewis 2013). Perhaps there is a similar motive for the

Art Project. The thousands of images now under Google's control may serve as visual data to improve Google's search from image capabilities, or it may serve other functions not yet available.³

The hybrid steward-owner relationship to digital information that Google takes on is not merely a result of Google's own initiative, but is also due to what has been termed its “consecrated” status (Hillis et al. 2013). That is to say, the power that is invested by users' naturalization of Google's activities. Google has set the standard, at least in popular use, for digital reference tools and knowledge sharing online, with such products as Google Search and Google Books. The brand and the company have become synonymous with looking up information online and the verb “to google” has been canonized in several English language dictionaries. Ken Hillis, Michael Petit, and Kylie Jarrett have argued that turning Google-the-company into “to google,” “googling,” and “googled” points to the naturalization of Google as an activity and a practice rather than as private communications firm (2013, 4). Turning Google-the-company into a verb and gerund also makes Google Search stand in as synecdoche for all the firm's activities and products. After all, the accepted meaning of “to google” is the search for information.⁴ In the argument put forward by Hillis, Petit, and Jarrett the transformation of Google's search engine into a verb suggests something about what they call the “culture of search”. The culture of search is the (generational) belief that everything that matters is online and that it *should* be available through search engines (Hillis et al. 2013, 6, emphasis added). These authors have also argued that search as a cultural practice depends on an invisibility or disavowal of the complexity of the algorithms and infrastructures that make it possible. The

3 “Search from image” is the Google Search function that makes it possible to drag an image file into the search bar and have Google return both text and image results.

4 “Search for information about (someone or something) on the Internet using the search engine Google.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/google?q=to+google>.

sparse front page of Google Search with its logo and single search bar is a perfect example of the disavowal of complexity in search activity. Hillis, Petit, and Jarrett expand on the naturalization of search practices in the following:

Online and mobile search practices and the algorithms that determine results are accepted by most searchers as utilitarian – though widely understood to be powerful, their very ubiquity has quickly naturalized them into the backgrounds, fabrics, spaces and places of everyday life. As practices, they are above all efficient and convenient and therefore conceived as politically neutral (Hillis et al. 2013, 5).

In order for belief in the moral injunction of the search-ability of everything online to be sustained, the perception of political neutrality needs to be in place. And indeed, this perception of neutrality is mirrored in the way that Google presents its products and services as free tools and platforms to make possible the desires of its users. Google places itself at the service of the public.

According to Hillis, Petit, and Jarrett, online search engines are understood as public utilities, and Google as the synecdoche of all search engine activities (2013, 5). By extension then, Google is understood as a public utility despite its status as a privately controlled company. Indeed, the fact that Google's online products are popular, easily accessible, and free to use (with an Internet connection) makes them *feel* like public services. As Siva Vaidhyathan has convincingly argued, many of Google's products and services, including Google Books and Google Search, constitute examples of what he calls “public failure” (2011, 155). These are services that he argues should be publicly funded and regulated, but because Google was either first or the most rapidly expanding and provided these services at little to no public cost, the public sector has not intervened in the effective privatization of information. There have been a few publicly supported alternatives to Google Books, but none of these has gained the popularity

of Google. According to Vaidhyathan, the public failure concerning Google stems from the neoliberal belief that technicized private industry's ability to solve problems and provide public solutions is greater and more efficient than state investment and oversight (2011, 43).

Vaidyanathan's argument is specific to a north american context (as is this study), but it is this context that spawned Google and so is relevant to the way Google and its users perceive the company's position, and its “corporate responsibility.” A responsibility that is felt in “non-commercial” Google services such as the Art Project that exist at the service of the public and art galleries. It remains however, that Google's database of cached information is incredibly powerful and is “in the hands of a non-representative private corporation” (Hillis et al. 2013, 17). This hesitation about the public-ness of Google is compounded by the fact that if Google as a company failed there is no guarantee of what would happen to the staggering amount of information contained in collections like Google Books and the Cultural Insitute, as well as the billions of links available only because they can be found by Google Search.

The public-ness of Google is further complicated by its relation to revenue and profit. To the individual user, Google Search is apparently free, however as Siva Vaidhyathan has pointed out, using Google is far from free (2011, 26). The people who enter search queries (those I have been referring to as users) incur costs in the form of computer hardware and Internet usage fees, but Google's customers are in fact the advertisers that bid to have their ads placed in the “sponsored results” that appear at the top of a search results page (Vaidhyathan 2011, 26). As José van Dijck has argued, platforms like the ones owned by Google like to present themselves “as pioneers of a joint public-private endeavour” (van Dijck 2012, 11). Google presents itself as a business by necessity, which is to say that they are only a business in order to fund the platforms

they place at the service of the public (Schmidt and Rosenberg 2014). There have been many scholars who argue that since Google is a privately owned corporation of huge economic success it cannot perform non-economic services, that its altruism is denied by the “truth” of its status as a business. In essence, the public quality of Google is foreclosed by its economic status. Hillis, Petit, and Jarrett have argued in contrast that there is no such natural distinction between economic and non-economic activity (2013, 7). Instead, they argue, Google's is a model of “corporate messianism” which is a combination of “technological idealism and missionary zeal suffused with corporate pride and capitalized overtones to be sure, but messianism nonetheless” (Hillis et al. 2013, 7). Perhaps then, it is possible for Google to be a private company that provides pseudo-public services. It is at this intersection of public and private that Google's messianism – “Google's belief that it is a moral force destined to reform the world for the better” – emerges (Hillis et al. 2013, 153).

In drawing comparisons between the Art Project and Google's treatment of other information collections (Google Books) and information hierarchies (Google Search), the foregoing has been an attempt to suggest the kinds of effects that Google's involvement in digitizing art works may have. As has been suggested by Hillis et al. about Google Books, Google's collection and aggregation of digitized culture may well function as a “library-cum-archive.” It is a collection that has the means of obtaining and maintaining materials, and that it serves a patron group if one considers that the users of Google are patrons (Hillis et al. 2013, 156-162). However, Google Books does not quite meet all the criteria for either a library or an archive. According to Hillis et al. the main reason it does not measure up is that its system of classification does not provide an adequate overview of the collection; there is no complete

independent index (Hillis et al. 2013, 159). Without an overview of the collection, an index divided by conceptual categories for example, the users “cannot see the forest for the trees” (Hillis et al. 2013, 159). I would suggest that the Art Project functions in a similar fashion. Extending this kind of hybrid identification that does not insist on completion and fulfilment of all criteria to the Art Project, I would like to suggest that the Art Project is akin to a museum-cum-archive rendered digital through Google. The Art Project satisfies some, but not all criteria of the two categories I am proposing here.

The Art Project is a database because it gathers together data in the form of images and creates searchable interrelations between data through metadata tags. The data set is continuously growing, but it is delimited to images of art works. This delineation of the data set is also archival in the sense that each archive has specific collecting priorities and goals. So as the Art Project serves as a database of images of art works, it also serves in part as an archive of museum holdings. An archive is usually understood to be a single physical site for the storage and custodianship of “records which have been selected for permanent preservation,” as well as for the provision of a public service (Craven 2008, 7). As has been discussed earlier in this chapter, the Art Project is at least partially public in its reach and intentions. In addition, Google's intentions seem to be to create eternal information collections (Hillis et al. 2013, 152). Those records that have been selected for preservation are usually arranged in archives according to their provenance (Craven 2008; Blouin and Rosenberg 2011; Ridener 2009). Provenance refers to a record's source of origin, which is usually understood to be the person, office, or studio that made the object in question. Keeping records of different provenance separate is what gives records their context and the archive its authority (Craven 2008). The Art Project is a virtual

rather than physical space, but it does aggregate and make available in one website thousands of works to be consulted. Digital images of and information about art works are grouped according to the museum collection the objects belong to, which it could be argued, is the work's provenance as far as the Art Project is concerned. The Art Project thus functions as an archive of museum holdings, whose records have been deemed worthy of preservation by the museums and cultural institutions that own the objects.

The level of curation in the Art Project accounts for the first portion of the hybrid museum-cum-archive label I have assigned it here. Although Google has claimed not to curate the Art Project, the images on the site are most definitely curated through the systems of recommendation like the "featured items" and "featured galleries," as well as through the exhibits of the Cultural Institute. The curation of items in the Cultural Institute's exhibits directly resemble the kinds of groupings of objects in museum exhibits, while the "featured" and "director's" galleries in the Art Project are reminiscent of museum wings dedicated to a particular period or theme. The Art Project also allows online galleries and exhibits to be created using works that are kept in museum storage and for which there is no space on the institution's walls. In this sense it is possible to argue that the Art Project is an extension of the contributing museums' public outreach mandates.

That said, the Google Art Project is not quite either a museum or an archive, its indexing and classification systems are not entirely museological or archival. The multiplicity of location is problematic for both categories. Archives, as in actual record repositories, according to Achille Mbembe and Jacques Derrida, depend on architectural locations (Mbembe 2002; Derrida 1995). This is to say, they depend on singular physical spaces that permit the rituals of archival visits

and gatekeeping to transpire (Mbembe 2002). Museums in many ways also depend on their often impressive architecture to facilitate the ritual of the museum visit, with its hushed voices and crowds of tourists. Though as Leslie Gordon and Richard Brust have observed, the fact that Google is so secretive about the terms of the agreements they have with museums it calls into question the public missions of the contributing institutions, “museums hold artworks in the public trust, licensing those assets requires transparency” (Gordon and Brust 2013). The Art Project as a digital and online entity does not allow for this kind of singularity. The art works are simultaneously in many places, on many screens, and the physical experience of touch that is possible (though taboo) in museums is foreclosed in the Art Project. Museums and archives also trade in originals, in rarity, and here again the Art Project forecloses that possibility. Its images, by virtue of being digital, are endlessly reproducible. In addition to being reproducible, digital files also complicate the processes of preservation. Digital files are prone to corruption and obsolescence as files migrate across changing formats, which poses a challenge to the longevity of these files (Gracy and Kahn 2011). Digital files are constantly being refreshed and regenerated in computer memories such that they become an “enduring ephemeral” (Chun 2011, 137). The endurance of digital files is always in these terms precarious. The Art Project's classification of digital items and its search functions do not serve the same functions as archival finding aids, and so prevent it from fully functioning as an archive, in much the same way that the organizational system of Google Books disqualifies it as a library.

