

It is a privilege to be asked to present this lecture. I'd like to thank the Hoff Insitute and University of Melbourne for the invitation.

My theme is how curators today can recognize how the process of curating itself can generate relationships between people, and offers so many ways in which the testimony of these relationships can change perceptions, and represent ways that different people can offer so much to one another and the shared world we live in.

Central to this discussion will be our perception of curatorial 'expertise'. Ursula Hoff was clearly a remarkable woman. She is a model of dedication to curatorial scholarship, and her life story is, as I have said in the announcement text for this event, a lesson from history on why we need to recognize the potential of people in migration and see them as individuals not as types.

She shared her expertise in many ways, including through her general introductions to the National Gallery of Victoria's collections. I want to consider other aspects of curating, emphasising the potential of ways of sharing expertise and life experiences.

[Blake images]

Of the many arenas of curatorial expertise in which she worked, William Blake's Illustrations to Dante were evidently very important to her.

To illustrate her scholarly breadth and weight, consider how even the two page introduction Ursula Hoff wrote for a slim picture book about Blake in the collection [slide] generated a further page of footnotes [slide].

William Blake's 'Illustrations to Dante' are currently on display at The Herbert, Coventry, the city's main museum and art gallery, in an exhibition in which I was involved called 'Journeys with The Waste Land'. They were also included in the earlier iteration of the same exhibition, at Turner Contemporary in Margate in spring 1918.

Slide : TC and shelter

For those of you who may not know, Turner Contemporary is one of the most recent of the generation of new contemporary art venues built since the mid 1990s to renew regional towns and cities through the use of lottery and local authority funding – where I used to work, Tate St Ives, was one of the first, and some say with our changing times that Turner Contemporary will be one of the last.

It opened to great acclaim seven years ago, in 2011, a beautiful building by David Chipperfield in a unique location. Margate and its region, right at the east end of Kent, is deprived but rapidly changing – in large part thanks to Turner Contemporary. Turner Contemporary can be here seen across Margate sands from a Victorian shelter, where Eliot sat in 1921 whilst drafting what was to become 'The Waste Land'. At this point in his life he had been given time off work at Lloyds Bank

to recover his mental and physical health, and came to the town with his wife, also in a fragile state. His great poem was to published the following year.

Journeys with The Waste Land took a participative approach to curatorial method. Individuals of different backgrounds shared in the making of the main exhibition and a host of other projects and elements.

Before I tell you more about the show, I would like to explain how I saw the curatorial context for *Journeys with The Waste Land* when as a guest curator I first proposed it to Turner Contemporary, in 2012.

The concept of the guest curator rather inevitably means a 'show and tell' model, where as in the case with *Turner to Cezanne* which we toured in 2010 in the US during the NMW refurbishment – here the introductory text drafted in Cardiff being read in Oklahoma City.

Participative and co-curated projects challenge this model of the expert 'showing and telling' by asking people beyond the gallery to contribute ideas and exhibits. TC's second exhibition 'Nothing in the World But Youth' was a rewarding example of the community curated project, exploring the subject of Margate and young people past and present.

Whilst being a terrific exhibition, shared many of the characteristics of such projects , where the knowledge provided by the participants is the testimony of their own

identities – in this case young people and people with memories of when they were young mediating their own material.

In my earlier work at Tate St Ives and the National Museum in Wales, the context of cultural identity, art history and contemporary identities are in powerful tensions. In Wales the discussion of complex identities is woven with a rapidly changing sense of 'Welshness'. Moreover in the National Museum, its great collections of art and applied art works alongside other disciplines such as social and industrial history, where explication and analysis of contemporary issues and forms of storytelling by participants – such as this example from research into women's views of historic stereotypes, or co-curating a project to demonstrate the rootedness of Polish people following their arrival in the Valleys coalfields in the 1940s, rather than the 1990s, - are fundamental to their curatorial approach.

Bedwyr Williams 'Bard Attitude' is one of many examples of a younger artists commissioned to challenge stereotyping in historic art. Alongside, like many museums and galleries, we complemented major historic work with locally informed responses mediated by artists as ways of reaching out to people left out of this discussion : the National Gallery's tour of the Madonna of the Pinks on its acquisition was accompanied in south Wales by a project by Helen Clifford working with young mothers excluded from school by having a baby, giving them the chance to come back into education, and offering pride and self esteem .

