The Museum *Qua*

The Evolution of a Knowledge Institution in an Era of
Pervasively Networked Information Infrastructure

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This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and beliefs, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University’s Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.
I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis contains a published scholarly work of which I am a joint author. The final chapter of this dissertation was co-written with Danny Birchall, Head Digital Services at Welcome Trust, and published as *Curating the Digital World: Past Preconceptions, Present Problems, Possible Futures* in the printed proceedings for *Museums and the Web* 2013, Portland, OR, 2013. Danny and I each contributed 50% of the work and ideas to this dissertation.

I have included as part of the thesis a written statement, endorsed by my supervisor, attesting to my contribution to the joint publication/s/scholarly work.
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“qua, prep.: In the capacity of; as being.”

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Abstract

The introduction of digital networked technologies, including the Internet, as the fundamental basis for communication in developed societies has added new dimensions of complexity to the museum’s task of epistemological and cultural perpetuation. As the digital network grows, as multivectoral connections between people and data become possible, aggregated along multiple, complex dimensions, knowledge is being transformed on multiple fronts. New tools and technologies for knowledge work alter the problems of knowledge and the ways such problems can be solved. Changes to the technologies for communicating alter the dynamics of knowledge by changing what it is possible to know; how such knowledge is created and legitimised; and by enabling participants to contribute to knowledge work.

Set against a background of a changing information infrastructure, this dissertation will therefore seek to articulate what it might mean for the museum qua museum and qua knowledge institution to be ‘of the network’. It will consider the nature of institutions, and explore how institutions enable cultural perpetuation, and create the context for knowledge. This dissertation will explore multiple ways that the museum participates in the information infrastructure, and consider how such participation shapes the museum as knowledge institution, and how that shapes the dynamics of knowledge. It will become evident that the networking of knowledge and information infrastructures is changing knowledge work, and therefore knowledge institutions. This dissertation will ultimately argue that for museums qua knowledge institutions to achieve the institutional mission of collecting, storing, sharing, and legitimising the objects of knowledge from the present and past for the benefit of both now and the future in ways that are appropriate in the context of networked information infrastructure, alternative tactics, strategies, and fundamental assumptions are necessary.

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