The kind of hybrid identity I am proposing with the museum-cum-archive can be productively expanded through Michel Foucault's discussion of heterotopias (Foucault 1986). These are spaces that “have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in

such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect” (Foucault 1986, 24). In contrast to utopias, which are “fundamentally unreal spaces,” Foucault proposes heterotopias as sites that “are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality” (1986, 24). These sites are enacted utopias – utopias brought to real spaces that represent, contest, and invert all other real (physical) spaces. Foucault outlines six principles of heterotopias as follows: first, heterotopias exist in all cultures; second, heterotopias may change functions over time; third, heterotopias may bring together and juxtapose in a single real place several sites that are incompatible; fourth, heterotopias are linked to portions of time, called “heterochronies” that break with traditional time; fifth, heterotopias presuppose systems of opening and closure that both isolate and make them accessible; and sixth, heterotopias have a function relative to all other spaces outside the heterotopia (Foucault 1986).

Foucault uses the site of the mirror to elaborate on the nature of heterotopias, explaining that the mirror is a utopia because what exists in the reflection is a placeless place, a virtual space that is somewhere over there, and it is also a heterotopia because it is identifiable as a real (physical) object. In his own words, “The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes the place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there” (Foucault 1986, 24). It is this in-between, mixed, and joint experience of the mirror that I would argue represents the Google Art Project. The Art Project is utopic because it is not a real place, in so much as it is virtual, but reflects and represents several real physical places, including museums and Google offices. It is heterotopian in the sense that the Google offices and servers exist in real

geographically locatable sites. The fourth and fifth principles of Foucault's heterotopias are more specifically relevant to the Art Project. The fourth characteristic of a heterotopia is its link to heterochronic time. Foucault uses the example of museums and libraries as examples of heterotopias of “indefinitely accumulating time,” of sites “in which time never stops building up and topping its own summit” (Foucault 1986, 26). Describing twentieth-century museums Foucault writes that,

the idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity (Foucault 1986, 26).

In describing the model of collection in twentieth-century museums as the “establishing [of] a sort of general archive,” Foucault is hinting at the convergence of archival and museological forms of collection. It is also, several decades later, an apt description of Google's universal collecting ambitions. A heterotopia is first a set of relations between sites, and according to the fourth principle, time.

Google's totalizing relationship to the collection and indexing of information is reminiscent of Foucault's all-encompassing heterotopian museum. In looking at the writings of Google founders about Google Books, Hillis et al. found that the assumption was that the digital, and more specifically the digital in the form of Google, is understood as eternal (Hillis et al. 152). In the context of Google Books the authors highlight the presence of a “metaphysics of totality – one where technology placed at the service of metaphysics renders transparent the previously “hidden order” of the universe of words and meaning” (Hillis et al. 2013, 162). The Art Project has been written about with the same kind of totality in mind, particularly in the way that it is

meant to bring “the *world's* cultural treasures” online (Google Cultural Institute “About” 2014; emphasis added). The Art Project gathers and represents many places and objects from many times and is intended to outlast them all.

The fifth characteristic of heterotopias relating to accessibility is especially important in discussing the Art Project because of the way it is perceived by Google and because its accessibility relates to the ways it serves as an archive. According to Foucault, “In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public space. Either the entry is compulsory...or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications” (1986, 26). He does add the following caveat, “There are others [heterotopic sites], on the contrary, that seem to be pure and simple openings, but that generally hide curious exclusions” (Foucault 1986, 26). In the case of Google and the Art Project, the openings may be read as the rituals of search practices. To use an example from Vaidyanathan (2013) this would include the user's confession of desire and predilection to the search engine. It is a confession corroborated by Google's tracking of all activity that passes through its platforms and makes it possible to code the relationships between people, ideas, and things (van Dijck 2012). The user galleries published on the Art Project may be read as an opening that is in fact an exclusion. The user may save and arrange images to a gallery that is shared on the site, but this gallery does not change the curation of the collection and users may not add new images to the site. So the personalized gallery in some ways sits on the sidelines of the Art Project. Being logged into the site through one's gmail account by default, and thus having the preferences and use history linked to an identifiable account marks the user as an insider and could in Foucault's terms be understood as a rite of purification.

In the larger context of Google, the confession of desire and curiosity in the practices of

online search constitute entrance rituals into the index and archival portal of Google. As Hillis, Petit, and Jarrett have argued, “online search through archival portals such as Google now constitutes a deeply meaningful ritual activity at a time when all manner of ritual practices previously deemed to take place only on this side of the screen are migrating to the Web and virtual spaces” (Hillis et al. 2013, 166). Thus search practices involving Google may well be constituted as rituals of access to the heterotopia of the totalizing museum-cum-archive. The question then becomes, once access is granted, what lies beyond the portal? In the case of the Art Project it is the collection of museum collections. It is the orders of museums brought into disruptive contact with order of Google. The Art Project as a heterotopia makes it possible for these cultural orders to meet and be mutually challenged.

CHAPTER THREE

Google and the collections of the McCord Museum and the Royal Ontario Museum

Items in their default arrangements within individual museum collections in the Art Project do not appear to be arranged according to thematic or use criteria, nor do they seem to be arranged according to date, medium, or artist, categories that might be expected given the typical organization of museum exhibits. This default arrangement results in some strange pairings and juxtapositions of items, juxtapositions that do not exist in traditional museum displays and are strange by comparison. For example, in the McCord Art Project collection, an Aislin cartoon about global warming from 2008 sits next to a wedding dress from 1763, while Aislin's 1976 caricature *OK Everybody Take a Valium!* sits next to Cornelius Krieghoff's *Head of a Habitant* dated 1847-1868. A letter written by Daniel de Rémy de Courcelles, Governor of New France, is found next to a sequined Paco Rabanne bathing suit from 1967 and an Ookpik dated between 1960 and 1980 (figure 3.1). The connection between these items is not immediately obvious and it seems that what links these items together is simply that they all belong to the McCord Museum and are now part of the Art Project. Like the McCord collection, the Royal Ontario Museum's Art Project collection is also host to bizarre and incongruous arrangements of items. For example, a horse mask from about 1900, a bronze figure dated between 475 and 221 BC, an early twentieth century war exploits robe, and an eighteenth century side table can all be found in sequence next to a late seventeenth century man's *jifu*. In addition to the comparatively strange juxtapositions, there are also those algorithmic pairings that make more intuitive sense such as the

display of a Mi' kmaq prayer book written in hieroglyphics from about 1790 next to a 1776 pamphlet entitled *Règlements de la confrerie de l'adoration perpétuelle du S. Sacrement et de la bonne mort*⁵ in the McCord collection. There is a, perhaps unintended, thematic relationship between these two items in that both are text-based documents dated within fifteen years of one another and both speak to the religious and spiritual history of Quebec. One might very well find these items together in a museum display. The instances of pairings whose thematic relationship is evident or discernible are far fewer than the strange and seem to be more accidental than intentional. The above examples have been an attempt to suggest that the default arrangement of items in the McCord and ROM collections does not immediately suggest what the connections between the items might be, other than that they belong to the same museum.

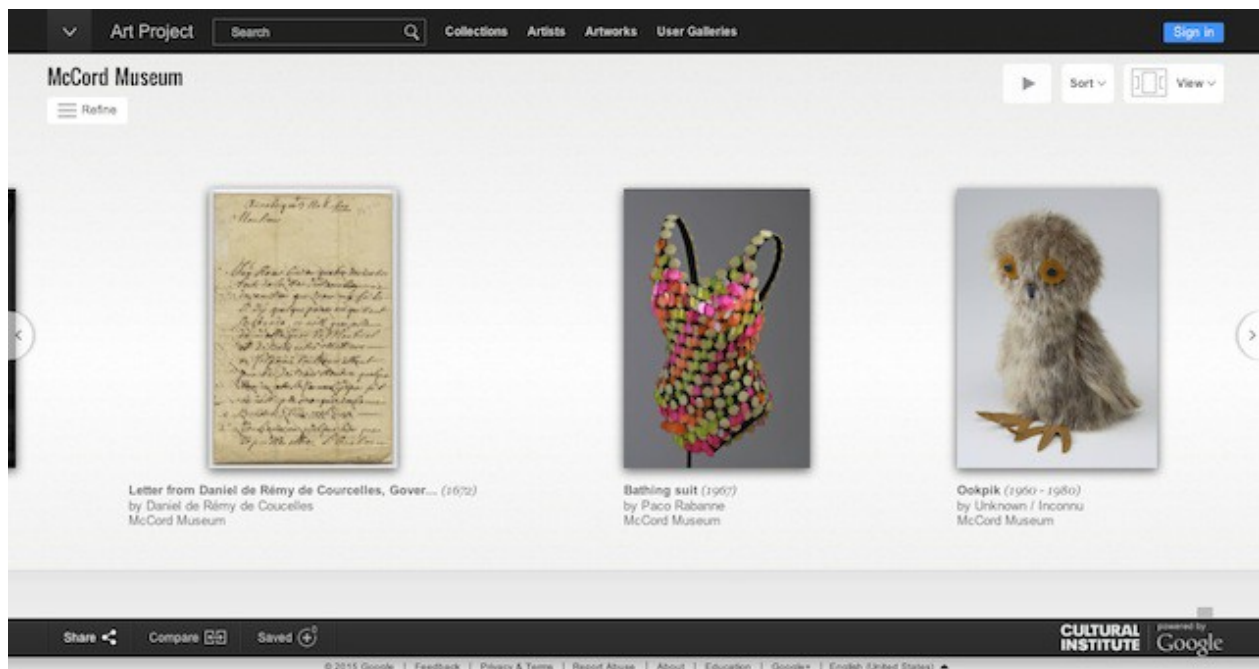


Figure 3.1. Screenshot of items in the McCord Museum collection in the Art Project with default view and sort settings taken 20 May 2015.