Bringing these strands of curating together “Muslim World on Your Doorstep” we created a season of differently curated projects developed over a long-term discussion in an advisory group. Thus material from people’s daily lives were juxtaposed with exhibitions such as the British Museum’s ‘Offas Dinar’ and an exhibition called ‘Somali Elders’ by Glenn Jordan, documenting the senior men in the Somali community in Cardiff.

Soon after, I worked on ‘Hineni’: here the Jewish Reform Synagogue decided to commission him to make a photographic exhibition alongside a self-led oral history project documenting individual’s stories.

Two examples:

I’d like to mention two moments in responses to these projects. In inviting asylum seekers and refugees developing a language skills through a co-curated displays, giving them the opportunity to choose from across the collections, I was struck by how visitors wanted to know why people didn’t remain fixed to their cultural background : why would an Iranian woman choosing Victorian costume jewelry or an Indian woman choose a Korean bowl ?

Then a professional curator commented on the display of personal artefacts in *Muslim World on your Doorstep* : its so boringly presented – it’s just like every other display. You can predict my reply : yes, exactly.

So, returning to Margate in 2012, I hope you understand why, now freelance, I proposed a co-curated show about Eliot, The Waste Land and Margate to Turner Contemporary. I wished to address: how to change the relationship between 'community curating' and 'guest expert curating' : how to redraw the role of the visitor from afar when articulating ideas within a different community and region ; how to change the presumption that the 'community's role was to provide knowledge and experience solely of histories in the community;

[slide]

and in contrast, by addressing a major work of modernism, often characterised as 'difficult' in so many ways, assert the right and the opportunity for people to create a public response around such a subject.

The principle was simple: to invite people by an open call through the ordinary gallery mailing list and through fliers around the town to take up in a collective enterprise to curate a 'slot' in the programme : a major exhibition and its outreach programme, the entire curatorial process being open to discussion and shared decision making.

We took our inspiration in part from the fact that 'The Waste Land' is a poem of many voices, and was itself a result of sharing editing. We also knew that artists had responded to the poem in open and provocative ways that created a kind of permission for us to do the same.

As a 'guest curator' I worked closely with another independent curator, Trish Scott, a locally based artist-curator-researcher. Trish took on a dedicated role in Turner Contemporary for the duration of the project. The gallery gave us the 'normal' timeframe and the 'normal' budget. After an 18 month preparation period, the first fortnightly open meetings in 2015 were attended by between 50 and 70 people. Eventually around 100 took part in one way or another, and became known collectively as the Research Group.

The Research Group included people with no prior knowledge either of Eliot and modernist poetry, or modern and contemporary art and curatorial methodologies, alongside people who had longstanding interests in one or the other. It included people from Margate, from the wider community of the Isle of Thanet, and people travelling from across east Kent and beyond. Some members of Turner Contemporary staff joined, attending meetings in their own time, intrigued by the chance to break out of their role in the organisation. Online participation was facilitated through a 'closed' website.

We met in different locations, thereby adding to the range of people we came into contact with, and requiring discussion and negotiation with other groups in the town. Every meeting was linked to the poem in some way, and always included listening, generally to a reading or performance of the poem, occasionally to recordings. We invited experts, or particular interest groups, such as a team of sound artists, to lead sessions. Many of the Research Group began to become 'gatekeepers' between the project and other audiences and individuals.

Over the three years of its existence the group varied in size, people came and went a small number – around 30 – 35 – stayed directly involved in everything from beginning to completion.

Key sessions were informed by the participative methodology developed at Turner Contemporary and by other strategies drawn from work in participative research, audience engagement and learning. But the group also informed methodologies with its own initiatives and reflections. In some cases these led to strands with their own identities and momentum, both as research and as engagement. Most prominent of these were a walking group and a reading group.

As the project and the group evolved, we devised research themes, debated the meaning and implementation of curatorial practices, and ways of making decisions. Dedicated elements were created around mental health and well-being, as well as “placemaking” through organisations such as the local volunteer-run museum, a gardening project, and a group researching Margate’s links with WW1 site in Flanders, all brokered through initiatives by individuals and smaller collaborative groups within the Research Group. We even had projects in the traditional areas of relationships, such as with the local art school, who produced a pastiche newspaper.

As the show came together, we were delighted by the responses of people and organisations approached to contribute. Major high-value loans were offered by MoMA New York, the Md’AM Paris, and UK public collections. Private lenders were

generous. E decided that every living artist would be asked if it was agreeable to be in the show rather than simply source from collections or galleries, and many in response offered particular work. The Research Group also curated the gallery Learning studio for use by schools, colleges and adult groups, and this and other elements gained significant sponsorships.