5 “Regulations of the brotherhood of the perpetual adoration of the Saint Sacrament and of the good death.” (author's translation)

The McCord Museum and Royal Ontario Museum collections in the Art Project have been selected as the basis for this chapter because both institutions are history museums (though of different types) and so do not fit neatly into the fine art frame presumed by a collection named the “Google *Art Project*” (emphasis mine). Both institutions belong to long established practices of museological collection whose legacies can be felt in their contributions to the Art Project. The McCord Museum is based in Montreal and is a social history museum with a local focus on the city of Montreal and the region of Quebec. Meanwhile the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) is located in Toronto and has a much larger scope for its collection, spanning natural history and world cultural history. Both institutions had existing digital collections available online before they joined the Art Project, which suggests that they had established expectations of the functions of digital collections. Thus, joining the Art Project was not a foray into the digital, nor a move from traditional analogue museum to new digital collection. As Google did not provide funding for digitization, joining the Art Project was not necessarily about increasing digitized collections, but rather specific to what it could offer as a Google platform. The museums' expectations of digital collections comes into contact with Google's expectations of digital platforms in the Art Project. This chapter seeks to trace the interpretations and expectations of items as they have been inducted into the Art Project.

The McCord Museum was founded in 1921 by David Ross McCord who was a collector of artifacts of Canadian history. Ross's collection included artifacts of “great history,” which encompassed Canadian military and political events, as well as First Nations cultural items. Through subsequent generations of presidents and curators, the museum has become increasingly focused on Montreal's social history. There is now a hierarchy in collection priorities that moves

geographically outwards in order of importance – Montreal, then Quebec, then Canada (Widmer 2015, personal communication). According to its mission statement, the McCord Museum sees itself as a “museum that mirrors a city; a city that mirrors the world,” and prioritizes “achievements and themes that propel Montreal onto the global stage” (McCord “Mission”). The McCord thus seems to position itself as a museum that is simultaneously local and global. The current curatorial practice of the McCord Museum spans across six collection areas including, “archaeology and ethnology,” “costume and textile,” “decorative arts,” “paintings prints and drawings,” “photography,” and “textual archives” (Widmer 2015, personal communication). Across these collection areas the museum holds more than 1.4 million artifacts (McCord “Collections Online”).⁶ Approximately 118 thousand artifacts from the McCord collection have been digitized and made available through the McCord's institutional website (McCord “Collections Online”; Widmer 2015 personal communication). This accounts for about eight per cent of the total collection.

The Royal Ontario Museum is both a museum of “world cultures” and of natural history that prides itself on the breadth of its collection (ROM “About”). The ROM is approximately a decade older than the McCord and was founded in 1912, while the building was completed in 1914. It was originally five museums – the Royal Ontario Museums of Archaeology, Palaeontology, Mineralogy, Zoology, and Geology – all housed in a single building (ROM “Our History”). To some extent the original five museums represent collection areas of the modern-day ROM, although they have now been regrouped under the umbrellas of “World Cultures” and

6 This figure does not include the items in the textual archive. The textual archive is measured in linear meters (262 of them) because textual archives follow the rules for archive description which means that items are not described to the object, but rather are grouped in ensembles. Celine Widmer, curator of McCord's textual archives, estimates that the museum holds 750 document ensembles or *fonds d'archive* (2015 personal communication).

“Natural History.” The ROM positions itself as “universal,” striving to provide “insights into how the earth and its cultures have evolved, and how the changes we face today will shape the world we live in tomorrow” (ROM “About”). Like the McCord, the ROM already had a digital collection available through their own institutional website before joining the Art Project.⁷ At the time of writing, the ROM's website hosts approximately 8 500 images of its collection. The images are fairly evenly divided between the “World Cultures” and “Natural History” collection areas, with an additional category containing images pertaining to the history of the ROM itself.⁸

Comparison of the layouts of museum collection pages in the Art Project with the organization of items in the respective institutional websites of the ROM and McCord Museum illustrates the differences in the expectations of digital collections applied by the museums and by Google. The items available through the McCord Museum's own website are grouped according to the six collection areas mentioned above (archaeology and ethnology, costume and textile, decorative arts, paintings prints and drawings, photography, and textual archives).⁹ The portal for each collection area has a thumbnail image and a few lines of text explaining the kinds of items found in each area, as well as an indication of the number of artefacts in each collection area and how many of these are available online. There is a search bar to the left of the collections portals as well as more advanced search options within the individual collection areas. The items in each collection area are arranged in list format with images on the left and explanatory text to the right. It is worth noting that although items are grouped according to the collection area to which they belong, within these areas they are not arranged in any particular fashion. That is to say that

7 The ROM website for its digital collection :

<http://images.rom.on.ca/public/index.phpfunction=home&sid=&ccid=>

8 By my count, at the time of writing the exact number is 8 570 digital images available through the ROM images website. Of those, 4,381 belong to the World Cultures collection area, and 3,322 to the Natural History. The remaining 867 images belong to “ROM buildings and work.”

9 The McCord website for its digital collection: <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/info/collection/>

they are not placed in discernible order according to date or artist, for example. The arrangements of digital items in the McCord institutional website are iterative, items are presented as iterations of a particular category of object. Individual images can be singled out from the list and can be zoomed in on as well as enlarged to full size.

The collection of images on the ROM's website is searchable via a search bar located at the top of the page, but also has images grouped into categories that offer browsing options and several points of entry for someone who may not know exactly what they are looking for. The ROM Images homepage provides the user with the choice of three overarching categories “Subjects,” “Collection Areas,” and “Image Categories.” Each of these in turn contains several divisions, for example if the following are selected in order, “Collection Areas” then “World Cultures,” the user is presented with nineteen geographic regions to choose from. Each of these regional options is further divided into approximately a dozen different categories based on use function, as well as a “view all” option. Each of the use function categories may contain up to several hundred images. The images themselves are arranged in a list format that the user scrolls through vertically. Each image is accompanied by text listing the object's name, date, period, accession number, and image number. There is also a “details” link that offers additional information about the object's medium, size, and area of origin.

Tony Bennett argues that the systems of classification employed by museums for the objects they collect and display produces certain object *types*. In his own words, “the arrangement of the relations between the individual objects that are assembled together in museums bring into being the more abstract entities – like art, prehistory, community, national heritage – that then subpoena those objects as aspects of the realities and relations they organise”

(Bennett 2013, 56). It is a cyclical pattern, in which gathering objects under the banner of “art” produces the category of “art object,” and the existence of this category is then used to bolster the self-evidence of the sorting of objects in museums. In other words, “It is the collection that makes the art, not the art that makes the collection” (Davenne 2012, 33). Thus the collection and classification of items in museums produces certain types of “objecthood” (Bennett 2013, 62). The classification systems of the ROM and McCord digital collections described above produce and reproduce the object types held in each of the museums. The McCord Museum's website produces objects types according to its collection areas. The items on the McCord site belong to the categories of archaeology and ethnography, costume and textile, decorative arts, paintings prints and drawings, photography, and text (archives). The ROM's website produces many more object types because its system of classification has more levels than the McCord website. The ROM produces the two overarching categories of World Cultures and Natural History that contain several other object types grouped by region. For instance the classification system of the ROM's website produces the object type “Ancient Near East” under World Cultures. Ancient Near East objects are then regrouped into nineteen more specific types according to their use function, including “Coins, Medals & Currency”; “Documents, Writing & Pictographs”; and “Unknown Use or Function” (ROM Images 2015). In the circular logic of museum objecthood, these object types produce the history museum because they are cast as “ancient” and as belonging to history, and in collecting them the museum becomes historical.

The categorizations of images and the object types they produce on the institutional websites of the ROM and McCord Museum meet expectations of traditional museum displays. If the juxtapositions of the items in the Art Project collections seem strange in comparison it is

perhaps because they do not fully reproduce the classification systems of the museum websites. The systems of classification of the McCord Museum and ROM websites reproduce the classifications of museum spaces and displays and so are readily recognizable. Both sites conform to their respective museum's collection practices – the collection areas form the basis for the grouping of images. The images in the collections available through the McCord and ROM institutional websites are conceived of as indexical references to the physical objects in museum spaces. As Petrov has argued, objects in museum exhibits are taken out of their primary contexts and are made to serve a representational function (Petrov 2012, 219). In this representational capacity, objects are layered with aesthetic and historical significance – the “object becomes historical insofar as it is documentary” (Petrov 2012, 226). The images are meant to keep the representational and historical dimensions of physical objects in the arrangements of collections on the institutional websites of the ROM and McCord Museum. I would argue that it is this consistency between museum and digital collection that makes the organizational structures of the collections available through the museum websites intuitively logical. It is these expectations of consistency with museum collections that are frustrated by the Art Project's arrangements.

In the contrast between the institutions' Art Project pages and their own websites, it would seem that there are two competing objectives in the use of the Art Project. Representatives of the ROM and the McCord have independently explained that joining the Art Project was understood as a way of promoting the museum's collection (Widmer 2015, Woods 2015 personal communications). The items available through the Art Project are only a fraction of the digitized collections these museums have available through their own websites. Nicola Woods of the ROM explained that the smaller selection of items on the Art Project serve to promote the collection

and attract audiences to the museum (Woods 2015 personal communication). As Celine Widmer of the McCord Museum remarked, the items that went to the Art Project were already “the classics” (2015 personal communication). In short, the items in the Art Project are believed to be ambassadors of the museum's overall collection. This is consistent with the way that digital collections available through institutional websites are conceived as promotional tools to entice patrons to visit the space of the museum (Dodge 2015 personal communication). The McCord and the ROM extend the organizational principles that govern curation within the museum space to the digital collections available through their respective websites, thus ensuring that digital collections reflect the analogue ones. Even though the McCord and the ROM treat the collections available through the Art Project as representative of the institution, the Art Project does not perform in the same way as the respective museum websites. Given that in the Art Project the only unifying thread for grouping items is the institution that contributed the images, and that considerations such as subject matter or use function do not appear in the organization of items within collections, Google seems to treat items as *information* to be sorted, searched, and shuffled by the user with as little limitation as possible. The arrangements and juxtapositions in the Art Project are possible because the items are conceived of as a digital information to be found on the web through Google, as opposed to singular representative historical objects in the museum. The museums take for granted that each item in their collections is unique and important because it testifies to another point in time and space, and that this testimony in carefully curated combinations produces history. Meanwhile Google takes it for granted that items in its overall Art Project collection are important because they were first collected by museums and art galleries. The Art Project understands the collecting of information from museums and galleries to produce

the generic “culture” online.

The friction between the classificatory systems and assumptions present in the Art Project collections may be further explained by returning to Foucault and the heterotopia. More specifically, to the museum as a heterotopian site. Scholars have claimed museums as heterotopias by pointing to the ways that they reflect and subvert the implicit cultural orders of objects and spaces (Petrov 2012, Hetherington 2011, Brady 2013). The argument for museums as heterotopias is usually presented according to the way that time is configured in the museum. Foucault writes of museums as heterochronic spaces and as heterotopias of “indefinitely accumulating time” (Foucault 1986, 26). Objects in museum exhibits are immediately historicized by virtue of being lifted out of their original temporal contexts in order to *represent* those same contexts (Petrov 2012, 226). This formulation of the museum assumes that the passage of time leaves material traces and that, of these traces, the best examples may be selected to represent entire periods. Time in the museum is then represented in the containment of objects cast as historical. Once objects enter the museum they remain fixed in time to the time and place of their creation, that is to the period they represent. Thus as Beth Lord formulates it, the museum “is both a space of time and a 'timeless' space” (Lord 2006, 4). In this sense the museum is heterotopian in the way that it disrupts the usual temporal-spatial relationships of objects.

However, as Lord has convincingly argued, there is a crucial element missing in the designation of museums as heterotopias based solely on their configurations of time. As Foucault writes, the formulation of time in the twentieth century museum (its infinite accumulation) is not the same as in the museum of the seventeenth century (Foucault 1986, 26). Thus the way time is conceived in the museum is historically contingent (Lord 2006). Lord argues that as both the

seventeenth century and twentieth century museums are heterotopian, it cannot be the indefinite accumulation of all time or “total history” that makes the museum a heterotopia (Lord 2006, 4). Rather, she argues, the focus must be on the definitions of heterotopias as literal spaces of difference (Lord 2006, 5). (After all, “hetero-topia” literally translates as “different-place”).¹⁰ It is true that museums contain and juxtapose objects that are temporally and spatially discontinuous in a single place. However, in Lord's argument, because heterotopias are spaces that represent, contest and invert the cultural order to which they belong, it is not enough that museums present objects as different from one another. In order to be truly heterotopian they must also present objects as different from “the conceptual orders in which those objects would normally be understood” (Lord 2006, 5). This latter instance of difference is enacted through interpretation and representation. The historicization and lifting of objects out of their original contexts in order that they might represent those same contexts in the museum is itself an interpretive gesture.

Interpretation in this case is both the language used to discuss objects as well as the order according to which they are classified. As Lord writes, “Interpretation is the relation between things and the words used to describe them and this relation always involves a gap” (Lord 2006, 5). This interpretive gesture is particularly evident in museum exhibits that make use of text panels on the wall next to the displays. However, interpretation is not limited to the use of words for things, but as Foucault suggests in his discussion of natural history of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is possible to interpret objects through their arrangement and classification – through their display without text.

¹⁰ The “hetero-” prefix comes from Greek and means “other or different,” while “topia” comes from the Greek word *topos* meaning “place.”

The documents of this new [natural] history are not other words, texts, or records, but unencumbered spaces in which things are juxtaposed...creatures present themselves one beside another, their surfaces visible, grouped according to their common features, and thus already virtually analysed, and bearers of nothing but their own individual names. (Foucault 1994, 131).

The classification of objects (or creatures) according to an order that appears so self-evident it does not require explanation is inherently an act of interpretation. The kinds of collections Foucault describes are exemplified in the paintings of Vicomte de Barde (1777-1828) that depict early systems of classification (figure 3.2). In these paintings objects such as shells and stuffed birds are arranged in separate cases and lined up according to the similarity of their features. Shells and Birds are classified into separate display cases and so produced as different object types. They are also presented as self-evident without identification labels. Vicomte de Barde's paintings represent a common organizational strategy for objects in cabinets of curiosities that were the pre-cursor to museum collections (Davenne 2012). Thus the classificatory practices of museums embody the difference between objects and their temporalities, but more importantly the difference between objects and their conceptualizations, which is to say the words used to discuss them and the orders used to classify them.



Figure 3.2. Left: *Selection of Shells Organized on shelves*, watercolour and gouache. Right: *Reunion of Foreign Birds Placed in Different Cases*, watercolour. Both by Alexandre-Isidore Leroy de Barde (Vicomte de Barde).1777-1828. (Musée du Louvre, Paris).

The apparently strange juxtapositions and pairings of items in the Art Project collections of the McCord and the ROM seem, at times, inappropriate in ways that are not necessarily easily identifiable. These pairings *feel* strange and out of order. Pairings like the Aislin cartoon about global warming next to the eighteenth century wedding dress (McCord Art Project Collection) that are disquieting because the objects seem to belong to different conceptual orders as well as to different temporal periods. In the museum, the cartoon belongs to the order of “paintings prints and drawings,” while the wedding dress belongs to the order of “costume and textile” (McCord “Collections Online”). To present them together in this way as belonging to the same type of objecthood remixes the order imposed by the museum on its collection. Foucault argues that “there is a worse kind of disorder than the *incongruous*, the linking together of things that are

inappropriate;...the disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension of the *heteroclite*” (Foucault 1994, xviii, emphasis in original). The dimension of the heteroclite is the space of the abnormal and the irregular – it is the space of the heterotopia. Another example from the McCord Art Project, the pairing of a Niisitapiikwan Honour Shirt next to a self-portrait by William Hind, illustrates this point. The Honour Shirt belongs to the order of ceremonial dress (“costume and textile”) in the museum, whereas the self-portrait is of a British artist-reporter and belongs to the order of fine art (“paintings prints and drawings”) in the museum. These two orders of objecthood are informed by histories of museum collection that produce one as an artifact of a colonized and therefore disappearing people. While the other is produced as an expression of artistic talent and as a record of the frontier. Perhaps it is in this discomfort, in these “strange” juxtapositions and pairings of objects that the uneven edges of different possible orders are felt. The museum's categories come up against Google's insistence that the name of the museum is the only thread needed to hold item groups together.

It is worth noting that Foucault's conception of classification as interpretive is not limited to the museum in particular, but extends to collections and displays of various sorts. In the Art Project items are interpreted via their arrangement within individual museum collections. There is very little interpretive text offered for items in the collections, and what text there is pertains to individual items rather than to the overall grouping. The Art Project organizes and classifies items through its interface, specifically through the layout of items and the kinds of interactions it enables. On this point, Johanna Drucker's work on the graphical properties of interfaces is useful. In discussing website layouts, Drucker argues that “The grid of wireframes is neither a set of neutral boxes for content nor a particular iconographic element. It is a structuring space whose

relations create value through position, hierarchy, juxtaposition, and other features in an act of interpretation” (Drucker 2014, 177). Wireframes in this context are visual representations of the structure of a webpage. They are the armature that divide space and separate content elements. Drucker's argument that the organization of elements on the webpage is an act of interpretation echoes Foucault's argument that objects are “already virtually analysed” by as a result of their classification and placement next to one another.

The layout of each collection's page is predetermined by the Art Project, so there is a structure common across all collections. The Art Project provides a platform and a template for institutions to display their items. In a sense then the graphical composition of the Art Project interface provides a wireframe outline to be filled in by the contributing institutions. The template itself has a set of embedded assumptions and the graphical composition of the collections interface, independent of the items or “content” contributed by each museum, frames the user's viewing of items. The most basic assumption here is that all collections can be made to fit the template, that systems of classification do not need to be specified according to the particularities of the items in individual collections. The template also assumes that the name of the contributing institution is sufficient to hold items together. The collections pages are spaces branded by Google and are enactments of analysis by classification. It is also perhaps worth noting that in Foucault's introduction to *The Order of Things* (1994), the table and the grid appear as the ground on which classification happens. At least discursively, the wireframe grid of webpage layouts is the ground of classification and consequently of interpretation. All this to say that the ordering of items within the graphical interface of the Art Project makes it a space for the display of difference – makes it a heterotopia.

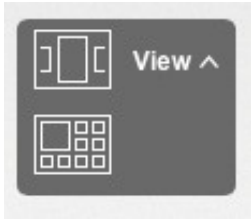


Figure 3.3. The icons indicating the item configurations (“views”) on offer in the Art Project collections. They represent the wireframe grids used to structure each “view” arrangement. The top icon indicates the default setting.