One key issue addressed within the Research Group — was how to express to audiences the identity of the Research Group itself. In Margate, contributions by the Research Group would be attributed to someone only where necessary or unavoidable: for instance in first hand testimony in introductory video and talks. Otherwise we collectively agreed anonymised interpretation.

Examples of mediation illustrate the results, and I will contrast the introductory video with other forms :

[introductory video]

Here is an extract from the printed guide to the exhibition, for Hopper:

“When I read the section of the poem called *The Fire Sermon* I thought immediately of this work by Hopper: ‘At the violet hour’ we have a single woman, a typist, moving through her daily chores. Despite her financial independence, she’s lonely and has an unsatisfactory sexual encounter with a “carbuncular clerk”. She seems detached from life, almost robotic in her actions.

I've been there, in that bedsit where the divan doubles as a sofa going through the motions of existing.

It reminds me, in particular, of working as an English teacher in the Czech Republic, making do and washing my jeans in the bathroom sink.”

In the show they were juxtaposed with Paula Rego’s Abortion Triptych

“Paula Rego made these sketches just before the 2000 abortion referendum in Portugal. In *The Waste Land* there’s reference to a home-induced abortion, carried out by a woman, Lil, towards the end of the First World War, when abortion was usually achieved via pills from a chemists shop. In the poem, the woman says “the chemist said it would be alright, but I haven’t been the same since”. I feel it’s important to include this work, because women’s rights over their bodies are still being threatened, for example if you look at America at the moment. The poem was written nearly 100 years ago but is as relevant now as it ever was.”

A different theme was the more literal sense of the Waste Land as an image of the dry land, deserted, derelict, a product of as well as a metaphor for modern urban society. New work made for the show by Hakansson, John Newling, both of whom worked with members of the Research Group to realize the works. In the install contrasted with museum pieces such as works by Cy Twombly and Ana Mendieta .

Lastly, I'll illustrate how we used the voices in listening points next to key works and juxtapositions. I will pick out Collins ' The Quest, on loan from Tate. Notice how we edited the conversation : again, no individuals are named, but by now you'll recognize my voice about half way through.

[Collins clip]

The off-site programme involved including versions of the exhibition that profiled other stories and 'takes: for example some locally based artists at Crate studios two of whom were in the group created a version of the show where ideas that didn't make it were available for re-curating.

It's crucial to say that some relationships in the group and outcomes from these were kept low key, known only to those involved and to those who enquired closely. One was a project to build the study and creative responses to the poem into a project with a local day centre for people with mental health problems. Tess Denman Cleaver worked with Jemma, a member of the group, to work with these people in a project they called 'They Do the Police in Different Voices', a reference to the title of the poem in its first draft. The result in the exhibition was a simple text work : on the other hand, people in both groups learned together through Tess and Jemma's leadership and, their mutual relationships being some of the most powerful elements of the project.

In Margate, then, exhibition and its on-site learning and engagement programmes received over 114,000 visits. The off-site programme generated 33 projects in 16 venues across the town. The learning programme was fully booked. The project featured in a huge range of media coverage. Fascination with the process and the appropriateness of it to the subject of Eliot's poem ran through much of it.

What a sprightly idea for a show. What you get with amateur curators, and not with their professional kin, is an emotional response you can trust. No one here is trying to further their career or make a mark. There are no gimmicks or weaselly bits of provocation. No trendy choices, no fashion-chasing. And the calibre of the loans is astonishing

Waldemar Januszczak : Sunday Times lead review, 11 February 2018.

Coming back to the Blake Dante Illustrations . In Margate they created comparisons with Carey Young's 'Lines Made By Walking', where a young woman walks up and down London Bridge at rush hour.

You will have noticed that these are not watercolours.

The exhibition guide on them explains :

"In our research meetings we decided on William Blake's illustrations to Dante's poem as a good way of illustrating the references to Dante in The Waste Land. But when I looked up online catalogues for them I discovered that some museums had a version dated 1922. At first I thought this was an amazing coincidence, but then found there were a limited edition of facsimiles done as a fundraiser to keep the Blake originals in public collections. Maybe these are another example of Eliot including something that was in the news as well as connecting to the great poem he loved."

I'm a great believer in the 'wouldn't it be good if' school of history – if only we could find in Eliot's letters, say, a reference to the coverage in the newspapers of the sale of the Linnell collection. Part of his job at Lloyds was, after all, to survey the daily papers. And I am confident, [sale slide] that a few of his London circle would be amongst those who responded to the appeal of the Tate (or more accurately, the National Gallery of British Art at Millbank) Director, Charles Aitken, to support a pooled bid for the 102 Blake Illustrations.