Perhaps the most striking difference between the arrangements of objects in museum displays and the individual collections in the Art Project is that in the Art Project the layout of items can be altered by the user (within limits). The changeability of the item arrangements serves to highlight the interpretive dimension of the Art Project's interface. There are two specific interface elements at the collection level that alter the arrangement of items and demonstrate this interpretive capacity. The “view” and “sort” options located in the top right corner of the screen allow the user to change (in limited ways) the arrangement of items in the collection. The “view” option offers the choice between two layouts for the collection page (see figure 3.3), while the “sort” option offers the choice of placing items in order from “oldest to newest” and vice versa. Figures 3.4 and 3.5 illustrate the default settings of both the “sort” and “view” options for the McCord and ROM collections in the Art Project. The default “view” introduces the collection and displays each museum's statement of purpose on the left hand side, along with its geographic position indicated on a Google map. To the right, items are arranged horizontally and the user is invited to continue scrolling to the right in order to bring more items on screen. Items disappear off screen to the left as new ones appear to the right in a horizontal scroll. As the user continues to scroll through the items, the museum's statement leaves the screen as though one were moving away from it. The number of items in view seems to be deliberately restricted to two or three.

There is a kind of mimicry of the perceptual experience of moving through a gallery space where the number of works within view at any one time is limited. This impression is strengthened by the white background and minimal text afforded by this viewing option. It is an uncluttered presentation common in many museums and galleries. The horizontal scrolling mechanism is much closer to the effect of looking at things on a wall than the more common vertical scroll. This arrangement and scrolling format reproduces museological practices of viewing, which may explain the reason it is the default “view” setting. For Google, the Art Project is about bringing collections and museum spaces “online” and so it makes sense to hold onto the conventions of museum display already in place. This layout of images, which looks like so many other museum displays, produces the digital history museum online.

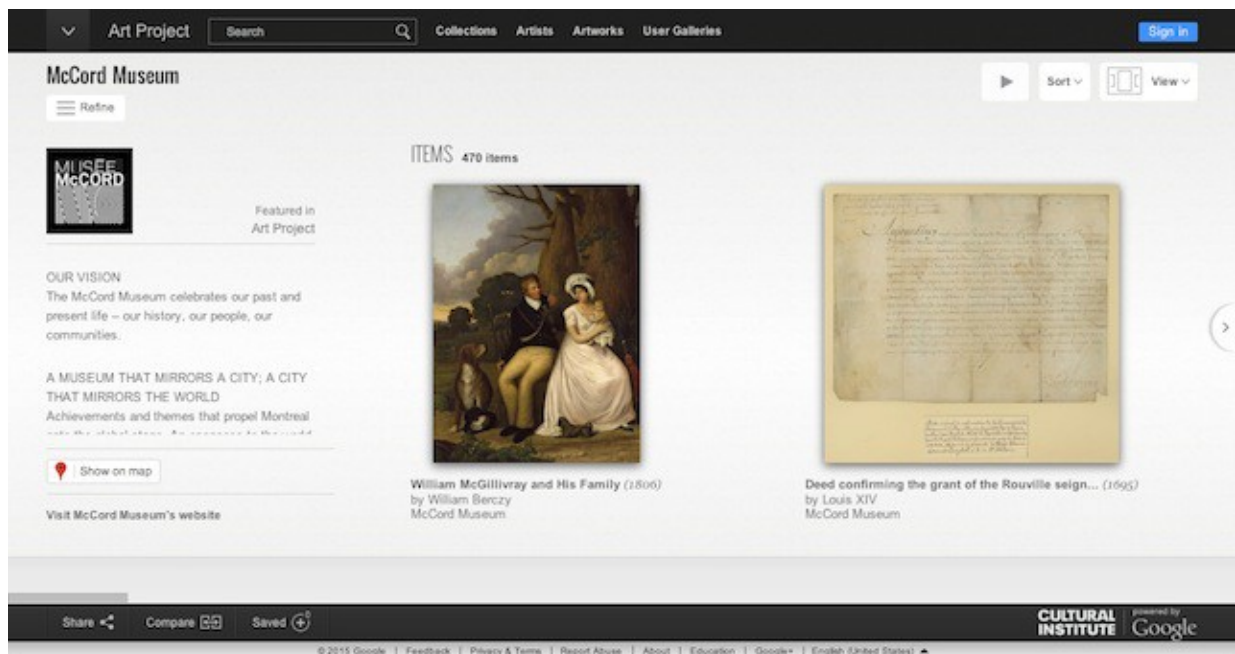


Figure 3.4. Screen shot of the default view of the McCord Museum Art Project collection taken 20 May 2015.

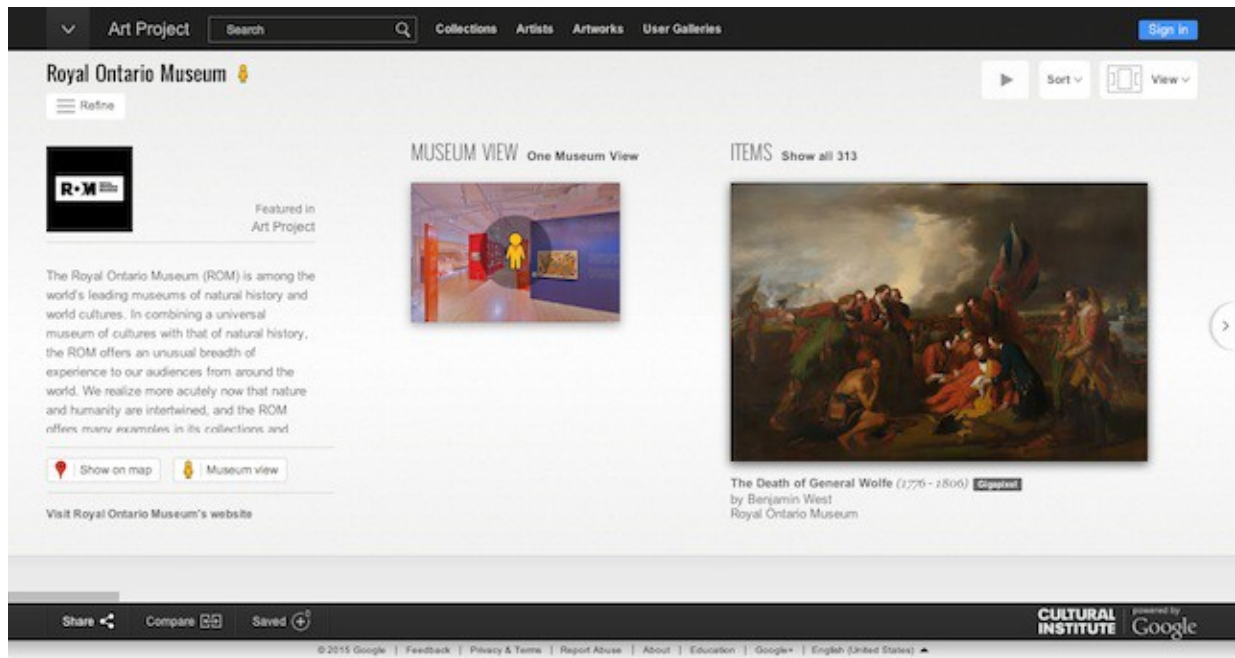


Figure 3.5. Screen shot of the default view of the Royal Ontario Museum Art Project collection taken 20 May 2015.

The alternate “view” option for both collections is illustrated by figures 3.6 and 3.7. As can be observed from the screenshots, in the alternate “view” items are arranged along a grid in which the relative sizes of images are uneven. In this arrangement there are many more items visible at one time, and the order in which the items appear on screen is similar but not identical to that of the default view. That is to say that if a set of three items are visible together in the default view they will be visible together in the alternate view as the user scrolls down, but the items will not necessarily sit next to each other in the same order. The alternate viewing arrangement of items is vertical rather than horizontal as in the default view. The vertical scrolling and grid-like arrangements is reminiscent of a Google Images search results page and maintains the usual conventions of Internet search and of Google's brand to which users have become accustomed. However, this alternate “view” also bears traces of the display conventions of early museums, or what Lord (2006) calls “Enlightenment-style” exhibits as well as cabinets

of curiosities. These are displays that present objects in high-density arrangements that are “sometimes indistinguishable from visible storage” (Lord 2006, 7). Cabinets of curiosities were collections marked by the disparateness of the objects in terms of size, purpose, and origin that were juxtaposed. These objects were often displayed without reference to the classical categories of art and science (Davenne 2012). The alternate view in the Art Project collections interface calls forward this older style of presentation. The alternate view in the Art Project does indeed resemble visual storage in the way that the items are not uniform in size and are arranged in a loose mosaic.

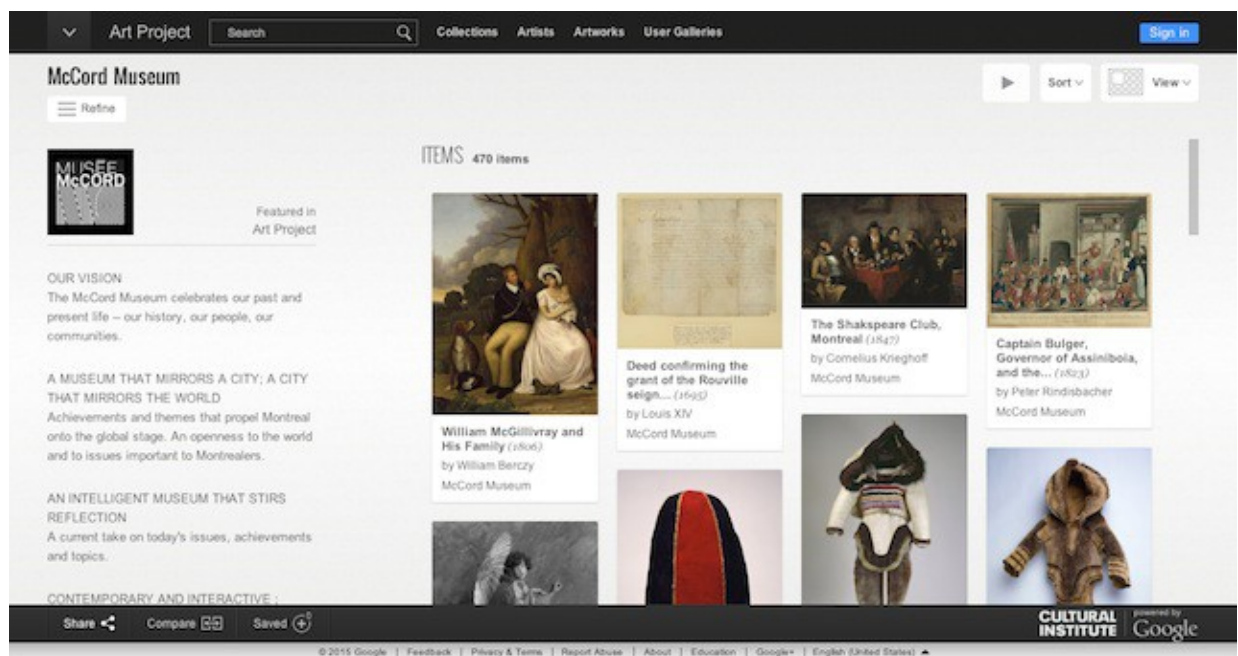


Figure 3.6. Screen shot of the alternate view option of the McCord Museum Art Project collection taken 20 May 2015. More images of items appear as the user scrolls down.

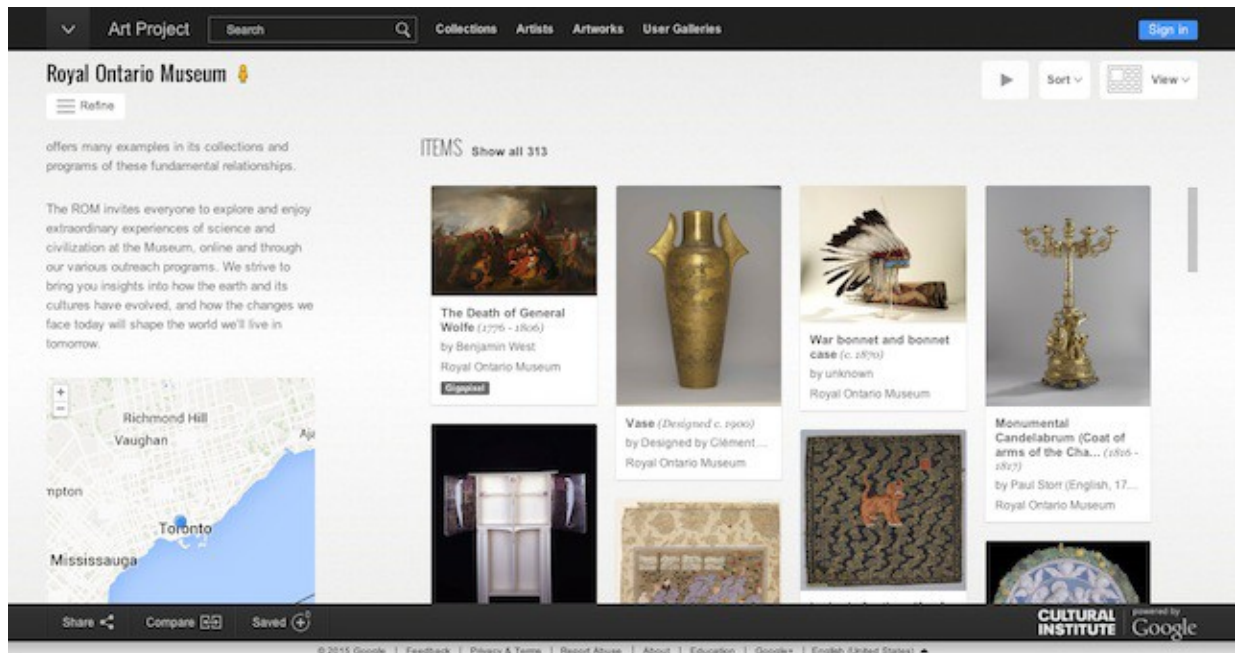


Figure 3.7. Screen shot of the alternate view option of the Royal Ontario Museum Art Project collection taken 20 May 2015. More images of items appear as the user scrolls down.

Until recently there was a third “view” option in which the images were arranged in a vertical list on the left-hand side of the screen and the accompanying text was displayed to the right.¹¹ This “view” was similar to the lists of images presented in the digital collections on the museums' institutional websites. The user would scroll down the list of items and the images would appear in the same order as in the default view setting. The text included next to each image in this view option was the same as the text currently offered in the “details” section for each item in the default and alternate views. The information in the “details” section is determined by the contributing museum, but usually includes a description of the item, as well as information about object type, medium, dimensions, period, and accession number. In the two remaining “view” settings much of the text is hidden until the user clicks on the “details” link that only becomes available once a particular item is selected for closer inspection. An item must be

¹¹ This third “view” arrangement option disappeared sometime between February and July 2014. Unfortunately, the author no longer has a screenshot of this view option.

selected and isolated from the stream of images for the “details” to become available.

As Rogers and Galloway respectively argue, subtle changes in interfaces imply a politics of knowledge and renegotiate spaces of meaning (Rogers 2013; Galloway 2014). The disappearance of the third list “view” in favour of the remaining two options increases the emphasis put on the aesthetics of items and places the image in an even more prominent position within the Art Project. The disappearance of the third view also seems to be related to Google's brand of sparse interfaces. The removal of the list viewing option and the hiding of text until an item is singled out and “details” is clicked simplifies the layout and minimizes clutter. In the same way that Google Search's front page is highly minimalist and disavows the complexity of the algorithmic elements that make it work (Hillis et al. 2013), the Art Project's minimization of textual information disavows some of the complexity of the items. The textual information is there to be found, but in hiding it, the items become primarily aesthetic. They trade on their surfaces, on the quality of their images. Like the objects in Foucault's natural history museum, these items are presented and interpreted through juxtaposition. In the disappearance of the list “view” option, items not only become more obviously aesthetic, but are also presumed to be more self-evident. Foucault writes about the displays of early museums as “unencumbered spaces in which things are juxtaposed” free of commentary and according to the order of nature (Foucault 1994, 131). This seems to be the assumption of the Art Project. In the remaining “view” options the images are presented with only the name, author, and date of the item as explanation of its significance and relationship to other items in the collection. The disappearance of the list “view” with more information about items readily available in favour of arrangements that emphasize the visual components of the items suggests that the meanings of these items are

presumed to be self-evident.

If the arrangement and classification of objects are claimed as inherently interpretive because of the relationships they create between objects, then it is worthwhile to examine the objects themselves more closely. In particular, the fact that the collections of the McCord and the ROM are understood as primarily historical but are claimed under the umbrella of the *Art Project* suggests something of the way the items are conceived of by the Project. While there are works like *The Death of General Wolfe* (ROM collection) that conform to the usual Western definition of “Art,” there are many more that do not. I am thinking in particular of the written texts and pieces of furniture, as well as the articles of dress and regalia (both European and Indigenous). These are items that would usually be classified under “textual archives” or “documents and writing,” “household furnishings,” and “costume and textile” (McCord “Collections Online”, ROM Images). Presenting these items together without separating them into more precise categories suggests that the Art Project does not make the distinction between types of cultural collections. All items are equally “cultural treasures” and so may be treated according to a standardized model. The items must all fit within the graphical model set out by Google in the interface of the Art Project, and are consequently set on the same level. The algorithmic sorting of items within collections in the Art Project also suggests that very little distinction is made between “art” and other kinds of cultural items. Counter-intuitively, this flattening out of object types means that it is possible to confer the designation “art” onto all items by virtue of their inclusion in the *Art Project*. Items are presented in the same mode as more traditional works of fine art, particularly in the way that stress is placed in their aesthetic characteristics with minimized explanatory text. “Art” then is the interpretive value conferred onto items by their

inclusion in the Project. Items are interpreted as art, and more specifically as historical art, through the various layers of classification imposed by the museum and the Art Project.

Returning to Bennett's argument about the production of objecthood, the items in the Art Project are produced as (digital) art objects.

So then, following the Art Project's implicit interpretive gestures, the practices of viewing art and visual studies deserve to be acknowledged. Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson (1991) argue that an art work's context is always dual. It is a clearly marked moment of creation in the past and it is the circumstances under which the viewer engages the work in the present (Bal and Bryson 179-180). As they write, "it is possible to analyze simultaneously the practices of the past and our own interactions with them" (Bal and Bryson 1991, 175). Bal and Bryson are careful to specify that both these temporal components of a work's context are defined by the elements brought together in the analysis of scholars and that context can never be totalizing (177, 207). The authors also refer to the "contextuality of the present," by which I understand them to mean both the contemporary conditions under which the artifact is seen, as well as the ways in which its history is understood. Along similar lines, Keith Moxey (2013) argues that art works create their own aesthetic time, which he describes as the effect of a work's aesthetic that compels the viewer to acknowledge a mode of perception different from the context in which the work currently appears (Moxey 2013, 5, 174). Moxey describes this historical distance as the tension between the aesthetic demands of the work in the present and the need to register the alterity of the past. He goes on to observe that the distance between the past and the present is never fixed, but rather is subject to constant negotiation (Moxey 2013, 158). The tension between contexts of viewing and the historical distances identified by Bal and Bryson and Moxey seem to be reaching for a

similar phenomenon – the plurality of temporal experience in the art work. It is a reckoning with the fact that visual works do not have stable meanings and the need to simultaneously register multiple meanings. These authors are essentially describing the work of interpretation. They are describing the imperfect bridging of the distance between the object and its meaning, between the thing and its conceptualization. The pull of aesthetic work that leads viewers to acknowledge the plurality of temporal conditions suggests that the items were already heterochronic even before entering the Project. As a result of their heterochrony the items also seem to relate the spaces of the museum as well as their original contexts in their representative capacity within the space of the Art Project.