The idea of a folder of high quality reproductions came later in the campaign – once the works were secured, as a way to top up the fundraising for the purchase channeled through the Art Collections Fund, but also in response to breaking up the 102, a facsimile set offering a record of the 102 images together. The scheme was approved by the partners in the autumn of 1918 (as the letter from Melbourne suggests), the purchases having been completed in the NACF's committee appointed a printer in February 1919.

The time it took Emery Walker and the Tate to make the facsimile set gradually became a concern : Melbourne's watercolours were not to arrive until 1921, with the facsimile set completed and fully sold on in June 1922.

In Ursula Hoff's guide she quite rightly focuses on keying each image to the appropriate passage from the Inferno :

Dante and Virgil, having entered through the gates of Hell, arrive in a vestibule:

And I who straightaway look'd, beheld a flag.

Which whirling ran round so rapidly

That it not pause obtained: and following came

Such a long train of spirits, I should neer

Have thought that death had despoiled

These wretches who neer liv'd

Went on in nakedness, and sorely stung

By wasps and hornets.

Eliot's development of the passage brings the raw, chilling resonances past and present of this image of queues of people, lined up at the shore, as they crowd to cross a filthy stretch of water.

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.

Ursula Hoff, in her little illustrated guide to Blake, didn't go into the story of the dispersal of the collection and the collective effort to keep the works in the public domain, albeit scattered across different museums. Nor, of course, did she speak in such a context of the resonances of Blake's images for her as a woman in post war Melbourne.

I would argue, why should she? The freedom for an expert to make the choice of approach and argument, to share the sources of her ideas, is surely something we must continue to argue for.

But then, as Sheridan Palmer in her terrific book 'Centre of the Periphery' quotes her as saying :

" ... certain pictures from a particular time carry within them whatever has been inherited from before and is in service to the present and the future..."

So in understanding a picture's meaning, we may recognise how curating embraces and celebrates the freedom to share different perspectives and insights from the present and for the future .

As you know, curating is derived from 'curare', to take care. The expert art-historian-curator like Ursula Hoff is a great example of this way of thinking about taking care.

In her contribution to our JWTWL closing conference, however, the curator Rachel Anderson described her and her partner's role in 'idle women' , a participative contemporary art project in the north west of England, as that of *care takers*.

I like the word 'care taker'. It reappraises the etymology of 'curator', and suggests positive attitudes and behaviour. It recalls the school caretaker, in a position of power but tasked with working on behalf of both a building and a community. It permits the thought that the curator takes care of people as well as things.

In addressing the opportunities of collaborative and participative curating, there is a shared process of giving up power. Within any institution or curatorial project there will of necessity be roles in which power inheres. The care taking curator understands the implications of exercising power and takes day-to-day and strategic decisions about how to respond given this awareness.

We are familiar with the discourse of the curator as dominated by the 'star curator'. There is, however, no such thing as the curator who works alone. The curator, by definition, one might argue, has to work with others to realize projects. But I argue that the characterization of curatorship as being the product of single author can only reinforce the audience's perception that they are 'other'.

The head of exhibitions at Turner Contemporary commented to me once that actually many elements of the process we adopted were ones that any major exhibition went through. Indeed, I have found this in other collaborative projects [eg of 'wavespeech'] the act of sharing and explaining the process simple introduces a round of debate about why this should be.

For it is the ability to control and diversify testimony which for me lay at the heart of our project. Introducing and sharing uncertainty, for example, offering the freedom to be intuitive or speculative, was part of allowing visitors to see the validity and strength of different experiences that may be shared by those potentially alienated from or intimidated by the exhibition's content. Equally, I hope we demonstrated why academic insights and knowledge, and pockets of specific research, were of great value too.

If we reclaim the term 'curating' as being the shared taking care of objects and the stories of people, we can also resist the appropriation of the term now commonly in everyday use, where curating solely describes the exercising of taste and selection based on an individual's prior knowledge – or even on algorithms. In reclaiming 'curating' as taking care and sharing, I hope we help preserve the wider civic value and the potential political and ethical role of the curator.

The testimonies of our project demonstrates the potential transformation of lives of when the potential of individuals, whatever their expertise and life experience, is both respected and released.

The challenge for the curator is in recognizing the power of the shared practices and platforms they possess in order to create parity of esteem : parity of esteem between the expertise and the life experiences of others, and seeking to embrace their audiences in that mutual respect so that, as one might say, we may come to know one another.