This heterochronic tension is exemplified in the “gigapixel” image of *The Death of General Wolfe* by Benjamin West in the ROM's collection. The original object in the Royal Ontario Museum is the fifth in a series of copies of this scene completed between 1776 and 1806. The painting has a colonial history and was used as a propaganda piece for the British colonization of North America in the years after its completion. The scene depicts the moment of General Wolfe's death on the Plains of Abraham to the centre-right of the composition, while to the left a messenger with the news of French defeat rushes on to the scene. It has been argued that the painting depicts Wolfe dying at peace because his purpose has been accomplished (ROM Art Project collection page, “details”). He has paved the way for future generations of colonists. *The Death of General Wolfe* has also been used as a marker of Canadian history as it “documents” (twenty years after the fact) a turning point in Canada's colonial history (Mitchell 1944; Montagna 1981). The image takes on the character of an origin myth for English Canada. The painting's incarnation in the Art Project as an ultra-high resolution digital image is the latest in a

series of re-interpretations. A blue label next to the item's title in the Art Project identifies it as “gigapixel.” This item is the only gigapixel image in the ROM's Art Project collection, and indeed the only one available for analysis here as the McCord does not have a gigapixel image as part of its collection. The gigapixel's distinguishing feature is a resolution that enables enlarged views of the painting's surface that would not be possible un-aided in front of the original. It is a statement of the power of Google's imaging technologies. Viewing *The Death of General Wolfe* in the Art Project as a gigapixel image amounts to a fetishization of contemporary technology's ability to modernize the older analogue (read obsolete) object, and calls forward histories of colonization. Even if the viewer is not familiar with Canada's colonial history (remembering that the Art Project reaches a global audience), the fact that this work was included in the ROM's collection and then singled out in the Art Project as a gigapixel image marks it as important and historically significant.

In the “details” accompanying *The Death of General Wolfe* the painting is named as “one of the Royal Ontario Museum's iconic treasures” (ROM Art Project collection page, “details”). This declaration is followed by an indication of where to see the original in the museum, which incidentally, is in the same gallery as the one represented by the “museum view” virtual tour in the ROM's Art Project collection. According to the ROM's Digital Engagement Coordinator, Ryan Dodge, digital collections are not meant to replace physical museum collections, but rather are meant to entice people to come see the real thing (Dodge 2015, personal communication). While digital collections may be considered as part of the museum's public outreach, the original objects are kept separate and cement the institution's position. The instructions about where to find the original in the space of the museums suggests exactly this. At the same time as these

distances between originals and reproductions are maintained they are also elided by the notion of access. Museums have joined the Art Project, in part, as a way of showcasing their collections and increasing the public access to those collections (Poisson 2015, Woods 2015, Dodge 2015, personal communications). Indeed the issue of access is one that appears in many of Google's statements about the Art Project and is one of the leading motivations for museums to participate in the Project. However, access to collections is discussed without clarification or nuance as to what is being accessed exactly. If taken literally, it is access to the online collection of digital images, but it is also treated as an entry point to the museum itself and the objects in its collection (Dodge 2015, personal communication). Since this digital collection is being used to promote the physical collection and attract visitors to the physical space of the museum, there seems to be a deliberate bringing together of the original and the reproduction. If digital reproductions are not meant to replace the physical collections of museums, they are asked to stand in as proxies for unreachable collections until such time as patrons can arrange a visit to the museum space.

The access to digitized objects through the Art Project affords a kind of plurality wherein the thing accessed is understood to be at once physical object and digital image. Perhaps the clearest illustration of this digital-analogue fluidity is the use of the word “item” to describe the elements in each of the collections in the Art Project. Each item consists of an image accompanied by text detailing the item's title, date, author, medium, copyright holder, collection. The information about the collection to which the item belongs could equally refer to the collection within the Art Project, or the collection that holds the physical object. All the details offered in the text pertain to the physical object except for the copyright holder which pertains to the digital image. Google's use of the word “item” – as opposed to

“image,” “object,” or “artifact” for example – to describe the elements in the collection is usefully vague. The word “item” can then encompass both the image and the accompanying text in the Art Project while simultaneously making reference to the physical object. Here again is a joining of original and reproduction. There is a fluidity in the relationship between the analogue and the digital within the Art Project, such that the art works represented and the digital reproductions that represent them are alternately treated as equivalents and as distinct entities within the Art Project.

The tensions between past and present, and between original and reproduction, that suspends the items between contexts seems to be an effect of what Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood call an art work's “anachronic” quality. For Nagel and Wood, the anachronic work represents a bending or doubling of time wherein works have the ability to move between two conditions of time (2010, 9). The first condition is substitutional, meaning that the art work holds a primordial meaning that is conferred through ritual no matter how often the material is replaced or restored. The second condition is authorial and demands that it be the original material that attests to the passage of time through weathering and deterioration (Nagel and Wood 2010, 13). “The ability of the work of art to hold incompatible models [of time] in suspension without deciding is the key to art's anachronic quality” (Nagel and Wood 2010, 18). The anachronic art work hesitates between “the substitutional system's unwillingness to commit itself to linear time” and the authorial system's “anchoring in time” (Nagel and Wood 2010, 18). The items of the Art Project collections discussed in this chapter seem to fit this description of anachronic works. Both the McCord Museum and the Royal Ontario Museum are, as has been mentioned, history museums, which means that the objects in their holdings depend on their

ability to serve as evidentiary reference to the time they were first made for their museological value (Latham and Simmons 2014). This is the authorial condition of time – museum objects only serve as evidence of time passed if their material is unaltered. However, there is a certain fluidity between the analogue objects with digital images when granting access to collections in the Art Project. This fluidity suggests something of the substitutional system wherein the digital reproduction has been substituted for the original analogue object. And yet, this substitution is not complete because there is still, in some instances, a distinction made between original and reproduction, particularly in terms of attracting patrons to the physical museum space. It must also be remembered that the only reason that the items find themselves in the Art Project at all is because of the museum's authority. So then there is hesitation between authorial and substitutional models in the Art Project collections considered here.

It strikes me that one of the Art Project's fundamental characteristics as a heterotopia is hesitation. The individual collections hesitate between museum and Google index of digital information. Collections hesitate between the possible orders of archives, museums, and Google. The Art Project presents itself as an extension of museum space and is treated as such by the museums themselves, however the order imposed upon items within collections indicates that the Art Project equally reflects the order of Google. The Art Project aggregates museum collections that have specific conceptions about the meanings of the objects they hold, but treats the items within these collections as digital information to be flattened and evened out. For the apparent disorder of items in collections is itself an organizational principle and consequently an interpretive act. It is an organizational system that takes all items to be of equal value. The Art Project takes items to be information without weight, information for which the categories of

“art” and the name of the museum are sufficient classification and explanation. Digitization is yet another interpretive gesture. What is done with the digital version of the collection determines what the character of the interpretation may be. In the case of the museums and their own institutional websites, the treatment of images takes for granted that there is an unbroken indexicality between the digital and the original object, and that the same conceptual orders can be applied to the digital reproductions as to the original objects. In the case of Google and the Art Project, the digital reproduction is treated as information without weight, as information that needs only to be found to be useful.

CONCLUSION

Further notes on Google, the Art Project, and collection

Collect /kə'lekt/ **verb** [with obj.] **1** bring or gather together (a number of things)... [no obj.] come together and form a group... systematically seek and acquire (items of a particular kind) as a hobby... accumulate over a period of time. **2** call for and take away; fetch...

– *Oxford Dictionary of English* third edition, 2010

This thesis did not begin with Google. Rather it began with the experience of cataloguing and digitizing a collection of marionettes. The marionettes' shifty materiality, the uneasy distinction between digital and analogue object, gave rise to an interest in digital extensions of analogue collections and the ways these get conflated and bound together in the archival language of preservation. However, as with most areas of digital information gathering, one does not have to look far to find Google. Once the research came into contact with Google it almost immediately changed shape. Most noticeably, the language of preservation dropped out in favour of the vocabulary of access. The usefulness of Google is the access it grants to information, access that is much more about circulation than it is about storage for future use. Copies of webpages are cached and then recopied and replaced with such frequency that they are set in motion rather than stored and preserved. What Google does store is data about such things as user search histories, user location, and traffic on advertiser sites, for future use. This data is studied and produces information useful for the improvement of search algorithms and advertisement targeting. This data/information is proprietary and a closely guarded professional secret. Google is then caught

in a paradox: it is useful because it grants access to information, but that information is only usefully accessible because of the personal data collected. Of the nearly infinite possibilities of the Internet, Google can produce the answer *you* were looking for. It is a usefulness produced by scope. Google can find what you need because it gathers so much information, it can find whatever it is you are looking for. It is this so-called utility that produces the tension central to this thesis: even as Google strives to fade into the background in its ubiquity, to become part of the unnoticed foundations of everyday life, it also demands attention. It disavows the complexity of its algorithms and functions while steadily announcing new services, products, and areas of human knowledge (Books, Maps, Art, etc.) brought to the Web by Google. Google as simultaneously a company, a set of online services, and the cultural practice of Internet search has a profound impact on the way we think of and use information. Google, in its various forms cannot be separated from the information it gathers, sorts, and indexes.

Thinking about what it means to collect, it seems that to collect things together is to implicitly make them of a kind. In the case of the Art Project, it is to make all cultural objects “Art” and it is to make these same objects (digital) information. The Art Project produces the impression that the world's culture is singular and that its material traces may be collected as “treasures” that can be arranged under the banner of “art.” To collect in the sense of “to call for and take away,” is interesting in the context of the Art Project because it implies that to collect challenges ownership. There is a sense in which to make something part of Google is to add another level of remove between an object and its previous owners. It is a condition that calls to mind the museum's often colonizing practice of lifting objects out of their spatial-temporal contexts in order to have those same contexts represented in the museum via the presence of

objects. Ownership in the Art Project is complicated by the digital-analogue relationships of items in the Project. The ROM and McCord museums retain ownership of the original (analogue) objects in their museum spaces and these institutions also hold the copyright for the digital images they contributed. However, the waters muddy when one considers that Google owns the Art Project *per se*. Google owns the Art Project's collection of collections, it owns the index.

Christine Davenne's views on collection also resonate with the activities of the Art Project, and of Google more generally. She writes, “collecting, which exists somewhere between too much and not enough, does not know any precise limit...A close kin to passion and excess, it carries the seeds of corruption and extreme fantasy” (Davenne 2012, 204). There is something in the location of collecting between “too much and not enough” that strikes a chord when looking at Google and the sheer volume of information it collects. In terms of Google's scale that phrase speaks to an almost absurd ambition, and yet Google continues to grow. One of Google's favourite questions is to ask if a project will “scale” (Stross 2008, Schmidt and Rosenberg 2014). The concern with scale is a preoccupation with a system or platform's ability to expand indefinitely and accommodate increasingly vast amounts of data. The scope of Google is beyond that of any preexisting collection though not beyond that of imagined collections. Google's ambition for universal collection of the world's information calls to mind Jorge Luis Borges' oft-cited short story, *The Library of Babel*. The chief problem with the universal library in Borges' story is that there is no index independent of the library itself. The library is its own index. That which is contained in the library cannot be made useful because there is no overview of the collection. There is no real overarching index of that which Google collects in its various forms. The Art Project and Google Books do not have independent guides to their holdings and are

indexes of themselves (Hillis et al. 2013). Google Search it could be argued functions as an index of the Web, and in some sense it does. However, it is incomplete and it changes for each user. Google Search returns results specific to the user and their search history and thus changes the shape of the Web between users.

Davenne's "seeds of corruption" present in any collection, for Google take the form of code and data corruption at one level, and at another level these seeds sprout as the potentially insidious uses of all the world's information. Google has recently launched an initiative through Google Maps and Google Earth to "build the most comprehensive and accurate map of Canada's Arctic" (Tuxen-Bettman 2012). Using Street View imaging technologies Google is working with local community members to map and capture images of Canada's Arctic in order to bring some of the most isolated places in the world "just a click away" (Tuxen-Bettman 2012). And while there is nothing inherently insidious about recording local knowledge and sharing it online, a map that not only marks terrain but also records populated areas in incredible detail does take on a slightly different tone in light of global interests in oil exploration in Northern Canada. In all likelihood Google does not intend for their maps to be used in this way. As with most of their initiatives – including Search, Books, Art Project, and Maps – Google intends to make world exploration from home possible. Taken at their word, Google simply wants to make information useful and the more information collected and analyzed the more useful it becomes.

José van Dijck argues that social platforms, a category that includes Google, "track people's desires by coding relationships between people, things and ideas into algorithms" (2012, 8). In being coded this way by online platforms, people's activities are rendered "formal, manageable, and manipulable" (van Dijck 2012, 8). The ability to engineer desire and social

relationships also casts the shadow of insidiousness on Google's tremendous collection. In this context, the Art Project participates in making visits to the museum and interactions with art works technical and manageable. Interactions with art works are standardized through the algorithms that govern interfaces. The patterns of interaction set up by the Art Project render visitors as users rather than as patrons. The interconnection of the Art Project with other Google platforms like Google+ and YouTube also manages the social aspects of visiting the museum. Coding behaviour and tracking desire in this way commoditizes relationships (van Dijck 2012, 11). The Art Project could speculatively be read as the tracking of desire in relation to material culture. It is conceivable that the Project generates data about patterns of looking at, liking, and sharing images of cultural collections. The Art Project is beautiful and seductive, it invites one to spend hours looking and looking.

In these potentially corrupt uses of Google, the “extreme fantasy” in Davenne's understanding of collection comes to the fore. Google's is the fantasy that all things and all relationships can be made digital and coded into automated algorithms. Google's is the fantasy of universal understanding because everyone has access to the information they need. It furthers the fantasy of total knowledge already present in libraries, archives, and museums. The Art Project is only one dimension of this fantasy. The early collection and display of objects in cabinets of curiosities were tools of a scientific history (Davenne 2012). A practice that conceived of a history that is formulaic and can be pieced together through the evidentiary capacities of objects. History and science have since been separated as formal disciplines, and yet they remain connected in discursive ways. Collections of libraries, museums and archives are very closely tied to information science via their systems of classification and organization. The use of

databases to manage the records of objects in their collections introduces a digital dimension to the information science of museums and archives. Google simply takes the possibilities of digital information and its management to extremes. Whereas in the museum information is at the service of history, in Google it is history and the museum at the service of information to be coded into useful relationships. The Art Project then is collecting based on the assumption that all things can be made into data to be passed through complex algorithms in order to produce a simpler, knowable world of culture.

As the above discussion suggests there is a great deal to say on the subject of Google that is beyond the scope of this thesis. The variety of directions in which Google extends reveals a refusal to remain still, a refusal to settle into a single niche. This constant movement, to me, is indicative of hesitation. This is hesitation that is not born of indecision but rather of a reluctance to define a singular position. This is a notion that is perhaps counter-intuitive given the seemingly singular universal scope Google assigns itself, but actually the breadth of Google's projects and its involvement in the organization of information suggests something of Google's hesitation. In diversifying its activities, Google resists the fixing of any single label or definition. Google hesitates between public and private, between corporate body and digital platforms, between services and products, between noun (Google) and verb (to google). And the Art Project hesitates between museum and archive, between digital and physical collections, between the "here" of the screen and the "there" of the museum. It is difficult to point to any one of these in isolation and say "*this* is Google." In this way Google is allowed to be everywhere and hold all things, it becomes a metamedium. It can present itself as a imminently useful guide that renders order out of the chaos of the Internet.

The Art Project's hybridity in terms of collection is also evidence of hesitation. The Project's hybridity is a product of its collection lineages, of the archive and the museum, and it is also a product of cross-pollination with Google. What has, up to this point in the thesis, been implicit is the fact that hybridity is always productive. A hybrid is not simply the sum of its component parts. A hybrid is always something new, or other in contrast to its parental lines. It is combination and re-mixing that produces a different kind of collection in the form of the Art Project. So in truth, the Art Project is neither archive nor museum, but rather its own kind of collection that bears traces of these other collection types. It is a collection model shaped by Google's pseudo-public totalizing accumulation of information and the culture of Internet search that deems all things fit to be put online. A collection shaped by engineers (Google) as well as historians (archives/museums). A collection in which it is possible to treat items as equally weighted information. Because the activity of collecting is historically contingent, and because the shapes of libraries, archives and museums and their collections are changing and coming closer in their resemblance to one another as a result of contact with digital technology, then perhaps Google and the Art Project are the next phase in collection. Even as the Art Project treats the items in its collection as neutral information to be arranged according to a one-size-fits-all model, it is never fully successful in this project. It is unsuccessful because the orders of the museum come into contact with the order of Google in the Art Project. It is this contact in the heterotopian space of the Art Project that reflects back to us the assumptions about collection implicit in the activities of Google and of museums like the ROM and the McCord.

In discussing the conceptualizations of objects in the collection of the Art Project and in the individual museums I have employed the useful fiction of separating out the individual

collections in the Art Project. The collections in the Project are not quite as self-contained as I have made them out to be. The items in the collections of the ROM and the McCord circulate in many ways that are untethered to the collection grouping, as is the case for all the images in the Project's collection. They can be searched, found, and compared in a wide variety of ways that have nothing to do with the collection as basic organizing unit. The user does not have to know which collection an item belongs in order to find it. The purpose of imposing limits in this way and isolating collections was to control the scale and make it possible to write about parts of the Art Project instead of having to always contend with it in its entirety. (In the year or so in which I wrote this thesis, 200 new institutional collections were added to the Art Project). I am calling attention to it here because it is the same of kind of constraint that other collecting bodies including museums and archives impose. Collections are never completely self-contained. If the pieces in a collection are meant to be representative of spatial-temporal contexts outside of the the museum, then the boundaries of a collection are always already ill-defined.

The other way of imposing limits and circumscribing what was under consideration in the analysis of the collections was to focus on the default “sort” settings for the items. Unlike the default and alternate “view” options the “sort” settings do change the order in which the items appear. With the alternate “sort” options users are able to see items in chronological order (and in reverse chronological order). The decision to focus on default settings in this case arose out of an awareness that default settings are revealing regarding the assumptions that Google makes about what it is that is being collected. And as Siva Vaidyanathan observes, most users very rarely change the default settings (2011).

In pointing out these serviceable fictions I do not mean to undermine or render false the

work that has gone before in these pages. Rather I wish to draw attention to my own practices of viewing and the order I have imposed in the interest of performing the analysis of the Art Project collection. It is a conceptual order that places the collection as a unit at the centre of understanding the narratives rehearsed about items in that same collection. I am pointing out these fictions and the imposed order of my own analysis because I think it is linked to the way that collecting bodies order their objects and the way that institutions conceive of their mandates. I want to suggest that the Art Project is much more than what I have been able to account for here. Finally, I wish to call attention to the fact that the Google Art Project is a place of contradiction and that to name it is to watch it change.

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Interviews:

Dodge, Ryan (Digital Engagement Coordinator at Royal Ontario Museum), interview by Alexandra Lussier-Craig, Montreal, 4 June 2015.

Poisson, Stephanie (Head of Web and Media at McCord Museum), interview by Alexandra Lussier-Craig, Montreal, 15 April 2015.

Widmer, Celine (Curator of Textual Archives at McCord Museum), interview by Alexandra Lussier-Craig, Montreal, 15 April 2015.

Woods, Nicola (Rights and Reproductions Coordinator at Royal Ontario Museum), interview by Alexandra Lussier-Craig, Montreal, 4 June 2015.

APPENDIX I
Certificate of Ethical Acceptability



CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant: Alexandra Lussier-Craig
Department: Faculty of Arts and Science \ Communication
Studies
Agency: N/A
Title of Project: Googling Art

Certification Number: 30004183

Valid From: February 13, 2015 to: February 12, 2016

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "J. Pfaus".

Dr. James Pfaus, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee