Barriers to digital participation within the Australian cultural sector: Mediating distance, unlocking collections

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Barriers to digital participation within the Australian cultural sector:

*Mediating distance, unlocking collections*
I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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# Table of contents

Declaration .................................................. i  
Acknowledgements ......................................... iii  
Table of contents ........................................... iv  
List of tables ................................................... ix  
List of figures ................................................. x  

Abstract  

Introduction: “The future is already here – it’s just not evenly distributed” within the cultural sector  
Dominant policy narrative: Creative Nation, Creative Australia .......................... 6  
Examining dissonance .................................................. 8  
Desert Mob 2017 ......................................................... 9  
Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project .......................... 10  
Digital and non-digital cultural platforms: A note on terminology ................. 12  
Media ecologies and barriers to digital participation:  
Developing an approach to the field ..................................................... 14  
Thesis proposition .................................................. 18  
Thesis structure ................................................. 19  
Conclusion ......................................................... 23  

Chapter 1: Digital participation in the Australian cultural sector  
Tracing developments in the communicative practices of the Australian cultural sector ..................................................... 29  
Digital participation as communicative practice: Inclusion and access ......... 33  
Communicative practices and the dominant cultural policy narrative ........ 36  
Barriers to digital participation within the cultural sector .......................... 38  
From digital divides to digital participation ................................................. 42  
Australian digital inequity .................................................. 45  
Context specific digital dynamics: (1) Desert Mob 2017 and  
(2) Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project ................. 47  
Desert Mob 2017 ......................................................... 48
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Digital participation in remote Aboriginal communities.......................................................... 50
Digital participation in remote Aboriginal art centres............................................................... 55

**Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project**

Digital participation in community collecting-organisations.................................................. 61

Conclusion................................................................................................................................. 63

## Chapter 2: ‘Doing’ the research: ethical and methodological considerations

Locating the researcher ............................................................................................................ 66
Consultation, mutual benefit, and feedback mechanisms ......................................................... 70

*Ethical mechanisms in practice* ............................................................................................ 71
Developing a media ecologies framework ................................................................................ 77

*Platforms* ............................................................................................................................... 79
*Practices* ................................................................................................................................. 81
*Publics* ................................................................................................................................. 82

*Making barriers to participation visible* ................................................................................ 86
Multiple methods ...................................................................................................................... 90

*Digital and non-digital ethnography: In theory* ...................................................................... 93
*Digital and non-digital ethnography: In practice* ................................................................. 95

*Semi-structured interviews* ..................................................................................................... 95
*Participant observation* .......................................................................................................... 97

*Collection and analysis of organisational data and records* .................................................. 98

Desert Mob 2017: Data ............................................................................................................ 99

**Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project: Data** ....................................... 105
Conclusion ............................................................................................................................... 110

## Chapter 3: “A coming together”: The convergence of creators and consumers

“Institutional mechanisms for collecting and distributing” ................................................... 114
“The art centre model” and its publics .................................................................................... 118


**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artists</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art centre managers</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous art fairs: The convergence of creators and consumers</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desert Mob Weekend</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publics comprised of consumers: Attendees and purchasers</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desert Mob publics</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 4: A digital Desert Mob: Making the cultural platform “accessible to people beyond the region”  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A digital Desert Mob</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital publics depicted on Instagram</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enactive publics and their digital practices</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interconnected enactive publics: Araluen staff and art centre managers</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art centre managers</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artists</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceiving of receptive publics as consumers</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumers, artists, art centre managers: Disconnected publics</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital participation and non-digital dynamics:</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An extension of the art centre model</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 5: ‘Unlocking’ cultural collections: From Australian Museums On Line to Victorian Collections  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early attempts to ‘unlock’ distributed cultural collections</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Victorian Collections</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying and ameliorating a ‘grey’ digital divide</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Victorian Collections cataloguing interface</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing digital access</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training workshops</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Veterans Heritage Project</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solving the grey digital divide?</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 6: “I’ve held a lot of babies, but never an iPad!”: Barriers to digital participation and their influence on access to the cultural collections

Distinct practices, interconnected publics: Cataloguers and consumers

Cataloguers

A cataloguing public at the Lara RSL

Cataloguing practices

Consumers

The influence of barriers to digital participation on cataloguing practices

Non-digital and digital barriers to participation: Cataloguing output

“If they search hand grenade, it’ll come straight up!”: Keywords

as postdigital barriers

A choice between barriers: Cataloguers over consumers

Conclusion

Conclusion: The consequences of choosing between barriers to participation

Two responses to barriers to digital participation

Mediating distance: consumers over creators

‘Unlocking’ cultural collections: cataloguers over consumers

Three primary findings

Finding one: Multifaceted digital inequity

Desert Mob 2017

Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project

Finding two: Enacted by publics rather than individuals

Finding three: Choices between barriers and thus between publics

Implications

Limitations and directions for future research

Conclusion

References
Appendices

Appendix A:
Evidence of ethics approval and amendments........................................... 368

Appendix B:
Plain language statement........................................................................ 381

Appendix C:
Consent form.......................................................................................... 384

Appendix D:
Guiding questions for semi-structured interviews ..................................... 389

Appendix E:
Trajectory of artworks sold during Desert Mob from 2010-2016.............................. 397

Appendix F:
A record of Victorian Collections’ cataloguing fields with descriptive text as of 22/05/2019.......................................................... 405
List of tables

Table 1
Visualising the interactions between the media ecologies’ components ........................................... 79

Table 2
Visualising a barrier between the media ecologies’ components ...................................................... 89

Table 3
Applying the media ecologies framework to Desert Mob 2017 .......................................................... 100

Table 4
Segmenting Desart member art centres by region ............................................................................. 101

Table 5
Segmenting Desart member art centres by remoteness measure ......................................................... 102

Table 6
Demonstrating direct engagement of art centres within the research by remoteness measure .......... 103

Table 7
Demonstrating direct engagement of art centres within the research by region .............................. 103

Table 8
Applying the media ecologies framework to Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project at the Lara RSL Sub-Branch .......................................................... 106

Table 9
Residential location of visitors to the Araluen Galleries during the Desert Mob exhibition, September 01 – October 31, 2010-2017 ................................................................. 137

Table 10
Delivery destinations for all works sold, Desert Mob 2010-2017 ...................................................... 141
List of figures

Figure 1
Tenures of art centre managers at one Desert Mob participating art centre, 1991-2017

Figure 2
One art centre manager’s tenure at multiple Desert Mob participating art centres, 1991-2017

Figure 3
Gender of Desert Mob participating art centre managers 1991-2017

Figure 4
Residential location of Desert Mob 2017 Symposium attendees

Figure 5
Residential location of visitors to the Araluen Galleries between September 01 – October 31, Desert Mob 2017

Figure 6
Residential location of visitors to the Araluen Galleries during the Desert Mob 2017 exhibition: Highlighting dominance of non-Northern Territory visitors

Figure 7
Delivery destinations for all works sold, Desert Mob 2017
Figure 8
Trajectory of each art work sold at Desert Mob 2017 .......................................................... 144

Figure 9
Trajectory of art purchased by a resident of a remote community, Desert Mob 2017........... 145

Figure 10
Trajectory of each art work sold, Desert Mob 2010-2017 .................................................. 146

Figure 11
Digital platforms used by Desert Mob 2017 participating art centres as of October 2017..... 153

Figure 12
Typology of Instagram posts made in 2017 by Instagram accounts within the Desert Mob 2017 media ecologies ............................................................... 155

Figure 13
Attribution of artists in Instagram post captions made by Desert Mob 2017 participating art centres in 2017 ................................................................. 156

Figure 14
Araluen Instagram posts made in 2017: Original and reshared content ............................ 162

Figure 15
Desert Mob Instagram posts made in 2017: Original and reshared content .......................... 162

Figure 16
All Instagram posts made by the Desert Mob Instagram account in 2017
(measured by comments and likes received) ........................................................................ 166

Figure 17
All Facebook posts made in 2017 by the Desert Mob Facebook account
(measured by comments and likes received) ........................................................................ 167
Figure 18
Desert Mob Facebook posts: Original and reshared content................................. 169

Figure 19
Desert Mob Facebook posts: Original and reshared content, by month .................. 170

Figure 20
Timeline of Instagram’s introduction to the remote art sector............................... 171

Figure 21
Number of Instagram posts made by Desert Mob 2017 participating art centres
as of October 2017.............................................................................................. 173

Figure 22
Number of Instagram followers for each Desert Mob 2017 participating art centre
as of October 2017.............................................................................................. 174

Figure 23
An example of one Desert Mob 2017 participating art centre’s posts on Instagram in 2017:
Measured by comments and likes received.......................................................... 176

Figure 24
Every Instagram post made by Desert Mob 2017 participating art centres in 2017:
Measured by comments and likes received.......................................................... 177

Figure 25
All Instagram posts made by Desert Mob 2017 participating art centres made August 01 –
September 31, 2017: Measured by comments and likes received.......................... 178

Figure 26
Top 20 commenters on Instagram posts made by Desert Mob 2017
participating art centres in 2017......................................................................... 189
Figure 27
35 most frequently used words in comments on Instagram posts made by Desert Mob 2017 participating art centres in 2017............................................................... 191

Figure 28
A screenshot taken July 29, 2019 of the Lara RSL’s website explaining how to access the digital iteration of the RSL’s newsletter. Image provided courtesy of the Lara RSL Sub-Branch. ............................................................... 217

Figure 29
A screenshot taken July 29, 2019 of the Victorian Collections website showing the consumer’s interface. Image provided courtesy of the Museums and Galleries Association Victoria............................................................... 218

Figure 30
A screenshot taken July 29, 2019 of the Victorian Collections website showing the first page of the cataloguer’s interface. Image provided courtesy of the Museums and Galleries Association Victoria............................................................... 219

Figure 31
A screenshot taken July 29, 2019 of the Victorian Collections cataloguing fields. Image provided courtesy of the Museums and Galleries Association Victoria............................................................... 220

Figure 32
A screenshot taken July 29, 2019 of the Victorian Collections keywords field and associated pop-up bubble. Image provided courtesy of the Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria............................................................... 221

Figure 33
Number of Lara RSL Sub-Branch collection items catalogued in Victorian Collections (2012-2017) per day prior to the Veterans Heritage Project............................................................... 253
Figure 34
Number of Lara RSL Sub-Branch collection items catalogued in Victorian Collections per day since January 2012, showing bulk upload by Victorian Collections staff .......................... 254

Figure 35
Number of Lara RSL Sub-Branch collection items catalogued in Victorian Collections per day since beginning Veterans Heritage Project, 2017 .......................................................... 255

Figure 36
Number of Lara RSL Sub-Branch collection items modified in Victorian Collections per day since beginning Veterans Heritage Project, 2017 .......................................................... 258

Figure 37
Number of Lara RSL Sub-Branch collection items catalogued and modified in Victorian Collections, July 01 – December 31, 2017 .......................................................... 259

Figure 38
Number of collection items catalogued by individuals within the Lara RSL Sub-Branch cataloguing public, July 01 – December 31, 2017 .......................................................... 261

Figure 39
Number of collection items moved by individuals within the Lara RSL Sub-Branch cataloguing public, July 01 – December 31, 2017 .......................................................... 262

Figure 40
The 30 keywords used against more than 10 collection records within the Lara RSL Sub-Branch Victorian Collections’ catalogue .......................................................... 267

Figure 41
Trajectory of art work sold at Desert Mob 2010 .......................................................... 398

Figure 42
Trajectory of art work sold at Desert Mob 2011 .......................................................... 399
Figure 43
Trajectory of art work sold at Desert Mob 2012 .......................................................... 400

Figure 44
Trajectory of art work sold at Desert Mob 2013 .......................................................... 401

Figure 45
Trajectory of art work sold at Desert Mob 2014 .......................................................... 402

Figure 46
Trajectory of art work sold at Desert Mob 2015 .......................................................... 403

Figure 47
Trajectory of art work sold at Desert Mob 2016 .......................................................... 404
Abstract

This research interrogates the apparent dissonance between the dominant Australian cultural policy narrative and the lived dynamics of digital participation in two contexts: remote Indigenous communities, and adults over 65. The research uses a combination of digital and non-digital ethnographic field work as well as collection and analysis of existing organisational data.

Australia has two national cultural policies: Creative Nation (Department of Communications and the Arts, 1994) and Creative Australia (Australian Government, 2013). The narrative that bridges these policies suggests that distance will be mediated and the nation’s cultural collections ‘unlocked’ (that is, made accessible) through digital participation. Drawing on media and museum studies literature, this research defines digital participation as a communicative practice with the potential to facilitate inclusive and accessible outcomes. Through mediating distance and ‘unlocking’ cultural collections, the cultural sector will include all Australians irrespective of location, and provide unfettered access to the nation’s cultural heritage.

However, as Ian McShane (2005) argues, these narratives are predicated on universalist assumptions of digital access that are not borne out by empirical research (p. 392). How can distance be mediated, and cultural collections be ‘unlocked’, if there are barriers to the digital participation that would enable this?

Persistent digital inequity – defined as the intersections of privilege and attitudes that influence access to, and use of the digital (Katz & Aspden, 1997) – is well-researched and the established literature aided in identifying two very different field sites: (1) Desert Mob 2017, and (2) Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project.

Desert Mob is an annual remote Indigenous visual arts festival held in Alice Springs. Desert Mob non-digitally mediates the distance between creators and consumers by bringing together artists and the publics that purchase their art. Simultaneously, Desert Mob traces geographic digital divides, as well as Indigenous/non-Indigenous digital disparities. Desert Mob 2017 is thus used here to examine whether, and if so, how, digital participation mediates distance when confronted by spatial dynamics of the digital divide.

Victorian Collections is a web-based and free-to-access cataloguing platform for community collecting-organisations. The Veterans Heritage Project is a series of capacity-building workshops designed to support Returned & Services League (RSL) Sub-Branches in using Victorian Collections to catalogue, and thus ‘unlock’, their
cultural collections. Given that such community collecting-organisations are typically staffed by elderly volunteers, Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project interacts with the ‘grey’ digital divide: the gaps in access and use that affect those over 65. Focussing on the Veterans Heritage Project as delivered at the Lara RSL in mid-2017, Victorian Collections provides a productive site for examining not only whether, and if so, how, cultural collections are ‘unlocked’ when doing so interacts with demographic dynamics of the digital divide, but also the efficacy of responses to these.

The research develops and applies to each field site a media ecologies framework (Fuller, 2005) comprised of platforms, practices, and publics, paired with a typology of three barriers to digital participation: non-digital, digital, and postdigital. The research presented in this thesis contributes to our understanding of the complexity of digital participation, and argues that this complexity is insufficiently addressed in cultural policy.

Responses to the dominant policy narrative in each field site were (1) confronted by multifaceted digital inequity, (2) enacted by publics, rather than individuals, and (3) shaped by choices between barriers to participation, and thus between which publics participated, and how. Although Desert Mob 2017’s digital participation mediated distance, it did so as a barrier to the cultural participation of distant consumers, rather than to the digital participation of remote dwelling Indigenous artists. Likewise, although Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project facilitated the cataloguing of the Lara RSL’s cultural collections – a step towards ‘unlocking’ them – the barriers to digital participation confronting cataloguers restricted consumer access, and ensuring the collections were obscured, rather than ‘unlocked’.

While it has long been acknowledged that the cultural sector makes choices between publics (Gillard, 2000, p. 126), that these choices extend into the digital has been under-scrutinised. By providing a detailed account of two field sites where distinct choices were made between which digital and non-digital publics participated and how, this research challenges the dominant Australian cultural policy narrative: to what extent can – or should – cultural policy account for the dynamics of digital participation? In asserting that through digital participation distance will be mediated and collections unlocked, Creative Nation (Department of Communications and the Arts, 1994) and Creative Australia (Australian Government, 2013) establish the context to which the cultural sector responds. By disregarding the extensive body of digital participation literature, these policies ensure barriers to digital participation remain, responses to these barriers are divergent and have exclusionary outcomes, with stark consequences for the Australian cultural sector’s inclusivity and accessibility.
Introduction:

“The future is already here – it’s just not evenly distributed” within the cultural sector
In 2016, the 20th Biennale of Sydney took William Gibson’s quote – “the future is already here – it’s just not evenly distributed” (The Economist, 2001, p. np) – as its title and thematic underpinning. According to artistic director Stephanie Rosenthal, the statement provided a dualistic investigative framework (2016, p. 30). The first component (‘the future is already here’) drove a focus on the present, while the second (‘it’s just not evenly distributed’) offered a reminder that “access to information, the internet … is by no means universal; many people are denied the opportunity to benefit from (or participate in) these new spaces where information can be exchanged” (Rosenthal, 2016, p. 30).

Gibson’s quote gestures towards the digital divide: the intersections of privilege and attitudes that influence access to, and use of, the digital (Katz and Aspden, 1997). Through using Gibson’s statement, Rosenthal (2016) positioned questions about digital participation within the cultural sector. In doing so, she echoed George MacDonald and Stephen Alsford’s (1991) earlier reflection that, in a rapidly shifting landscape, the cultural sector would have to use “technologies in ways that capture and hold interest, rather than erect barriers” (p. 310).

The application of such questions about digital participation to the cultural sector, however, runs counter to the dominant Australian policy narrative. Permeating each of Australia’s two national cultural policies (McShane, 2016, p. 131; Throsby, 2006, p. 12), Creative Nation (Department of Communications and the Arts, 1994) and Creative Australia (Australian Government, 2013), this narrative suggests that distance will be mediated and cultural collections will be made accessible (for example, via online catalogue records), and thus ‘unlocked’, through digital participation.
This narrative is underpinned by a logic that positions digital participation as a direct facilitator of inclusive and accessible outcomes. Through mediating distance, digital participation will enable the cultural sector to include all Australians, regardless of location. By digitally cataloguing, and thus ‘unlocking’, the nation’s cultural collections, digital participation will provide Australians with unfettered access to the country’s heritage.

However, as Ian McShane (2011) argues, this narrative is predicated on “universalist assumptions of … [digital] access and … use [that] are not supported by empirical research” (p. 392). Indeed, research shows that digital participation remains complex, with inequity in the Australian context falling along geographic and social segmentations (Alam & Imran, 2015; Atkinson, Black, & Curtis, 2008; Blanchard, Metcalf, Degney, Herman, & Burns, 2008; Rennie, Crouch, Wright, & Thomas, 2013). Those living in geographically remote locations (Castells, 2000; DiMaggio & Hargittai, 2001; Helsper, 2012; Salemink, Striker, & Bosworth, 2017, p. 362), Indigenous populations (Auld, Snyder, & Henderson, 2012; Australian Communications and Media Authority [ACMA], 2008; Rennie, Hogan, Gregory, Crouch, Wright, & Thomas, 2016; Taylor, 2012), and those over the age of 65 (ACMA, 2016; McCosker, Bossio, Holcombe-James, Davis, Schleser, & Gleeson, 2018; Thomas, Barraket, Ewing, MacDonald, Mundell, & Tucker, 2016; Thomas, Barraket, Wilson, Ewing, MacDonald, Tucker, & Rennie, 2017; Thomas, Barraket, Wilson, Cook, Louie, Holcombe-James, & MacDonald, 2018) are particularly likely to experience digital disadvantage.

Mediating distance and ‘unlocking’ cultural collections are not simple policy outcomes, and digital participation remains complex. How can distance be mediated, and cultural collections be unlocked, if there are barriers to the digital participation that would
enable this? This dissonance – between dominant cultural policy narratives and the lived dynamics of digital participation – provides the foundation for this research.

**Dominant policy narrative: Creative Nation, Creative Australia**

Published in October 1994, just six months after the internet was made publicly accessible in Australia, *Creative Nation* (Department of Communications and the Arts, 1994) was “the first Australian attempt to fuse the cultural, economic and technical dimensions of digital communication technologies” (McShane & Thomas, 2010, p. 152; see also Gillard, 2000, p. 120; Johanson & Glow, 2008, p. 261, O’Regan & Ryan, 2004, p. 30). By taking advantage of the “convergence of the broadcasting, telecommunications, computing and creative … industries and technologies” (Department of Communications and the Arts, 1994, p. 56), *Creative Nation* aimed to ensure that digital participation would be “part of the cultural domain” (O’Regan & Ryan, 2004, p. 31-2).

According to *Creative Nation*, “the production of content … [was] the essential element in the broadband and multimedia environment” (Department of Communications and the Arts, 1994, p. 9), and the cultural sector would be a significant contributor of this content (O’Regan & Ryan, 2004, p. 36). By uploading such content to the “information highway” (Department of Communications and the Arts, 1994, p. 55), the cultural sector would “invigorate the national life and return its product to the people” (p. 9). That is, through digital participation, the cultural sector would provide Australian citizens with access to cultural material regardless of location (Department of Communications and the Arts, 1994, p. 69). Further, digitally facilitated “collaboration between Commonwealth, State and local government libraries, museums and galleries” would allow “discrete and separate collections” to form “one national cultural and heritage
Introduction

Almost two decades later, Australia’s second (and, so far, latest) national cultural policy, *Creative Australia* (Australian Government, 2013), similarly emphasised the relationship between digital participation and the cultural sector (Caust, 2015, p. 175). Particularly evident in the policy’s fifth goal, *Creative Australia* (Australian Government, 2013) would “ensure Australian creativity thrives in the digitally enabled 21st century, by supporting innovation, the development of new creative content, knowledge and creative industries” (p. 6). Again, the mediation of distance and the unlocking of cultural collections that digital participation was to facilitate was highlighted:

The Australian Government will work to ensure our cultural sector is able to produce high-quality Australian content for use in a converged environment. The National Broadband Network, one of the most significant national infrastructure projects of the 21st century providing access to high-speed broadband will aid this transformation. (Australian Government, 2013, p. 16)

It is clear that the digital, networked world offers endless new ways to experience cultural products … This is potentially a golden moment for the cultural economy, as the historic obstacles of distance … disappear. (Australian Government, 2013, p. 38)

Taken together, *Creative Nation* (Department of Communications and the Arts, 1994) and *Creative Australia* (Australian Government, 2013) establish a dominant policy narrative that requires the cultural sector to digitally participate, and, through doing so, to facilitate inclusive and accessible outcomes. As noted above, however, digital participation remains profoundly uneven. Logically, then, there are points at which the
cultural sector interfaces with people or places that are particularly likely to experience barriers to digital participation and these narratives come unstuck. In 2019, 25 years since the release of *Creative Nation* (Department of Communications and the Arts, 1994), it is time to examine this dissonance between dominant policy narratives and the lived dynamics of digital participation in specific local contexts.

**Examining dissonance**

The aim that underpinned this research was thus:

To examine whether, and if so, how, barriers to digital participation influence the cultural sector’s responses to dominant Australian cultural policy narratives.

Working from established research that identifies persistent digital inequity, my objectives were:

1. To provide a detailed, dual-field site account of how spatial and demographic dynamics influence the Australian cultural sector’s digital participation;
2. To determine the influence of barriers to digital participation derived from spatial and demographic dynamics on the Australian cultural sector’s success in improving access and inclusion for its publics.

The research accomplishes these aims and objectives through examining two field sites: (1) Desert Mob 2017 and (2) Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project delivered at the Lara RSL sub-branch in mid-2017. Each field site was chosen for its relationship to the dominant cultural policy narrative, as well as dynamics of digital participation that existing literature suggested were likely to be difficult.
Desert Mob 2017

Desert Mob is an annual visual arts festival held in Alice Springs at the Araluen Cultural Precinct. First held in 1991 as the Central Australian Aboriginal Art and Craft Exhibition and delivered in partnership with Desart (the peak agency for remote central Australian Aboriginal art centres) since 2004, Desert Mob is the oldest of all Australian Indigenous art festivals (Acker & Jones, 2014, p. 82). Comprised of an exhibition, an art fair (Desert Mob MarketPlace), and a symposium (Desert Mob Symposium), visitors to the 2017 exhibition experienced 256 artworks (Desart, 2018, p. 38) by Aboriginal artists from 28 remote art centres, and thousands of artworks from 30 art centres at the Desert Mob MarketPlace. By bringing artists and the publics who purchase their art together in Alice Springs, Desert Mob mediates the distance between creators and consumers. In line with the dominant cultural policy narrative, various digital initiatives such as the use of Instagram have been developed in an effort to do the same. As declared by the Department of Communications, Information and Technology and the Arts (2004): through digital participation, “physical remoteness has ceased to be the predominant issue in marketing [remote] Aboriginal artworks” (p. 14). Through digital participation, distance is mediated.

However, Desert Mob simultaneously intersects with dynamics that existing literature suggests are likely to create barriers to such digital participation. Firstly, through engaging with remote Indigenous art centres, Desert Mob intersects with the geographic digital divide (Castells, 2000; DiMaggio & Hargittai, 2001; Helsper, 2012; Salemink et al., 2017). Further, there is significant digital inequity between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians that worsens for those Indigenous peoples living in remote Australia, such as the artists exhibited at Desert Mob (ACMA, 2008; Auld et al., 2012; Rennie et al., 2016; Taylor, 2012). Desert Mob 2017 is thus used here to examine
whether, and if so, how, digital participation can mediate distance when confronted by a geographic digital divide and Indigenous/non-Indigenous digital inequity.

**Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project**

The second field site is Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project.

Developed in 2009 by the Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria – known then as Museums Australia (Victoria) – and Museums Victoria, Victorian Collections is a web-based and free-to-access cataloguing platform for community collecting-organisations. In turn, the Veterans Heritage Project is a series of capacity-building workshops designed to support Returned & Services League Sub-Branches (RSL Sub-Branches) and other ex-service organisations in using Victorian Collections to catalogue, and thus unlock, their cultural collections.

However, the community collecting-organisations that use Victorian Collections are predominantly staffed by elderly volunteers (Hawkins, Auty, & Ensor, 2015) with limited “experience and knowledge of personal computing … internet, and related technologies” (Hawkins & Blake, 2013, p. np). As a consequence, this field site confronts barriers to digital participation derived from the ‘grey’ digital divide: the gaps in digital access and participation that affect those over 65 years of age and ensure that digital participation is lower for older Australians than it is for younger (ACMA, 2016; McCosker, Bossio, Holcombe-James, Davis, Schleser, & Gleeson, 2018; Thomas, Barraket, Ewing, MacDonald, Mundell, & Tucker, 2016; Thomas, Barraket, Wilson, Ewing, MacDonald, Tucker, & Rennie, 2017; Thomas, Barraket, Wilson, Cook, Louie, Holcombe-James, & MacDonald, 2018). Indeed, according to the most recent Australian Digital Inclusion Index, those over 65 are the least digitally-included age group in
Introduction

Australia (Thomas et al., 2018, p. 6). In response to this digital inequity, capacity-building workshops such as the Veterans Heritage Project have been developed to support community collecting-organisations in their use of Victorian Collections. In this thesis, I focus on the delivery of the Veterans Heritage Project at the Lara RSL Sub-Branch in mid-2017.

Formed in 1928, the Lara RSL has occupied the same mid-nineteenth century building on Rennie Street in Lara, a town of just over 16,000 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016a) around 60 kilometres south of Melbourne, since their first official meeting on April 11, 1949. The RSL’s collections comprise an estimated 900 items, ranging from locally to nationally relevant military memorabilia (A. Robertson, personal communication, August 24, 2017). Of particular significance is a “Boer War Union Jack that was carried into battle in South Africa and marched around the Geelong region once back on Australian soil” (A. Robertson, personal communication, August 24, 2017). Through using Victorian Collections, such collections are supposedly ‘unlocked’.

Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project as delivered at the Lara RSL thus provides a productive site for examining whether, and if so, how, cultural collections were ‘unlocked’ when doing so interacted with demographically derived barriers to digital participation. This field site also offers insight into the efficacy of responses to these barriers to participation.

Drawing on empirical data derived from digital and non-digital ethnographic observations, semi-structured interviews, and collection and analysis of existing organisational records, I demonstrate that responses to the dominant cultural policy narrative in each field site were (1) confronted by multifaceted digital inequity, (2)
enacted by publics, rather than individuals, and (3) shaped by choices between barriers to participation, and thus between which publics participated, and how.

Before elaborating on these findings, however, it is necessary to clarify how I refer to each field site, to define my approach to the concepts of digital and non-digital, and to outline the conceptual framework I used for the analysis.

**Digital and non-digital cultural platforms: A note on terminology**

Although both Desert Mob 2017 and Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project are within the Australian cultural sector, neither is explicitly a cultural institution. For example, although in part delivered by, and held at, a gallery (the Araluen Cultural Precinct), Desert Mob itself is a temporally specific (although recurring) coming together of multiple artists and art centres for a commercial exhibition, a symposium, and an art fair. Likewise, although developed by the peak body for Victorian museums (the Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria) in collaboration with a major metropolitan museum (Museums Victoria), the Veterans Heritage Project is comprised of a series of workshops delivered in RSLs. I thus refer to each as a cultural platform, which I define as a ‘holder’ of cultural content through bringing together a combination of museum and media studies. In order to do this, I specifically follow the example of literature that considers the museum as media (Henning, 2006; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999; Kelly, 2013; Kidd, 2014; Parry, 2007; Russo, 2012), and Nancy Proctor’s (2010) extension of this to the museum as a platform.

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1 Following the example of the Piggott Report (Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections, 1975), I consider galleries as “essentially carrying out the functions of museums” (p. 5). The question of whether or not galleries and museums can or should be considered collectively can be traced back to the Italian Renaissance, when artefacts were held in the museo and art was kept in the galleria (Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections, 1975, p. 5).
As Ross Parry (2007) explains, museums contain media (p. 11), they communicate messages to an audience (Henning, 2006, p. 305) but they are also media makers (Kidd, 2014, p. 3) that are “profoundly implicated and active” in the act of communication (Parry, 2007, p. 11). Following this line of thought, Proctor (2010) suggests that the museum might productively be understood as a platform: “a medium through which information or content is published or exchanged” (p. 35; see also Meecham, 2013, p. 36). From a media studies perspective, I follow literature that conceives of platforms as the non-digital and digital modes by which people enact communicative practices that afford sociality (Geismar, 2012; Wakeford, 1999, 2003; see also Van Dijck’s, 2013, discussion of ‘connective’ media, which draws on Actor Network Theory by Latour, 2005, and Political Economy concepts from Castells, 2009). As Tarleton Gillespie (2010) explains, “‘platforms’ are ‘platforms’ not necessarily because they allow code to be written or run, but because they afford an opportunity to communicate [and] interact” (p. 351).

While Proctor’s (2010) notion of the museum as a platform is widely used, I add the qualifier ‘cultural’ in order to distinguish between each field site as a whole, and the digital and non-digital platforms deployed by each field site (for example, a digital platform such as Instagram, or a non-digital platform such as a gallery space). Approaching the museum as a platform facilitates an understanding of both digital and non-digital aspects: from the physical (non-digital) museum space, to the digital, online, and mobile (Kelly, 2013, p. 54; Stuedahl & Lowe, 2013, p. 303).

Taken together, these literatures facilitate an approach to ‘holders’ of cultural content that allows analysis to move beyond both disciplinary and sectoral boundaries. That is, the digital and non-digital practices enacted by art centres in relationship to an annual art festival can be discussed in the same breath as the digital and non-digital practices.
enacted by community collecting organisations. Likewise, this theoretical construct allows me to apply museum studies literature that can sometimes be restricted in scope by a constrained definition of what comprises the cultural sector to contexts that might otherwise be ignored. By developing and applying the notion of the cultural platform, I present an argument that broadens the scope of when and where we might consider the set of practices that comprise digital and cultural participation. While in this thesis I restrict my analysis to the digital and cultural participation that occurred in relation to sites that were located specifically within the Australian cultural sector, this conceptual model would facilitate analysis of cultural participation within typically neglected contexts such as the family home, the school, and beyond.

Proctor’s (2010) conceptualisation of the museum as a platform has recently been critiqued by Kirsten Drotner, Vince Dziekan, Ross Parry, and Kim Schrøder (2018) and Dziekan and Proctor (2018). Despite these critiques, I remain steadfast in my use of the term. While Drotner and colleagues (2018) argue that conflating museums with media creates analytic difficulty (p. 2), in that the researcher may not be able to distinguish between the museum itself and the media the museum uses, I overcome this through using a media ecologies framework (Fuller, 2005) as a conceptual and analytic approach to each field site (discussed below). In turn, Dziekan and Proctor (2018) argue that the notion of a museum distributed across multiple platforms was useful for understanding the introduction of digital technologies to the cultural sector, the sector is today “approaching a postdigital horizon” (p. 177, emphasis in original) in which the digital has become “a matter of fact” (Dziekan & Proctor, 2018, p. 177; see also Parry, 2013). As I argue throughout this thesis, although the dominant Australian cultural policy narrative that this thesis is interested in articulates a postdigital cultural sector in which digital participation is expected, neither of my field sites could themselves be described
as postdigital. Digital participation in relation to Desert Mob 2017 and Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project had decidedly not become “a matter of fact” (Dziekan & Proctor, 2018, p. 177).

It is important to note that it is unlikely that either field site would have used the term ‘cultural platform’ to describe themselves. As such, it could be said that in defining each field site through a conceptual framework that may not accord with those within the field site, I altered the object of study. This, however, is an established consequence of research. As Clifford Geertz wrote in 1973, “what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people’s constructions” (p. 10). Acknowledging this up front is a way to make my influence on the research clear. I expand on how making the influence of ‘me’ on the research visible was critical to my ethical and methodological considerations in Chapter Two.

**Media ecologies and barriers to digital participation:**
**Developing an approach to the field**

To shape my engagement with each cultural platform, I developed and applied a media ecologies (Fuller, 2005) framework comprised of digital and non-digital platforms, practices, and publics (McCosker, 2016). To identify the points at which the dominant cultural policy narrative came unstuck, I paired this framework with a typology of three barriers to digital participation: non-digital, digital, and postdigital.

Developing out from linear systems thinking and theoretical ecosystems (Scolari, 2012), media ecology research seeks to acknowledge the contemporary multi-modal or polymedia environment (Madianou & Miller, 2013; Miller et al., 2016). In this context,
communicative practices are “distributed across multiple sites” (Baym, 2007, p. np) resulting in symbiotic relationships between “people and the media technologies they create and use” (Lum, 2014, p. 137). As I discuss in Chapter Two, I draw primarily on Matthew Fuller’s (2005) notion of media ecologies (in the plural) to align my discussion with what Michael Goddard (2011) describes as an “ecological as opposed to environmental conception” (p. 8). According to Fuller (2005), where the environmental approach to media ecology research implies that “there has passed, or that there will be reached, a state of equilibrium” (p. 4; see also Goddard, 2011, pp. 7-8), the ecological approach “focus[es] more on dynamic systems in which any one part is always multiply connected, acting by virtue of these connections and always variable” (Fuller, 2005, p. 4). These connections are constantly articulated and re-configured through the interactions that occur between the media ecologies’ constituent components (de Seta, 2015, p. 119, 122). In the context of this thesis, I understand these components as digital and non-digital platforms, practices, and publics (McCosker, 2016).

Platforms are the non-digital and digital modes by which people enact communicative practices. Platforms are thus digital websites or applications such as Facebook or Instagram as well as the non-digital gallery in which Desert Mob 2017 was hung, or the non-digital heritage-listed building in which the Lara RSL was situated, and the Veterans Heritage Project was delivered.

Practices are how people and publics (defined below) access and use platforms. To understand this access and use, I adopt a practice theory approach and ask: “what, quite simply, are people doing in relation to [cultural platforms]?” (Couldry, 2010, p. 39). And if, as Chris Kelty (2013) explains, “participation in a public is at some level structured by ‘platforms’” (p. 25), then it is the practices conducted on platforms that create publics.
Although the cultural sector has “conceptualised the people on their premises” (Runnell & Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt & Runnell, 2012, p. 331) through a variety of terms ranging from prosumers (Toffler, 1980), to produsers (Bruns, 2006), to customers (Peacock & Brownbill, 2007), and beyond, I am particularly interested in their collective form, which I conceive of as publics. However, as danah boyd (2010) reminds us, the notion of publics is conceptually messy as it is used by “different disciplines to signal different concepts” (p. 40). Embracing this messiness is useful “because the concepts addressed by ‘public’ are interconnected” (boyd, 2008, p. 21), and sometimes interchangeable. For example, Sonia Livingstone (2005) argues, ‘publics’ can be ‘audiences’, and ‘audiences’ can be ‘publics’, and as John Postill (2015) suggests, “sociality may take on plural forms even within a single universe of practice” (p. 61). Similarly, for audience studies scholar Patricia Gillard (2000), “there is no such thing as a mass audience, ‘audiences’ are multiple” (p. 123). Taking, as Livingstone (2005, p. 11) does, that audiences can be publics, I follow Gillard (2000) to identify multiple cultural platform-based publics. Cultural platforms thus do not correspond with singular publics, “but rather function as social venues” (Parks, 2010, p. 105) around which many publics may or may not form.

Following boyd (2010), I do not seek to re-draw conceptual lines over what does or does not constitute a public but rather to identify key conceptual points that are useful for my research. I also draw from literature that deals with notions of sociality more broadly as dictated by my empirical data, using these studies to focus in on concepts such as audiences, and communities of practice. In the context of this research, cultural platform-based publics were social groups (Kemmis et al., 2014), that formed around media (Baym, 2015; Hartley, 2012; Hartley and Potts, 2014; Jenkins and Carpentier, 2013; Miller et al., 2016; Rennie & Hartley, 2004; Papacharissi, 2002, 2009) – media in this case being platforms and inclusive of the museum as per Proctor (2010). In
addition, I understand digital, or online, publics as what Victoria Bernal (2014) describes as networked forms of community or what Mizuko Ito (2008), and boyd (2008) have termed ‘networked publics’.

Networked publics are “not just publics networked together, but … publics that have been transformed by networked media, its properties and its potential” (boyd, 2010, p. 42). Although the notion of networked publics provides a useful set of criteria for examining digital sociality, it does not deal with non-digital contexts. And, in the digitally disparate contexts this thesis deals with, the restructuring of publics that networked platforms have enabled was not always afforded by the digital participation available to each cultural platform. I thus follow Jason Potts and John Hartley (2014) to understand both digital and non-digital publics as demes: knowledge communities, or forms of social affiliation and identification that form around “culturally made meaningful identities” (p. 41) through the innately human trait of storytelling or narrative building. According to Hartley and Potts (2014), such narrative building produces two publics: ‘we’ groups (comprised of the tellers of the narrative), and ‘they’ groups (comprised of people to whom the narrative is told). In this research, I extend Hartley and Potts’ (2014) analysis by identifying a third public: ‘the told about’, comprised of people who are the subject of such narratives.

As I discuss in Chapter One, I use digital participation literature as a conceptual tool for examining the interrelated dynamics of digital equity within and in relation to the Australian cultural sector. Cassie Hague and Ben Williamson (2009) define digital participation as the capacity to engage “socially, culturally, politically and economically in everyday life” through digital platforms that “are an everyday and familiar presence” (p. 3). Digital participation is thus dependent on not only access, but the skills and literacies
required “to enable the effective use of a range of media and platforms in a contemporary digitally mediated society” (Hughes, Foth, Dezuanni, Mallan & Allan, 2018, p. 185).

Through drawing on Marshall McLuhan’s (1964) argument that each medium contains “personal and social consequences” (p. 7), Parry (2007) argues that “we ought … to think about what the ‘personal and social consequences’ of … (the museum) are going to be for the visitor” (p. 10). According to Parry, these consequences are not static, but rather are “culturally and historically contingent”, changing “according to the experiences and knowledge of an individual and the shifting discourses of any given community or society” (p. 10; see also Henning 2006, pp. 305-6). In this thesis, I apply Parry’s argument to the notion of a cultural platform, and conceive of such consequences as barriers to participation. To identify these, I develop a typology of three barriers: non-digital, digital, and postdigital.

Non-digital barriers are those related to access, while digital barriers are comprised of the practices and literacies required to facilitate participation once access is achieved. Postdigital barriers, in contrast, are defined through drawing on Parry’s (2013) notion of the postdigital museum – a cultural institution in which the distinction between digital and non-digital has been negated (pp. 24-5) – and conceived of as barriers that arise when digital participation is assumed to be unproblematic. For example, Araluen’s resharing of content on Instagram in relation to Desert Mob 2017 (discussed in Chapter Four) was based on a postdigital assumption that art centre managers were taking and posting re-shareable content. Similarly, Victorian Collections’ use of free text keywords (discussed in Chapter Six) was based on a postdigital assumption that those doing the cataloguing at the Lara RSL could conceptualise how consumers might access their collections.

Importantly, the concept of a postdigital museum does not suppose that full adoption or universal acceptance of digital has occurred (Parry, 2013, p. 27; see also Cox, 2013),
but rather suggests that within the contemporary cultural sector, digital is no longer “emergent and technologically nascent … [but] has become normative” (Parry, 2013, p. 36; see also Bowen & Giannini, 2019, p. 561; Cramer, 2014, p. 4; Taffel, 2016, p. 329). As Jenny Kidd (2018) suggests, the boundaries between the digital and non-digital components of cultural institutions “are now recognised as porous if not frictionless” (p. 195). Although the distinction between digital and non-digital remained evident in both field sites, they each existed within the context of a postdigital cultural sector, in which digital participation was expected (as evidenced by the dominant cultural policy narrative discussed above). Accordingly, although sometimes inelegant, I explicitly identify digital or non-digital contexts in an effort to articulate this divide.

Through examining the digital and non-digital platforms each cultural platform developed and used, the practices that were or were not enacted on them, and the publics that formed or did not as a result, I determined whether (and, if so, how) non-digital, digital, and postdigital barriers to digital participation were influencing responses to the dominant cultural policy narrative. As Fuller (2005) and Gabriele De Seta (2015) tell us, media ecologies are articulated through the interactions that occur between their constituent components. This research shows that for both Desert Mob 2017 and Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project, the interactions between each cultural platform’s platforms, practices, and publics were influenced by non-digital, digital, and postdigital barriers to participation.

**Thesis proposition**

Responses to the dominant cultural policy narrative in each field site were (1) confronted by multifaceted digital inequity, (2) enacted by publics, rather than individuals, and (3)
shaped by choices between barriers to participation, and thus between which publics participated, and how.

Although Desert Mob 2017 digital participation mediated distance and was thus aligned with the dominant policy narrative, this had implications for inclusivity. Distance was mediated as a barrier to the cultural participation of consumers, while distance as a barrier to the digital participation of artists remained, raising questions about who gets to tell digital cultural narratives. In turn, although Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project digital participation facilitated the cataloguing of the Lara RSL’s cultural collections – a step towards unlocking them, as per the dominant cultural policy narrative – this had consequences for accessibility. Postdigital barriers remained, and ensured that the practices of consumers were restricted, raising questions about the efficacy of such community-based cataloguing practices.

That the cultural sector makes choices between which publics participate and how is not new. Indeed, much has been written about the inclusivity and accessibility of the cultural sector. As Patricia Gillard (2000) argues, some publics “are deliberately ignored, others prized. Certainly, some … are more visible than others” (p. 126). That these choices extend into the digital, however, has been under-scrutinised. By providing a detailed account of two field sites where distinct choices were made between barriers and thus between which digital and non-digital publics participated and how, this thesis offers a step towards remedying this.

**Thesis structure**

The thesis’ structure is driven by my argument that responses to the dominant cultural policy narrative in each field site were influenced by the lived dynamics of digital participation. In order to prosecute this argument, the specific contexts of each cultural
platform require examining. Accordingly, each field site is discussed across two chapters. The first chapter locates and contextualises the cultural platform, while the second chapter articulates the digital participation observed.

Chapter One “Digital participation in the Australian cultural sector” contains the thesis’ primary literature review. In this chapter, I identify the research gap that exists at the intersection of digital museum studies and digital participation literature. As explained above, there is dissonance between the dominant Australian cultural policy narrative and the lived dynamics of digital participation. I further this discussion by outlining the cultural sector’s communicative practices as they have developed over time, and position my interest in digital participation in relation to new museology: the paradigmatic shifts within the cultural sector that facilitated “an understanding of museums as social actors” (Kamel & Gerbich, 2012, p. 259; see also Macdonald, 2006). Through reconsidering how the cultural sector approached questions of “inclusion, community, access and representation” (Kidd, 2011b, p. 69; see also Sandell, 2000, 2002), new museology sought to widen “the scope of dialogue, [and] the range of voices taking part” within the cultural sector (Kidd, 2011b, p. 66; see also Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt & Runnel, 2018, p. 146). Taken in this sense, this research defines digital participation as a communicative practice with the potential to facilitate inclusive and accessible outcomes.

I then identify the limited literature that examines barriers to digital participation within the cultural sector, before turning to provide an overview of the vast body of digital participation literature (understood as being inclusive of first- and second-level digital divide studies, as well as digital literacies and inclusion literature). Finally, I describe the specific dynamics of digital participation in each field site: spatial dynamics derived from geographic and Indigenous/non-Indigenous digital inequity in the case of Desert Mob
2017, and demographic dynamics derived from the grey digital divide in the context of Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project.

In Chapter Two “‘Doing’ the research: Ethical and methodological considerations”, I advocate for a research practice that engages with what is readily observable or what you are invited to observe, rather than accessed via intervention or intrusion. Accordingly, digital and non-digital ethnographic research methods (participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and collection and analysis of existing organisational records) were used not to reveal secrets or sensitive information, but rather to document the public practices enacted on the behalf of, and in relation to, public cultural platforms.

These methods were applied to each field site via a media ecologies framework of platforms, practices, and publics (discussed above). I thus provide an overview of the literature this framework was built upon, before turning to define each component. Finally, given my research methods were designed to acknowledge the very different field sites I was working with, and thus applied asynchronously – as, when, and how required – I describe what this looked like in each field site, and the data that this produced.

Chapters Three and Four are concerned with Desert Mob 2017. In Chapter Three “‘A coming together’: The convergence of creators and consumers”, I position Desert Mob 2017 in relation to the participating remote Aboriginal art centres. This chapter establishes that since its inception in 1991, Desert Mob has mediated distance as a barrier to cultural participation (such as viewing and purchasing the exhibited art) through the convergence of remote dwelling creators (the exhibited Indigenous artists) and consumers (the publics that attended). Through re-purposing internal data collected by both Araluen and Desart, I make visible the non-digital publics that coalesced around
Desert Mob from 2010-2017, confirming that these were distant from both the remote art centres that participate, as well as Alice Springs, where Desert Mob is held.

In Chapter Four “A digital Desert Mob: Making the cultural platform ‘accessible to people beyond the region’”, I build on the previous chapter’s findings to argue that digital participation was likewise intended to mediate distance as a barrier to the cultural participation of distant consumers. By detailing the digital practices enacted in relation to Desert Mob 2017, I identify three publics: (1) those enacting the digital practices (comprised predominantly of non-Indigenous art centre managers and Araluen’s Exhibition Officer), (2) those depicted within them (typically the participating artists), and (3) those imagined as receiving them (distant consumers). Through positioning this finding in relation to the non-digital dynamics described in Chapter Three, I demonstrate that digital participation in this context was a direct response to distance, and an extension of existing practices. In the same way that Desert Mob non-digitally mediated distance through the convergence of creators and consumers, so too did the associated digital participation. Digital participation was thus aligned with the dominant policy narrative: through digital participation, distance was mediated.

In doing so, however a choice between barriers – and thus between publics – was made. Although the exhibited Aboriginal artists were rendered a highly visible digital public, they did not themselves enact digital practices. Accordingly, while distance was mediated as a barrier to the cultural participation of consumers, it remained a barrier to the digital participation of artists. The digital inequity confronting artists was perceived as irrelevant because the enacted digital participation was not intended for these artists.
In Chapters Five and Six, I turn my attention to Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project. In Chapter Five “‘Unlocking’ cultural collections: From Australian Museums On Line to Victorian Collections”, I locate Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project within an existing trajectory of Australian initiatives to ‘unlock’ cultural collections via digital participation. In doing so, I demonstrate that the barriers to digital participation that confront community collecting-organisations have been long acknowledged. I then introduce Victorian Collections and the Veterans heritage Project, and show that in developing the cultural platform, these barriers were identified, and platform features intended to ameliorate them developed.

In Chapter Six “‘I’ve held a lot of babies, but never an iPad!’: Barriers to digital participation and their influence on access to the cultural collections”, I detail the digital participation I observed at the Lara RSL during the Veterans Heritage Project. While platform features were developed to ameliorate non-digital barriers such as access, and digital barriers such as cataloguing or “museum literacies” (B. Ensor, personal communication, April 17, 2018), postdigital barriers remained, and ensured that the participation of a public comprised of consumers was restricted. A choice between barriers, and thus between publics, was made. Although the amelioration of non-digital and digital barriers to participation facilitated the cataloguing of Lara RSL’s collections – a step towards ‘unlocking them’ – the collections cannot be considered unlocked if they cannot be found.

I conclude with: “The consequences of choosing between barriers to participation”. In this chapter, I bring the two field sites together to articulate the thesis’ three primary findings: that responses to the dominant cultural policy narratives in each field site were (1) confronted by multifaceted digital inequity; (2) enacted by publics rather than
by individuals; and (3) shaped by choices between barriers to participation, and thus between which publics participated, and how.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explained that there is dissonance between the dominant Australian cultural policy narrative — that digital participation will mediate distance and unlock cultural collections — and the lived dynamics of digital participation. How can distance be mediated and cultural collections be ‘unlocked’ if there are barriers to the digital participation that would enable this?

I have introduced the thesis’ research aim:

To examine whether, and if so, how, barriers to digital participation influence the cultural sector’s responses to dominant Australian cultural policy narratives.

And the objectives underpinning it:

1. To provide a detailed, dual-field site account of how spatial and demographic dynamics influence the Australian cultural sector’s digital participation;

2. To determine the influence of barriers to digital participation derived from spatial and demographic dynamics on the Australian cultural sector’s success in improving access and inclusion for its publics.

I then introduced Desert Mob 2017 and Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project and outlined the structure of the thesis. In the next chapter, I turn to the literature to contextualise what follows.
Chapter One:

*Digital participation in the Australian cultural sector*
This research positions questions about digital participation within the Australian cultural sector. As Sabina Mihelj, Adrian Leguina and John Downey (2019) note, taking such an approach requires combining “two bodies of research that are rarely brought together” (p. 1466). Accordingly, I draw from a diverse array of scholarly work, following the example of Jenny Kidd (2014) who positions “questions about the museum as media … [within] a number of discrete areas of study” (p. 2). I also follow Ross Parry (2005, 2007, 2010), who advocates for the use of “intellectual frameworks and critical tools of other subjects” to examine “both the extent and the complexity of digital technology’s influence on the museum” (2007, p. 9; see also Cameron & Kenderdine, 2007; Drotner et al., 2018). In this chapter, I review these diverse literatures to position my research at their nexus.

The chapter is structured in four parts. In the first, I trace the development of communicative practices within the cultural sector to move beyond a framing of digital participation as a wholly new phenomenon (Parry, 2005, 2007). In doing so, I define digital participation in relation to the shifts in the cultural sector’s communicative practices associated with new museology (Vergo, 1989). This is necessary because, as Aaron Delwiche (2013) tells us, “the notion of participation is intrinsically political” (p. 19), and as Chris Kelty (2013) argues, “participation is a plural thing” (p. 29). Making clear exactly how this research approaches digital participation is thus critical for what follows.

In the second section, I locate the Australian cultural policy narrative that this thesis examines – the mediation of distance, and the unlocking of cultural collections – in relation to the communicative practices just discussed. In the third, I discuss the limited existing literature that exists at the intersection of museum studies and digital participation literature (understood as being inclusive of the first- and second-level digital divides as well as digital
inclusion and digital literacy literatures). As I will argue, this body of work has tended to engage with the experiences of individuals within marginalised social groups, and neglected the digital participation of publics (Helsper, 2017, p. 223) – including, of course, the publics within cultural platforms such as those that I am interested in here. This, however, does not render such studies irrelevant. Accordingly, in the fourth section, I use this literature to contextualise each field site through a discussion of relevant digital participation literature.

Although digital participation has enabled some cultural institutions to extend beyond their non-digital settings, a notion that itself reaches back to Andre Malraux’s (1967) concept of a museum without walls (see also Arvanitis, 2010, p. 170; Kidd, 2018, p. 195), access to, and use of, the digital remains unevenly distributed. The walls may have become porous, but barriers to digital participation remain.

**Tracing developments in the communicative practices of the Australian cultural sector**

As Parry (2007) argues, the cultural sector has “always been associated with technology” (p. 137; see also Bautista & Balsamo, 2011; Filippini-Fantoni & Bowen, 2008, Hsi, 2008; MacDonald, 1998; Parry, 2005, 2008, 2013; Vavoula, Sharples, Rudman, Meek, & Lonsdale, 2009; Walker, 2008; Wallace, 1995), with this association forming part of an ongoing “trajectory of networking, classifying and forging representations of relationships between people and things” (Geismar, 2012, p. 266). I am particularly interested in the use of digital technology within the cultural sector for communication, and so in this section, I trace developments in the communicative practices of the cultural sector. Given the context of this research, I draw from international literature, but remain focussed on the Australian trajectory.
Traditionally understood as ‘custodians’, cultural institutions were initially tasked with the preservation of, and education about, cultural content (Bieldt, 2012, p. 2; see also Gilmore & Rentschler, 2002; Harrison & Shaw, 2004; Rentschler, 1998), achieved through enacting practices of acquiring, conserving, researching and exhibiting (International Council of Museums, 2007) cultural content. Through doing so, cultural institutions enacted communicative practices that were associated with education. These practices were tied to both the institution itself as well as its metaphoric position within the ‘nation’ (Bautista & Balsamo, 2011). As Tony Bennett notes (1995), the cultural institution was, at its core, intended to be a “display of power to the populace” (p. 98).

In Australia, in 1974, the Whitlam Government initiated the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections. A year later, the resulting Piggott Report (Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections, 1975) articulated ten aims (p. 6) that would guide the development of a modern Australian cultural sector. These were largely aligned with the ‘traditional’ practices described above, focussed on conservation and education. However, by defining the modern cultural institution as not “simply buildings where ancient objects were preserved and displayed”, but rather as “vital places of education, entertainment and research” (Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections, 1975, p. 1), the Committee signalled an emerging trend towards “dynamic engagement with the public” (Griffin & Paroissien, 2011, p. 2). For example, the educational practices of old were being “supplemented and even replaced by specialised text books, films and transparencies” (Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections, 1975, p. 17). In doing so, the Committee acknowledged that the communicative practices of the cultural sector were changing.
By the 1980s, a new focus on commercialisation (Gilmore & Rentschler, 2002; Rentschler 1998) had resulted in the “growing primacy of the ‘museum experience’” (Bieldt, 2012, p. 2). These shifts continued into the 1990s, when “new ideas about museums, their function, purpose and wider social, economic and political relationships” (Davidson & Sibley, 2011, p. 176) initiated a ‘new museology’ (Vergo, 1989): the paradigmatic shifts within the cultural sector that facilitated “an understanding of museums as social actors” (Kamel & Gerbich, 2012, p. 259; see also Macdonald, 2006), and examined the production of knowledge. Previously underpinned by a focus on preservation, study and communication (MacDonald & Alsford, 1991), the cultural sector developed communicative practices that were intended to entertain and enacted in relation to “different segments of the public” (Ntamkarelou, Bantimaroudis, & Economou, 2017, p. 56). The visitor experience became centred around interactive participation (Bieldt, 2012, p. 2; Booth, O’Connor, Franklin, & Papastergiadis, 2017, p. 10), which, for Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000), symbolised a turn to the visitor. New museology thus marked a distinct movement away from the cultural institution of old (an authority that spoke out with no opportunity to speak back), to one where members of the public were encouraged to participate (Henning, 2006). Coinciding with the introduction of “the new global architecture of electronic technologies”, these shifts asserted the cultural sector’s “communicative role” (McShane, 2005, p. 21).

When placed in the context of new museology, digital participation “restructure[s], contextualise[s] and personalise[s]” the cultural institution (Stuedahl & Lowe 2013, p. 304), resulting in what Susana Bautista and Anne Balsamo (2011) describe as “a postmodern formation” that adapts its traditional practices “to the new cultural environment of the digital age” (p. np; Dziekan & Proctor, 2018, p. 180). As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the resulting distributed museum is predicated on a
reimagined relationship between the institution and its publics that extends “beyond the walls and grounds of its physical location” (Stuedahl & Lowe 2013, p. 304; see also Kamel & Gerbich, p. 259) to encompass multiple “digital destinations” or platforms (Bautista & Balsamo, 2011; Economou, 2004; Galani & Chalmers, 2002, 2010; Stuedahl & Lowe, 2013; Vom Lehn, Heath, & Hindmarsh, 2001).

For Parry (2015), the developments in the cultural sector’s communicative practices that this section has outlined are the result of “a fusion between what were once distinct and divergent discourses around museum communication and education on the one hand, and digital media on the other” (p. 16). Where museum communication was traditionally associated with learning and education, digital media were conceived of in relation to internal processes such as cataloguing, “rather than outwardly to public engagement and experience” (Parry, 2015, p. 16). It was not until the 1990s, and the interconnected developments of new museology, the internet, and “more integrated in-gallery digital media” described above that “these divergent areas of ‘communication’ and ‘media’ finally became overtly connected” (Parry, 2015, p. 16), and the contemporary cultural sector’s communicative practices firmly established.

Having broadly described the developments in communicative practices within the cultural sector – shifting from authoritative to conversational – I now turn to define digital participation in relation to new museology. Through reconsidering how the cultural sector approached questions of “inclusion, community, access and representation” (Kidd, 2011b, p. 69; see also Sandell, 2000, 2002), new museology sought to widen “the scope of dialogue, [and] the range of voices taking part” (Kidd, 2011b, p. 66; see also Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt & Runnel, 2018, p. 146). Taken in this sense, then, this thesis defines digital participation as a communicative practice with the potential to facilitate inclusive and accessible outcomes.
Digital participation as communicative practice: Inclusion and access

Participation is a “pluralistic thing” (Kelty, 2013, p. 24). Although participation within the cultural sector is “not synonymous with increased use of media” (Kidd, 2014, p. 10), as Sonia Livingstone (2013) argues, “audiences are becoming more participatory, and participation is ever more mediated” (p. 25; see also Axelson, 2018, p. 67; Russo, 2011, p. 327). Recent scholarship has “proliferated terms and concepts to explain the effects of the internet and new media on participation” (Kelty, 2013, p. 23; see, for example, Benkler, 2006; boyd, 2008; Bruns, 2008; Castells, 1996, 2001; Jenkins, 2006). For example, in the specific context of the cultural sector, Lynda Kelly and Angelina Russo (2008) have examined digital participation enacted by members of the public in relation to the Australian Museum to identify four categories (spectators, joiners, commentators, and creators) of increasing interactivity. Kelly and Russo (2008) speculate that digital participation such as the use of social media, might be used to move beyond a ladder of participation comprised of incremental increases in interaction to “create networks of participation” in which communication could occur “with and between users” (p. np). Likewise, Nina Simon (2010), identifies a typology of participation within the cultural sector, ranging from contributory, collaborative, co-creative and hosted.

Such research examines participation in light of the new museology. As described above, the shifts “towards multi-directional many-to-many communication … modelled upon the ‘conversation’ rather than the lecture” (Kidd, 2011, p. 65) that new museology engendered have ensured that both digital and non-digital participation is often conceived of as democratic participation. This positioning is consistent with much existing literature. As The Janissary Collective (2013) explains, “in Western societies … participatory culture tends to be heralded as an… intrinsically democratic force,
a means for offsetting social inequities and making possible for a diversity of voices to be heard” (p. 258; see, for example, Jenkins, 2006). Accordingly, in defining digital participation within the cultural sector as a communicative practice that has the potential to facilitate inclusive and accessible outcomes, I build on this tradition. I also draw on a nascent body of research currently underway in the United Kingdom, which perceives a relationship between digital practices and the cultural sector’s social purpose (see, for example, Malde & Kennedy, 2018). As Ross Parry writes (in Malde & Kennedy, 2018), digital literacy and social purposefulness within the cultural sector are interdependent (p. 34). As such, thinking about the “socially purposeful aims” of the sector requires simultaneously “reflecting on … digital capabilities, the digital dimensions to modern society, and the digital contexts of audiences’ lives” (p. 34), and vice versa. Digital participation therefore requires more than the enacting of communicative practices, requiring the consideration of who these practices include and exclude.

Participation is thus also about power (Carpentier, 2011, p. 10; Delwiche, 2013, p. 19; Kelty, 2013, p. 29; van Dijck, 2013, p. 31), and can therefore be proscribed. As Kidd (2011b) argues, it is these issues of power that ensure digital participation’s democratic promise for the cultural sector is often “neutralise[d], contain[ed] and flatten[ed]” (p. 66; see also Axelsson, 2018; Gronemann, Kristiansen, & Drotner, 2015; Kidd, 2010, 2011a, 2014; Noy, 2016). As this research examines how (or whether) barriers to digital participation influence responses to the dominant Australian cultural policy narrative, I am interested in both the enacting of digital participation, and how this digital participation might be restricted. Addressing this research aim requires “thinking concretely about the practices, tools, ideologies and technologies” that shape and collectively comprise digital participation (Kelty, 2013, p. 29). According to Kelty (2013, p. 24), a way to make such issues of power visible is to acknowledge that participation
occurs within existing frameworks, and that these frameworks prescribe and proscribe the participation that is both possible and permissible. To do this, Kelty (2013) suggests that the researcher needs to ask two questions (p. 24). Firstly, how is participation structured? And secondly, how does the permitted participation transform or influence the structure of participation? Although, as Jennifer Jacobs Henderson (2013) argues, “technology has created new opportunities for participation across greater physical spaces” (p. 272), digital participation requires not only “access to the tools and networks of communication” (Kidd, 2014, p. 13), but also the digital literacies necessary to use these (Hargittai & Jennrich, 2016; Malde & Kennedy, 2018; Shaw & Hargittai, 2018). I thus understand the proscription of digital participation as being due to barriers (an approach that aligns with existing research, such as Jenkins, 2006; Russo, 2011), and, in Chapter Two, identify a typology (non-digital, digital, and postdigital) to make these barriers visible.

The overarching research approach that this thesis takes is to “think along with” my research partners (Rogers, 2013, p. 1). This imperative to “think along with” (Rogers, 2013, p. 1) each of my field sites extends to my use of literature, and is particularly evident in my approach to digital participation. Rather than an academic or etic notion, I understand digital participation as an emic, or vernacular, undertaking. Doing so responds to Kelty (2013), who asks: what if the researcher chose to view “participation in a naturalistic light … to simply present the practices and organisational formations of participation and ask, ‘what is that?’” (p. 23, emphasis in original). This is what my media ecologies framework (outlined in the introduction to this thesis and elaborated on in Chapter Two) allows me to do. By thinking through the digital and non-digital platforms that comprised each cultural platform, the practices that were or were not enacted in relation to them, and the publics that did or did not form, I do “the work of explaining” (Kelty, 2013, p. 29) the digital participation that occurred in relation to both Desert
Mob 2017 and the Veterans Heritage Project at the Lara RSL. While it could be argued that any investigation into participation is an investigation into emic or vernacular undertakings as the resulting analysis is “always an expression of what ‘participation’, in a given place, at a specific time, and enacted by particular people, means” (The Janissary Collective, 2013, p. 257), it is worth stating in order to clarify the approach that this thesis takes.

Having described the development of communicative practices within the cultural sector, and defined digital participation as a communicative practice with the potential to facilitate inclusive and accessible outcomes, I now turn to position these understandings in relation to the dominant cultural policy narratives that this research is concerned with.

**Communicative practices and the dominant cultural policy narrative**

The shifts in communicative practices that heralded the development of new museology described above coincided with the release of *Creative Nation* (1994), Australia’s first cultural policy. As Megan Cardamone and Ruth Rentschler (2008) note, it was in this document that the connection between “arts, business and digital technology” (p. 106) was first made in policy. *Creative Nation* (Commonwealth of Australia, 1994) positioned “new communication technologies” as enabling “Australians … access to cultural material which [had] … been largely inaccessible” (p. 69). Through digital participation, the cultural sector would mediate distance and ‘unlock’ cultural collections. In doing so, the cultural sector would enact communicative practices that would include all Australians irrespective of location, and provide access to the nation’s cultural heritage.
The interconnectedness of the cultural sector and digital participation as established by *Creative Nation* (Department of Communications and the Arts, 1994) is evident within the rhetoric of ensuing policies and discussion papers. For example, *Australia’s Digital Economy: Future Directions* (Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, 2009, p. 13) describes “the reuse and innovation that flows from placing public cultural collections in open source environments” (McShane & Thomas, 2010, p. 156). Similarly, the *National Cultural Policy: Discussion Paper* (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2011) states that “collecting institutions” will shift their focus from collections management to digitisation (p. 7). Through digitally facilitated access, the cultural sector will mediate distance, and ‘unlock’ cultural collections.

Almost two decades after the release of *Creative Nation* (Department of Communications and the Arts, 1994), Australia’s second (and so far, final) cultural policy was released. *Creative Australia* (Australian Government, 2013) similarly emphasised the relationship between digital participation and the cultural sector. Through ‘unlocking’ cultural collections, “the digital, networked world offer[ed] endless new ways to experience cultural products” that would result in the mediation of distance: “the historic obstacles of distance … disappear” (Australian Government, 2013, p. 38).

Although Australia has not had a national cultural policy since 2013 the edges of a contemporary approach can be gleaned through examining publicly available policy documents. For example, the Department of Communications and the Arts *Revised 2018-19 Corporate Plan* (2018c) describes digital participation as providing “new ways to access Australia’s … creative and cultural products” (p. 4), suggesting that distance will be mediated and cultural collections ‘unlocked’. This same narrative is reiterated within the Department of Communications and the Arts *Corporate Plan 2016-2020*.
(2018a), which explains that “in the arts sector, digital technologies offer new ways to view and engage with heritage and cultural collections and provide new avenues for creating and distributing creative work” (p. 7). Further, the “increased connectivity and capacity provided through fixed and mobile networks” is described as “changing … how Australians experience culture” (2018c, p. 10). Even without a contemporary national cultural policy, the dominant narrative remains evident.

**Barriers to digital participation within the cultural sector**

There is a significant body of work that engages with digital participation – such as the use of social media – within the cultural sector. From this research, we know that the cultural sector develops and disseminates cultural narratives (Rowe, Wertsch, & Kosyaeva, 2002, p. 98), and that digital platforms have altered “the form and function” of these narratives through the “diversification of author and audience, and the impact of instantaneous and global scale” (Stogner, 2013, p. np). Audience studies literature, part of a tradition that extends back to the late 19th century (Kelly, 2016), tells us about the use of digital platforms within the cultural sector for the growth of, and engagement with, external publics. Further, Jonathan Hutchinson (2013, 2017) argues that if we are to talk about the interaction of digital participation with cultural production, it is necessary that we understand how this is operationalised. However, while these findings may be true for major metropolitan sites (Hutchinson, for instance, is referring to practices enacted in relation to the Sydney Opera House and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation), we must acknowledge that digital participation literature (discussed below) indicates this is unlikely to be possible in every place and for all people.
Barriers to participation within the non-digital cultural sector have long been acknowledged. As Kate Oakley and Dave O’Brien (2016) explain, “almost all research agrees that cultural consumption is socially differentiated and there are differences along lines of class and social status, education level, age, gender, ethnicity and disability” (p. 474). Despite the democratic possibilities represented by digital platforms discussed above, that these barriers extend into the digital has also been documented. For example, as the use of web-based technologies took off within the cultural sector in the mid-1990s, those such as Charlie Gere (1997) articulated concern that the cultural sector would remain the preserve of the wealthy elite (p. 65; MacDonald & Alsford, 1991, p. 310).

These concerns continue today. As Parry (2007) reminds us, “it is imperative that we ask ourselves … what the implications are of choosing to communicate and work with digital media in the museum” (p. 12). For example, as Kidd (2014) notes, digital participation enacted by on site visitors may be predicated on the provision of free WI-FI that ensures access for all (p. 15). Studies by Corinna Dean, Caroline Donnellan and Andy Pratt (2010) and Nanna Holdgaard (2012) further this line of inquiry, noting that those who engage with cultural institutions digitally are often also those most likely to visit non-digitally in the first place (see also Kelly, 2010; Russo, 2011). More recently, Mihelj and colleagues (2019) have argued that although digital participation has “greatly increased the volume, accessibility and diversity of cultural content”, it has simultaneously “created new opportunities for cultural distinction, segmentation and, hence, inequality” (p. 1466).

However, this research remains focussed on the digital participation of publics that coalesce around the cultural sector, rather than those within it. In the Australian context, the dearth of information on this topic has been noted. As Megan Cardamone and Ruth Rentschler (2008), for example, write, “there is a lack of information about the
engagement of cultural sector organisations with technology” (p. 106). They point to a survey conducted by the Australia Council in 1999, which likewise noted that although “an extensive literature search has been undertaken, nothing of substance arose” (Cardamone & Rentschler, 2008, p. 106). Also in 1999, and then again in 2001, Arts Victoria surveyed “around sixty small to medium arts organisations in Victoria” (Cardamone & Rentschler, 2008, p. 106) as part of the Digital Media and the Web Environment project. However, this survey focussed on only one state, and “relate[d] more to the creative use of technology” (Cardamone & Rentschler, 2008, p. 106) than to how digital platforms were used operationally within the cultural sector.

Addressing this research gap, Cardamone and Rentschler (2008, p. 106) use data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics ([ABS], 2006) to demonstrate that although 90% of organisations and businesses within the ‘culture and recreation sector’ used the internet, only half had a web presence. In 2015-16, the ABS renamed this industry subsection to “arts and recreation services” (ABS, 2017a, p. np). Of these organisations and businesses, 95.3% had internet access, 75.9% had a web presence, and 69.9% used social media (ABS, 2017a), suggesting that digital participation within the sector has increased since Cardamone and Rentschler’s (2008) work. However, given that the ABS data lumps the cultural (now arts) sector in with the recreational, this data has limited utility for this research. Further, through collecting only binary responses (arts and recreation services either do or do not have a website or use social media), this data does not tell us about the practices that this digital participation requires, nor the possible barriers that require overcoming.

Answers to such questions are currently being generated by an emerging body of research in the United Kingdom that examines the digital participation enacted by publics within cultural platforms. Kidd (2014), for example, notes that for staff
“firewalls, inadequate (or even non-existent) connectivity, associated costs (and the fetishization of these costs) can all be stumbling blocks” (p. 14) to how the cultural sector digitally participates. In addition, a lack of existing personal digital practices amongst staff, or “willingness to explore new hardware, might also be contributory factors” (Kidd, 2014, p. 15) to restricted, or prohibited, digital participation by the cultural sector (see also Parry, 2008, p. 189). In 2014 and 2015, the annual New Media Consortium (NMC) report identified the digital literacy of staff as a barrier to digital participation. Similarly, Ross Parry, Doris Ruth Eikhof, Sally-Anne Barnes, and Erika Kispeter (2018) draw on surveys by Nesta, the Arts and Humanities Research Council and Arts Council England (2014, 2015) to suggest that “over a third of museums in England still feel that they do not have the in-house skills to meet their digital aspirations” (Parry, Eikhof, Barnes, & Kispeter, 2018, p. np; see also Barnes, Kispeter, Eikhof & Parry, 2018, pp. 24-5). Likewise, work by Nesta and Arts Council England (2017) is used to identify a lack of confidence as a barrier to digital participation (Parry et al., 2018, p. np). Of particular interest to this thesis is that these reports identify “significant variations in digital activity and impact … across organisation types and … regions” (Nesta, 2017, p. 7). National organisations, for example, were found to be “more digitally active, experience fewer barriers, have better access to skills … than the arts and culture sector as a whole” (Nesta, 2017, p. 7), as were those based in capital cities. Cumulatively, these studies point to the existence of barriers that intersect with, and influence, the digital participation enacted on the behalf of the cultural sector. It is at this intersection that this thesis is located, and to this emerging body of literature that this research contributes.

Examining the digital participation of cultural platforms that experience such barriers requires engaging with digital participation literature. However, this research tends
to focus on individuals, rather than on publics (Helsper, 2017, pp. 223-4). Although I am specifically interested in cultural platform-based publics, rather than the digital participation of individuals, this does not render the existing literature irrelevant. I use it here to determine what we can know about (a) the dynamics of digital participation in the contexts in which each cultural platform was based, and (b) the likely experiences of the non-digital publics that interfaced with each cultural platform. For Desert Mob 2017, this involved reviewing digital participation data and research relating to remote and very remote Australian communities as well as by remote-dwelling Aboriginal peoples, while Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project required engaging with literature about the intersection of digital participation and age. I begin by introducing the existing digital divide literature (understood here as being inclusive of first and second levels, as well as digital literacies, inclusion, and participation literature), before narrowing to the Australian context, and then to the contexts that this thesis is specifically interested in.

**From digital divides to digital participation**

Drawing on the stratification hypothesis (Dutton, Shepherd, & di Genarro, 2007; Helsper, 2008; Powell, Bryne, & Dharma, 2010; Selwyn, 2004; van Dijk and Hacker, 2003), digital divide research questions “to what extent, with the expansion of digital media, socially existing segmentations” increase (Hepp, 2014, p. 92; see also Hargittai & Shafer, 2006; Mubarak & Nycyk, 2017; Park & Humphry, 2019). For Neil Selwyn (2004), the digital divide is thus inextricably political (see also Alam & Imran, 2015; Sparks, 2013), and for Matthew Payne (2005), it is “an ethical crisis” (p. np). Although the rapid development and uptake of digital platforms over the last decade has seen the divide narrow through increased access, a secondary (Hargittai, 2001) or deepening (van Dijk, 2005; van Dijk & Hacker, 2003) divide has been observed.
For second-level digital divide scholars, access does not necessarily equate to use or ability (Blank & Groselj, 2015; Castells, 2001; Hargittai, 2002, 2007; Ono & Zavodny, 2007; Stanley, 2003; Underwood, 2007; van Dijk, 2005). Second-level digital divide studies suggest that by focusing on issues of access, first-level divide scholars have neglected questions around digital literacy: the skills needed to effectively engage with digital platforms (Chen & Wellman, 2005; Donner, Gitau, & Marsden, 2011; Hargittai & Hinnant, 2008; Helsper, 2012; Hudson, 2013; Mansell, 2002; Nakamura, 2004; Norris, 2001; Notley & Foth, 2008; Ogle & Musolino, 2016; Salemink et al., 2017; Selwyn, 2004; Tsatsou, 2011; Warschauer, 2002, 2003). As Hudson (2013) explains, a household may have digital connectivity and thus be considered on the ‘right’ side of the digital divide, but access does not mean all residents use the internet, whether at all or to the same extent (see also Hargittai & Hsieh, 2013; Park, 2012; van Deursen & van Dijk, 2014).

In turn, digital literacy studies respond to second-level divide critiques of the first-level digital divide. Defined as the capacity to access and draw benefit from the resources that digital platforms provide access (Bonfadelli, 2002; Castells, 2011; Gebremichael & Jackson, 2006; Gilster, 1997; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; van Dijk & Hacker, 2003), digital literacy was pluralised – to digital literacies – by Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear (2006) to reflect “the multiplicity of situated social practices that are mediated through digital technologies” (Nichols & Stornaiuolo, 2019, p. 14; see also De Oliveira Nascimento & Knobel, 2017; Lankshear & Knobel, 2008, 2011; Pahl & Rowsell, 2010). Digital literacies are thus not a static skill (Walton, Kop, Spriggs, & Fitzgerald, 2013), but rather comprise a repertoire of practices that enable individuals to “use information critically, creatively and responsibly” (Hughes et al., 2018, p. 185).
By extending beyond infrastructure provision to understand the interaction of access, use and outcomes (Park, 2017) on a spectrum or index (see for example, the Australian Digital Inclusion Index, Dezuanni, Burgess, Thomas, Barraket, Marshall, Wilson, Ewing, & MacDonald, 2017; Thomas et al., 2016, Thomas et al., 2017, Thomas et al., 2018), digital inclusion literature facilitates an increased understanding of the “unique contours and cleavages … [that] describe differences in ICT possession and use” (Schejter, Harush, Rivka, & Tirosh, 2015, p. np). As Ellie Rennie, Julian Thomas and Chris Wilson (2019) argue, approaching digital inequity from the perspective of digital inclusion studies encourages the researcher “to consider access alongside other factors … [such as] affordability … capacities … capabilities … and what benefits” (p. 107) are derived.

Finally, digital participation research builds on the body of second-level digital divide and digital literacies studies that assert “physical access to the internet does not ensure digital inclusion, rather it's the take up and use of technology which matters” (Hughes et al., 2018, p. 185). Conceived of as the ability to engage “socially, culturally, politically, and economically in everyday life” through “technologies and media [that] are an everyday and familiar presence” (Hague & Williamson, 2009, p. 3), digital participation research also acknowledges the learnings of digital inclusion literature, which highlights the significance of equitable digital participation for individuals and society (Hughes et al., 2018, p. 185).

As a conceptual tool, digital participation thus enables understanding of the interrelated dynamics of digital inclusion and exclusion. Digital participation is dependent on not only access (the first-level divide), the skills required (the second-level divide), but also the digital literacies needed “to enable the effective use of a range of media and platforms in a contemporary digitally mediated society” (Hughes et al., 2017, p. 186). Digital inequity, then, is derived from not only inadequate access, but the lack of skills
and online networks that might facilitate participation (Park, Freeman, & Middleton, 2019). As I demonstrate in the following section, digital participation offers a useful conceptual tool for accounting for the multifaceted nature of Australian digital inequity.

**Australian digital inequity**

Digital inequity has long been an Australian policy concern, with the ABS monitoring access to, and use of, digital technology since 1996 (Notley & Foth 2008). Questions about internet access were first introduced to the Census in 2001; used to identify computer and internet users, as well as to distinguish between place of use, whether at home, work, or elsewhere. From this data, the ABS (2003) noted that there were “a number of access and equity issues associated with the use and accessibility of both personal computers and the internet” (Rennie et al., 2019, p. 63), thus identifying an Australian digital divide. As Rennie, Thomas and Wilson (2019) explain, the need for data to inform government responses to such digital inequity has ensured questions about digital access have remained on the Census ever since. Despite this, however, the Census has tended to capture “less nuanced internet data” (Rennie et al., 2019, p. 111) since 2001, significantly blunting the utility of such data.

As is typical internationally, Australian digital inequity falls along geographic and social segmentations (Alam & Imran, 2015; Atkinson et al., 2008; Blanchard et al., 2008; Rennie et al., 2013). Early reports associated decreased participation with factors such as lower incomes and educational qualifications, as well as older age (Lloyd & Bill, 2004). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, those from non-English speaking backgrounds, those outside the workforce, as well as those living outside metropolitan areas also experienced decreased levels of digital access and use (Lloyd & Bill, 2004). Although access has improved over time, little has changed in terms of these geographic and social segmentations.
As globally, digital access in Australia is increasingly occurring via mobile devices (Boyera, 2007; Chigona, Beukes, Vally, & Tanner, 2009; Donovan & Donner, 2010; Thomas, 2016). While mobile access offers possibilities for re-imagining “the provision of health and education, open new economic opportunities, and expand cultural, civic and political engagement” (Thomas, 2016, p. np), mobile services are not yet equivalent to fixed line broadband, and they remain considerably more expensive (Thomas et al., 2018; Uy-Tioco, 2019). As a result, Philip Napoli and Jonathan Obar (2013, 2014) report significantly different usage patterns, suggesting there is likewise a mobile-only digital divide (Thomas, et al., 2018; Mossberger, Tolbert, & Hamilton, 2012; Park, 2017; Reisdorf, Hampton, Fernandez, & Dutton, 2018; Rhinesmith, Reisdorf, & Bishop, 2019).

Policy responses to the Australian digital divide (see Notley & Foth, 2008 and Hughes et al., 2017 for an in depth discussion) have tended to respond to the ‘supply-side’ element of the problem through providing access (therefore responding to the first-level digital divide), with little focus placed on the ‘demand-side’ barriers (such as the second-level digital divide, literacies, and thus participation). As argued by Tanya Notley and Marcus Foth (2008), “these demand-side issues will continue to inhibit household ICT uptake and use even when the appropriate infrastructure is made available” (p. 91; see also Daly, 2002; Holloway, 2005). Without addressing such ‘demand-side’ issues, this literature suggests barriers to digital participation will remain.

Digital participation literature thus provides a useful conceptual tool for examining Australian digital inequity because barriers to participation range from access (the first level divide), to the skills and literacies required for use (the second level digital divide). For example, Hughes and colleagues (2017) suggest that limited National Broadband Network uptake in areas where the infrastructure is available indicates a gap in digital
literacies (see also Nansen, Arnold, Wilken, & Gibbs, 2013). This is reiterated by Borg and Smith (2016), who note that “many groups … lack the opportunity or motivation to use the internet” (p. 7; Broadbent & Papadopoulos, 2013), indicating a divide in digital participation. Having broadly described Australian digital inequity, in the next section I restrict my focus further to provide an overview of literature relevant to the specific contexts of each of my field sites.

Context specific digital dynamics: (1) Desert Mob 2017 and (2) Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project

This research engages with two cultural platforms that existing literature suggests are particularly likely to confront barriers to digital participation: spatial dynamics derived from the geographic digital divide, and the digital inequity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in the context of Desert Mob 2017, and the demographic dynamics of older adults in the case of Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project. Although I examine each field site separately, there were some overlaps. As I demonstrate in Chapter Four, while the Aboriginal artists exhibited at Desert Mob 2017 confronted barriers to digital participation derived from spatial dynamics, art centre managers indicated that the age of these artists might also be a relevant factor, as in the case of the Veterans Heritage Project. This insight aligns with work by Tim Acker (2015), who documents that over 31% of all Indigenous artists practicing out of remote art centres are over the age of 55 (p. 4). And, as Sora Park (2017) notes, while residents of remote locations experience digital exclusion derived from a lack of, or inadequate, infrastructure, the demographics of these locations are also typically elderly (and often with lower educational levels and incomes), resulting in additional barriers to participation. I discuss these overlaps in greater depth throughout this thesis through drawing on my empirical data.
I begin this section by contextualising Desert Mob 2017. However, as I discuss throughout this thesis, although this research examines the digital participation of Aboriginal art centres in relation to an Aboriginal art festival, it does not necessarily interface with the digital participation of Aboriginal artists specifically or people generally. This is because of the art centre model. While Aboriginal owned and governed, each employs a manager responsible for, amongst other things, the art centre’s digital participation. In 2017, each Desert Mob participating art centre employed a non-Indigenous manager (important exceptions to this will be discussed in Chapter Four). As such, while the digital divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is important for understanding the contextual experience of the non-digital publics that surrounded the Desert Mob 2017 participating art centres, as well as of the exhibited artists, it is not necessarily useful for understanding the digital participation of the art centres themselves.

**Desert Mob 2017**

Desert Mob is held at the Araluen Cultural Precinct in Alice Springs, a regional centre in the Northern Territory that is connected to major digital services. In 2017, each of the 28 participating art centres had varying experiences of both remoteness and digital access. As I demonstrate in Chapter Two, of those 28 art centres, six were considered remote, while the remaining 22 were very remote. Accordingly, digital participation in this context was informed by the geographic digital divide (Castells, 2000; DiMaggio et al., 2001; Helsper, 2012), also known as a rural digital divide (Salemink et al., 2017), or a spatial digital divide (Townsend, Sathiaselvan, Fairhurst, & Wallace, 2013).

The Australian digital divide between rural and urban residents is not narrowing (Park et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2017). As Park and colleagues (2019) explain, internet
connection rates in regional and remote locations “still lag behind those of urban Australia, and lower levels of use and engagement among rural consumers indicate persistent barriers to digital inclusion” (p. 139). Indeed, the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (Thomas et al., 2018) reveals that Australia’s least digitally included regions are entirely located outside major cities.

Using ABS (2017b) data, Park and colleagues (2019) show that around 23% of the remote Australian population remains disconnected from the internet, compared to 19% in outer regional areas, 17% in inner regional areas, and 12% in major cities (p. 140). In very remote Australia, only 41.4% of all households have broadband connectivity, and only 49.62% have internet access at all (Park, 2017, p. 403; see also Zander, Taylor, & Carson, 2012). Even in those areas with access, remote and very remote areas often experience limited and inferior service (Park et al., 2019, p. 141; see also Freeman, Park, Middleton, & Allen, 2016; Lane, Tiwari, & Alam, 2016; Middleton & Park, 2014; Park, et al., 2019). Further, as mentioned above, digital inequity in regional and remote Australia is exacerbated by the demographics of rural areas, typified by lower educational and income levels, as well as declining and elderly populations (Park, Freeman, Middleton, Allen, Eckermann, & Everson, 2015, p. 3633; Park et al., 2019, pp. 139-40), ensuring infrastructure access is not the only concern. As Park and colleagues (2019) explain, digital disengagement in these locations is also influenced by a “lack of skills, motivation and social contexts” (p. 141; see also Hughes et al., 2018; Park & Kim, 2015; Salemin et al., 2017).

These barriers to access (or the type and quality of access) have consequences for the practices that are enacted. Julian Thomas, Chris Wilson and Sora Park (2018) for example, demonstrate that households in rural and remote Australian communities tend not use digital services that require greater bandwidth, such as education or
entertainment services (see also Park et al., 2019). The geographic digital divide thus causes what the literature describes as ‘double remoteness’. According to Ellie Rennie and Julian Thomas (2012a, 2012b), this is what occurs when people living in remote communities are cut off from services due to geographical distance, but simultaneously face the prospect of being cut off from online opportunities and services due to barriers to their digital participation (Boase, 2010; Malecki, 2003; Park, 2017; Park et al., 2019; Salemink et al., 2017; Townsend et al., 2013).

While the increasing shift to mobile access (discussed above) offers the possibility for ameliorating some of these issues, the Regional Telecommunications Review (2015) demonstrates that mobile coverage in non-metro areas remains restricted. Between 50% and 98% of non-metropolitan regions receiving mobile coverage, compared to between 87% and 100% in urban areas (Regional Telecommunications Review, 2015). And, as noted above, mobile services remain incomparable to fixed line services as well as far more expensive, resulting in an emerging mobile only digital divide.

Digital participation in remote Aboriginal communities

Research on questions of digital participation in remote Aboriginal contexts is limited (ACMA, 2008; Rennie et al., 2019). This is due to a number of reasons, ranging from the cost of remote field work, the difficulties associated with intercultural research, and the lack of infrastructure that makes remote survey delivery by phone almost impossible. In this section, I detail a recent synthesis of the available literature and data by Ellie Rennie, Julian Thomas, and Chris Wilson (2019), referring to other studies where relevant.

2 Across Australia, there are now around three times the number of mobiles to fixed line telephone services (Ogle & Musolino, 2016, p. 11).
Drawing on work by Laurel Evelyn Dyson (2004) and Peter Radoll (2006), Cardamone and Rentschler (2008) describe the digital inequity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians as being derived from a “lack of access to infrastructure, lack of home ownership of computers and lack of technological literacy” (p. 105). These dynamics are evidenced by the existing literature. For example, the internet access questions incorporated in the 2001 Census (discussed above) allowed Rachel Lloyd and Anthea Bill (2004) to note that internet use at non-home and non-work locations was particularly prevalent for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Building on this observation, in 2005, Anne E. Daly used 2001 Census data to document differences between internet use ‘at home’ and internet use ‘generally’, finding that for Indigenous people living outside major cities in the Northern Territory and South Australia, internet use ‘generally’ (such as at a community centre, library, or workplace), was three times higher than home use.

Although 77% of all remote communities had access to some form of telecommunications by 2007, in some instances this comprised only a public telephone booth, and only 26% had mobile coverage (Rennie et al., 2016, pp. 18-19). In 2009, a survey of shared internet facilities in central Australia found that although playing a central role in providing access, the sustainability of these access points “was a significant concern” (Rennie et al., 2016, pp. 38-9). Data from the 2011 Census shows that under 40% of those remote and very remote Indigenous dwellings had access to a home internet connection, compared to over 80% of the total Australian population (Rennie et al., 2016, p. 14; see also ACMA, 2008; Auld et al., 2012; Christie, 2005; Perley & O’Donnell, 2006; Taylor, 2012). By 2015, of the 74 Northern Territory outstations with 100 or more residents, 40.54% (30) had access to ADSL, and 59.44% (44) had mobile coverage (Rennie et al., 2016, pp. 18-9).
Data from the 2016 Census updates these findings, showing that although 85.8% of all Australians have a home internet connection, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders this drops to 75.3%. When location is taken into account, further digital inequity is revealed. Although 82.8% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in metropolitan locations have a home internet connection, this drops to 73.2% in regional locations, 61.3% in remote and 49.9% in very remote Australia (Rennie et al., 2019, p. 109).

In 2016, the Centre for Appropriate Technology Limited conducted a survey of internet access and infrastructure, finding that although 37% of the 401 outstations surveyed had internet access, in 80% of these cases, coverage extended to only one residence (p. 41).

The 2014-2015 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey ([NATSISS], ABS, 2016b) provides further evidence of geographic disparities. Where 88.8% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in metropolitan areas had accessed the internet in the past twelve months, only 62.7% of those in remote areas – a category that includes Alice Springs, where Desert Mob 2017 is held – and 47.5% of those living in very remote areas had done so. When accounting for daily internet use, the NATSISS (ABS, 2016a) shows that only 36.5% of all Indigenous people living in remote areas, and 19% of those in very remote areas, used the internet every day, compared to 71.1% of those living in metropolitan regions.

The NATSISS (ABS, 2016b) also shows that the vast majority of respondents – 71% – accessed the internet away from home, for example, at work, a government office, a library or community centre. This was also true of 70.2% of all respondents in remote

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3 Remote Aboriginal communities, in their current policy form, can be traced back to the Outstation Movement, itself an outcome of the 1967 Referendum (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs 1987, commonly known as the Blanchard Report). Outstations (also known as homelands) are small Aboriginal communities, on country that has been returned to its rightful owners.
and very remote areas. However, unlike metropolitan residents, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in remote and very remote Australia were far more likely to “exclusively rely upon out of home access” (Rennie et al., 2019, p. 112). Where only 2% of metropolitan Indigenous residents relied on out of home access, for remote and very remote residents, this increased to 11.4% and 27%, respectively, thereby providing support for Daly’s (2005) findings.

In 2018, the Australian Digital Inclusion Index Supplementary Survey (Thomas et al., 2018, p. 19) was conducted in Ali Curung, an Indigenous community of around 500 residents, located 380kms north of Alice Springs. Ali Curung residents were much less digitally included than those living elsewhere in Australia, with a digital inclusion score of 42.9 points (out of 100), 17.3 points lower than the national average, and 11.5 points lower than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations in urban and regional locations. This low score is primarily due to affordability, which was complicated by a reliance on mobile only access. Compared to an affordability score of 57.6 (out of 100) for all Australians, and 49.7 for non-remote dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, residents of Ali Curung received a score of 25.8 (Rennie et al., pp. 108-9; see also Thomas, 2018). Perhaps as a consequence, Indigenous residents of Ali Curung were significantly less likely to access the internet on a daily basis. However, Ali Curung residents scored higher than the Australian average (49.5) as well as the urban and regional Indigenous population (45) on digital ability, with a score of 52.3. While not intended to be comparable to other remote Indigenous communities, the data just discussed is particularly relevant to this research as one of the Desert Mob 2017 participating art centres was based in Ali Curung. As such, the Australian Digital Inclusion Index Supplementary Survey (Thomas et al., 2018) provides direct insight into one art centre’s contextual experience of digital access and use.
Daly’s (2005) work (discussed above) underpins the enduring notion that community or shared internet access is the most viable response to remote Australian digital exclusion (McCallum & Papandrea, 2009). The efficacy of this approach, however, is difficult to validate because “the location [of internet access] was dropped [from the Census] in 2006 and has not been reinstated” (Rennie et al., 2019, p. 111). In recent times, there appears to be a shift occurring: from a focus on public computer or media centres to public WI-FI points. While this may mean that access is more readily available, the download speeds and bandwidth available in these communities continues to restrict digital participation. As I discuss in Chapters Three and Four, this was the case for several Desert Mob participating remote art centres.

However, statistics such as those just described can create narratives that override lived experiences (Rowse, 2010; Sen, 2000). Accordingly, qualitative research that engages with the social and cultural specificities of digital practices will always be necessary (Rennie, et al., 2016). For example, work by Fiona Brady, Laurel Evelyn Dyson and Tina Asela (2008) documents a “very high rate of mobile adoption” (p. 393) on an island in the Torres Strait, which they attribute to the relatively low cost of technology. Work by Bronwyn Carlson (2013) and Bronwyn Carlson, Terri Farrelly, and Fiona Borthwick (2015) finds that social media provides Indigenous Australians with a site for kinship connectivity and continuity (see also Kral, 2011; Lumby 2010). Others still have documented negative outcomes (Frazer & Carlson, 2017; Rennie, Yunkaporta, & Holcombe-James, 2018; Vaarzon-Morel, 2014), such as “deliberate acts to undermine authority” (Rennie et al., 2019, p. 114). As I suggest in Chapter Four, such qualitative studies provide invaluable evidence that even despite digital inequity, digital participation remains observable.
Having contextualised the digital participation possible in the remote Aboriginal communities where Desert Mob 2017 art centres were based, in the next section, I detail what we know about digital participation in the specific context of these art centres.

**Digital participation in remote Aboriginal art centres**

In 2004, the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts declared that through digital participation the distance confronting remote Indigenous art centres had been mediated: “physical remoteness … has ceased to be the predominant issue in marketing [remote] Aboriginal artworks” (p. 14). According to Iris Bendor, Tania von der Heidt, and Tim Acker (2013) it is this potential for facilitating financial outcomes that ensures effective digital participation is critical for the remote art sector (see also Acker, Stefanoff, & Woodhead, 2013; Coate, 2009). However, little scholarly attention has been paid to whether, and if so, how, such digital participation occurs in relation to remote Aboriginal art centres. In this section, I provide an overview of the existing literature to provide context for what follows.

In 1999, Felicity Wright surveyed 39 remote art centres, finding only 8% had a website (p. 71). While 76.92% used photography, only 7.69% had a digital camera, with the remaining 69.23% using film. Only 5% of the surveyed art centres had catalogues that incorporated images of art works available for sale, which Wright (1999) attributed to a “lack of technology and photo processing facilities” (p. 108). By the 2000s, sector peak agencies such as Desart (discussed further in Chapter Three) were using websites to promote themselves, their members, and their artists (Altman, Hunter, Ward, & Wright, 2002). At around the same time, art centres began using websites to disseminate information and facilitate communication via email (Altman et al., 2002; Cardamone, 2007; Cardamone & Rentschler, 2006, 2008).
Although interested in ‘Indigenous Cultural Micro Enterprises’, and thus not specific to art centres, work by Cardamone and Rentschler (2008) demonstrates progression in the digital platforms and practices deployed by the remote Indigenous arts sector since the Wright (1999) survey. All surveyed microenterprises reported using digital cameras, with most using the camera “a few times per week” (Cardamone & Rentschler, 2008, p. 110).

Although confirming Wright’s (1999) observation that few art centres were using online payment systems, Cardamone and Rentschler (2008) explain the low instances of online payment systems amongst the surveyed cohort not as the result of barriers to digital participation, but as a considered response to the practices of those purchasing the art:

The rejection of systems with fully online transactions may relate to the idea that art buyers have specific needs that cannot be fulfilled by a website alone. They are likely to desire personal interaction with the vendor – at least the enterprise (such as a gallery or art centre), if not the artist or craftsperson themselves. (Cardamone & Rentschler, 2008, p. 111; see also Smith, Discenza, & Baker, 2005, for similar findings in non-Indigenous contexts)

For Cardamone and Rentschler (2008), “the real-world presence of the mediating organisation” (p. 111) plays an important part in reassuring the purchaser through the promotion of authenticity intended to “inform and guarantee the value of an art investment” (p. 111; see also Altman, 2005a; Cardamone, 2007). Although perhaps not directly resulting in sales, similar practices appear to extend into digital contexts. Work by Altman (2005a) and Cardamone (2007) suggests that digital participation enacted by art centres is likewise intended to reinforce values such as authenticity and cultural integrity (see also, Acker, Stefanoff, & Woodhead, 2013; Bendor, von der Heidt, & Acker, 2013).

Conducted between 2011 and 2016, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Economies Project (see for example Acker, 2016; Acker & Stefanoff, 2016; Acker et
al., 2013) builds on this body of literature. Although noting that the majority of art centres today have an online presence, and the use of Facebook has been evident in the sector since 2010, Bendor and Acker (2015) report that art centre managers were not convinced of the utility of digital participation, and most did not see the need to invest in mobile optimized websites. Usefully for this research, Bendor and Acker (2015) link the varied take up and use of digital platforms within the sector to barriers to digital participation such as “slow or frequently interrupted internet connection[s] … and technical support not being readily available” (p. 3).

The research just discussed suggests art centres confront multiple barriers to digital participation. While access has improved over time (Bendor et al., 2013; Taylor, 2012), it remains uneven. Simultaneously, as Bendor and colleagues (2013) argue, drawing on work by Cardamone (2007), a second-level digital divide comprised of skills and literacies is also evident. Overcoming the barriers to digital participation that confront remote art centres thus requires addressing both access and literacies (Bendor et al., 2013; Cardamone, 2007). Over the following chapters I demonstrate that such responses to the barriers to digital participation confronted by remote dwelling Indigenous artists were not evident within my data. This is not to argue, however, that similar responses are entirely absent from this context. The remote Indigenous broadcasting industry, for example, has taken on geographic and Indigenous/non-Indigenous digital inequity as a key focus, with the industry peak body – First Nations Media Australia (formerly known as the Indigenous Remote Communications Association) – a primary advocate for, and provider of, digital inclusion. These efforts, however, fall outside the scope of the current research.
Having described the dynamics of digital participation in relation to the remote Aboriginal art centres that participated in Desert Mob 2017, I now turn to discuss the ‘grey’ digital divide, and the influence that this has on the community collecting-organisations that use Victorian Collections.

**Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project**

As discussed in the introduction to this section, this research examines two cultural platforms that existing literature suggests are particularly likely to confront barriers to digital participation. In the case of Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project, this comprised a population that was primarily over the age of 65, resulting in demographically derived barriers to digital participation that the literature describes as the ‘grey’ digital divide: the gaps in digital access and participation which affect those over 65 years of age and ensure that digital participation is lower for older Australians than it is for younger (ACMA, 2016; McCosker et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2016).

The impact of the grey digital divide increases with age (Friemel, 2016). According to ACMA (2016), in June 2015 an estimated one million Australian adults, comprising 6% of the total adult population, had never accessed the internet. 71% of this disconnected cohort were over the age of 65. Although 11% of all Australians between 65 to 69 have never accessed the internet, this increases to 42% for those over 80 (ACMA, 2016; Hargittai & Dobransky, 2017). Although older adults who are online enact a range of digital activities (van Deursen & Helsper, 2015; see also Hunsaker & Hargittai, 2018; Vroman, Arthanat, & Lysack, 2015), and the development of these diverse activities “has been amplified by user-friendly and affordable apps and devices” (Schehl, Leukal & Sugumaran, 2019, p. 222), the pace at which this cohort develops such digital practices
does not match that of the general population. As such, although increasing their internet use, Australian seniors continue to conduct the fewest number of activities online (ACMA, 2014; Suchowerska & O Zinn, 2014).

In a 2016 study by Borg and Smith, respondents in this age bracket were least likely to have “access … at home or via a mobile device, [but] most likely to [rate themselves as having] poor/fair self-efficacy, and … to have a negative attitude towards the internet” (p. 22). Indeed, as reported by ACMA (2016) 69% of those older Australians who reported not having home internet access stated, “they had no need for internet or that they were not interested in using it” (p. np). Jan van Dijk (2005, 2006) thus suggests that the grey divide is the result of motivational, material, skills and usage barriers (see also Cameron et al., 2001; Eynon & Helsper, 2010; Freese, Rivas, & Hargittai, 2006; Mubarak & Nycyk, 2017). And, as Anthony McCosker and colleagues (2018) argue, this suggests that rather than “a binary digital divide”; the ‘grey’ digital divide comprises “a set of complex personal and social factors contributing to digital and social exclusion” (p. 6). It is therefore best understood as “a participation divide” (McCosker et al, 2018, p. 6).

The ‘grey’ digital divide is not predetermined: not all those over the age of 65 face barriers to their digital participation, whether at all or to the same extent. As Thomas Friemel (2016) argues, “social context[s] … influence Internet use in manifold ways” (p. 327). For example, a person using a computer or the internet before retirement is more likely to use one later in life (Naab & Schwarzenegger, 2017, p. 97). As such, the notion of a ‘grey’ digital divide is problematic in the same way that the notion of a ‘digital native’ is. As danah boyd (2014) argues, not only is [digital natives] fraught, but it obscures the uneven distribution of technological skills and media literacy across the youth population, presenting
an inaccurate portrait of young people as uniformly prepared for the digital era and ignoring the assumed level of privilege required to be ‘native’. (boyd, 2014, pp. 179-80; see also Hargittai, 2010; Helsper & Eynon, 2010)

In the context of the ‘grey’ digital divide, Barbara Barbosa Neves, Jenny Waycott, and Sue Malta (2018) argue that the characterisation of older adults as a homogenous group of non-users “masks multifaceted social and agentic processes that involve literacy, status, identity, and practices” (p. 237; see also Hargittai, Piper, & Morris, 2018; Hunsaker & Hargittai, 2018). While I acknowledge and agree with such critiques, the notion of a demographically derived digital divide remains useful for describing the dynamics observed at the Lara RSL, and as such, I use it throughout this thesis.

A number of studies have engaged with solutions to the ‘grey’ digital divide. Brian Real, John Bertot and Paul Jaeger (2014), for example, argue that imparting digital skills can decrease the influence of barriers to digital participation. Dale Gietzelt (2001), Peter Millward (2003), and Alexander van Deursen and Jan van Dijk (2010) emphasise that for successful outcomes, the contexts in which such digital training occurs must be supportive and facilitated at the pace of the participants. Further, work by Kathleen Segrist (2004), Christina Blaschke, Paul Freddolino, and Erin Mullen (2009) suggests that digital literacy training with this cohort of older adults is most likely to be successful when tied to the existing interests and skills of the participants (see also Dezuanni & Allan, 2018, p. 191). Likewise, Friemel’s (2016) work suggests learning from and with friends or family might be similarly successful for ameliorating demographically derived barriers to digital participation.

Having described the dynamics that comprise the grey digital divide, I now examine the literature that details digital participation in relation to community collecting organisations, such as those that use Victorian Collections.
Digital participation in community collecting-organisations

Community collecting-organisations are defined by the “active and ongoing involvement in the source community in documenting and making accessible their own history on their own terms” (Stevens, Flinn, & Shepherd, 2010, p. 60). The collections that these organisations care for are therefore often “selective and partial and rooted in local understandings of historical value” (Wallace, Tait, MacLeod, Mellish & Hunter, 2011, p. np). Typically reliant on the voluntary efforts of retirees (Witcomb & Mauldon, 1996, p. 77), community collecting-organisations “represent individual interests, enthusiasm and knowledge” (Wallace et al., 2011, p. np; see also Beel, Wallace, Webster & Nguyen, 2015).

Claire Wallace, Elizabeth Tait, Marsaili MacLeod, Chris Mellish and Colin Hunter (2011) describe cultural platforms such as Victorian Collections as “repositories based on information systems” (p. np; see also Kidd, 2009, p. 167) that offer community collecting-organisations scope for widening their participation. In part, this potential for increased participation is attributed to the relatively “lower cost” and “fewer human resources” (Wallace et al., 2011, p. np) required by digital participation. However, when community collecting-organisations catalogue their cultural collections online – as they do through using Victorian Collections – the result can be messy (Wallace et al., 2011, p. np). Volunteer turnover can cause varied cataloguing practices, resulting in “multiple forms of cataloguing, archiving and content management” (Wallace et al., 2011, p. np; see also Kidd, 2009, p. 180; Lorimer & Philo, 2009). Accordingly, although offering the possibility of widened participation (Wallace et al., 2011), digital participation simultaneously “creates a variety of new demands and risks” (Beel et al., 2015, p. 204; see also Higgins, 2011; Offen, 2013). However, there is “little evidence or understanding … of the technical and social processes” (Wallace et al., 2011, p. np) that such digital cultural platforms require. As such, David Beel, Claire Wallace, Gemma Webster and Hai Nguyen (2015) argue that researchers must “think
through the difficulties and tensions that come with digital technologies and [their] … bearing upon the practices” (p. 204) of community collecting-organisations. In examining the intersection of Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project with a grey digital divide at the Lara RSL, it is precisely this that the present research sets out to do.

In 2009, as the Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria developed Victorian Collections, a survey of likely users was conducted to “ascertain the status of their collections, information systems, technical resources, attitude toward online technologies, and the technical aptitude of their volunteers and staff” (Hawkins & Blake, 2013, p. np). The survey found the majority of these community collecting-organisations were serviced by volunteers, a relatively high proportion of which “were older retirees with fairly limited experience and knowledge of personal computing, digitisation techniques, Internet, and related technologies” (Hawkins & Blake, 2013, p. np; Hawkins et al., 2015). Many of the surveyed community collecting-organisations “had no online presence … some … lacked ready access to broadband … [and] few … had access to modern desktop PCs with current web browsers” (Hawkins & Blake, 2013, p. np; Hawkins et al., 2015, p. np).

The digital participation that those publics Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project were intended for thus conforms largely with the existing literature discussed above. Volunteers were generally older, typically disconnected and had relatively lower levels of digital literacy and thereby participation. This was certainly the case at the Lara RSL, as I discuss in Chapters Five and Six.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I have located questions regarding digital participation within the Australian cultural sector. Through tracing the development of the sector’s communicative practices I have defined digital participation as a communicative practice with the potential to facilitate inclusive and accessible outcomes. Having done so, I positioned these practices in relation to the dominant cultural policy narrative that this thesis examines: that digital participation will facilitate the mediation of distance and the ‘unlocking’ of cultural collections.

I then discussed the limited literature that examines the intersection of the cultural sector and barriers to digital participation, before turning to provide an overview of digital participation studies more generally. In doing so, I provided an understanding of the barriers to digital participation that both Desert Mob 2017 and the Veterans Heritage Project and Victorian Collections were likely to confront, offering context for the discussion that follows.

Having set the scene, in the next chapter I detail the ethical and methodological considerations that the ‘doing’ of this research entailed. As I demonstrate, these informed my research design, my media ecologies approach to each field site, and my analysis and presentation of the data.
Chapter Two:

‘Doing’ the research: Ethical and methodological considerations
In this chapter, I describe the ethical and methodological considerations that this research required. I refer to these considerations, and the research approach they gave rise to – of “thinking along with” (Rogers, 2013, p. 1) each field site – as the ‘doing’ of the research. This phrasing emphasises my position within the research design, methods, and findings, as well as the media ecologies of both Desert Mob 2017 and Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project.

To ensure rigour in my approach to each cultural platform, I developed a media ecologies framework of digital and non-digital platforms, practices, and publics (as defined in the introduction to this thesis and developed further below). Methods were designed to intersect with and gather data related to one or more elements of this framework. In ‘doing’ this research, I thus observed the platforms that each cultural platform engaged with, the practices that each cultural platform enacted, and the publics that did or did not form as a result. I paired this framework with a typology of three barriers to digital participation (non-digital, digital, and postdigital) using these to make visible the points at which digital participation – and therefore the responses to the dominant cultural policy narrative – came unstuck.

Importantly, this research was not intended to be comparative. Instead, it brought together the two very different field sites of Desert Mob 2017 and the Veterans Heritage Project through examining their likely experience of barriers to digital participation: respectively, the geographic and grey digital divides. My methods were thus asynchronous and agnostic; employed as, when, and how each field site required. I outline these methods broadly, before narrowing to the specifics of each field site.
I begin this chapter by locating myself within the research and providing further context as to how this thesis came about. I do so to make clear how and where my own identity informed the process of research development and the ethical and methodological considerations that followed.

**Locating the researcher**

As I discuss below, when it came time for the ‘doing’ of data collection, I deployed digital and non-digital ethnographic research methods (participant-observation and semi-structured interviews, augmented by collection and analysis of internal data and records). The advantages of using such qualitative methods to examine digital participation are well documented (see, for example, Ito et al., 2009). In this section, however, I explain how ethnographic methods were integral to my ethical considerations: used purposefully to highlight the voices of those within each field site and to gain insight into participation as it was understood by these voices. This was appropriate because ethnographic methods privilege emic perspectives, or the ‘insider’s point of view’ (Harris, 1976). Despite this privileging, the voices of these insiders were inevitably heard through my etic, or external, perspective. And, as Martín Sánchez-Jankowski (2002) notes, “there is not a participant-observation study that has not involved the concepts of ‘representation’ and ‘responsibility’” (p. 144). As researcher, I was both representing the voices of my participants and responsible to them for ensuring the veracity of these representations.

These dynamics of representation and responsibility were further complicated due to one half of the research being located in specifically Indigenous contexts. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) notes:

> It is surely difficult to discuss research methodology and Indigenous peoples together, in the same breath, without having an analysis of imperialism, without
understanding the complex ways in which the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices. (Smith, 1999, p. 2)

This is a discussion about knowledge production: who controls the way in which the world is seen and understood, and how this in turn confers power (see Banerjee & Linstead, 2004; Pels & Salemink, 1994; Prasad, 2003, for discussion of the relationship between ethnography and colonialism). The act of entering the field is thus also the entering into of power relations between the researcher and the researched, and the resulting “interplay that exists between subjectivity and objectivity” requires recognition (Madden, 2010, p. 146). Scholarship suggests that this can be achieved through using reflexivity (Elliott, 2005; Marcus, 1998; Nicholls, 2009) and positionality to manage “the influence of ‘me’ on the research and representations of ‘them’” (Madden, 2010, p. 22; see also Belfrage, 2007; Nilson, 2017; Russell-Mundine, 2012; Wilson & Neville, 2009).

To introduce ‘me’, then. I am politically left-leaning, under thirty, and middle-class. I am the eldest of four children born to a British father and a white Australian mother in an outer-regional Australian town with a population of roughly 2,000. I was raised in various regional towns and grew up spending weekends in museums and galleries. As I grew older, and as the cultural sector ventured onto the internet and into platforms such as Instagram, my non-digital practices of visitation became digital. I thus have been, and am often still, a member of digital and non-digital cultural platform-based publics. This research therefore represents an extension of my own engagement in cultural practices. However, it was also informed by the work that I undertook prior to, as well as during, the ‘doing’ of this research.
In 2013, I worked for an arts company that delivered week-long capacity building workshops in remote Indigenous communities around Australia. Based in the Melbourne office, I facilitated conversations between managers, artists, and communities across the country. Through this, I was exposed to the geographic digital divide, often calling the community’s one public payphone with fingers crossed that the person I needed was within shouting distance. Soon after finishing this work, I returned to university to begin my PhD. This thesis was funded as an in-kind contribution (first by the Swinburne University of Technology, and then by RMIT) to the Cyber Safety in remote Aboriginal Communities and Towns Project (known colloquially as the Cyber Safety Project) conducted with Telstra (see, for example, Rennie, Hogan, & Holcombe-James, 2016; Rennie, Yunkaporta, & Holcombe-James, 2018a; Rennie, Yunkaporta, & Holcombe-James, 2018b; Rennie, Yunkaporta, & Holcombe-James, 2018c). Over two and a half years, Associate Professor Ellie Rennie, Dr Eleanor Hogan, Dr Tyson Yunkaporta, Mark Sulikowski (Telstra), and I investigated cyber safety concerns in remote Aboriginal communities and towns. While my thesis was connected to the Cyber Safety Project, I had freedom to develop my own research agenda. As we conducted fieldwork for that project, I simultaneously conducted scoping work for this thesis. On an early trip to central Australia, I developed relationships with key figures in the local cultural sector.

Through these connections, I was encouraged to introduce myself to Dr Mark Cree, Senior Director of the Araluen Cultural Precinct in Alice Springs. This, in turn, led to me meeting Philip Watkins, CEO of Desart (the peak agency for central Australian remote Indigenous art centres), and my decision to focus half of this research around

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4 Eleanor worked on the first half of the project and was instrumental in establishing it, while Tyson became involved in the second.
Desert Mob 2017 – a cultural platform that interacted with the mediation of distance as well as barriers to digital participation.

My research partnership with the Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria (known then as Museums Australia (Victoria)) was likewise initiated through non-digital connections. At a music festival in regional Victoria, I was introduced to Cameron Auty, who at that time was co-managing Victorian Collections (and, by extension, the Veterans Heritage Project). After ongoing conversations, I decided that Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project – as a cultural platform that interacted with efforts to unlock cultural collections as well as barriers to digital participation – would form the second half of the thesis.

I recount these stories to make explicit that who I am, where I live, what I do, and who I associate with directly informed the development of this thesis. These identity markers followed me into, and out of, the field. In order to make visible “the influence of ‘me’ on the research” (Madden, 2010, p. 22), I developed mechanisms of feedback and consultation. I discuss these below, and endeavour to point them out throughout this chapter and the thesis as a whole. For example, when research participants clarified, or reminded me of, particular nuances. I do this to demonstrate how these ethical considerations were crucial to the entire process of researching and writing this thesis. They were not constrained to one field site as a special consideration, nor an act that was embarked upon at the beginning of field work and then forgotten about, but rather an ongoing labour underpinned by an ethics of care (Beaulieu & Estalella, 2011; Lawson, 2004; Lomborg, 2012; Tiidenberg, 2018).


Consultation, mutual benefit, and feedback mechanisms

Although only one of the two field sites engaged with explicitly Indigenous contexts, the research as a whole was designed in compliance with the ethical standards set by the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in the Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies ([GERAIS], AIATSIS, 2012) as well as the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007, updated in 2015, and 2018).

While all research with human participants is built on ethical concepts of informed consent and confidentiality derived from the right to privacy (Eynon, Fry, & Schroeder, 2008), research conducted with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is required to go beyond these to demonstrate values such as reciprocity.

However, the GERAIS (AIATSIS, 2012) does not provide guidance for digital or internet-based research beyond digital visual or audio recordings and/or data (see p. 11, 17). Neither does the GERAIS’ online summary (despite an update in April 2016).

Given this lack of guidance on digital research practices, I looked to the Association of Internet Researchers (Markham & Buchanan, 2012) for best practice ethical considerations to account for the digital components of the thesis. I also found Katrin Tiidenberg’s (2018) work on digital ethics as a practice of care a particularly useful tool for mapping the precepts established by the GERAIS (AIATSIS, 2012) and the NHMRC (2007) to digital contexts.

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5 The GERAIS (AIATSIS, 2012), for example, identifies fourteen principles grouped under six categories: (1) rights, respect and recognition; (2) negotiation, consultation, agreement and mutual understanding; (3) participation, collaboration and partnership; (4) benefits, outcomes and giving back; (5) managing research: use, storage and access; and (6) reporting and compliance. Section 4.7 of the National Statement (2007) identifies four guidelines for ethical research in such contexts, each underpinned by six core values. The four guidelines are: (1) research merit and integrity; (2) justice; (3) beneficence; and (4) respect. Each are underpinned by the following six core values: (1) reciprocity; (2) respect; (3) equality; (4) responsibility; (5) survival and protection; (6) spirit and integrity.
Tiidenberg (2018) draws on work by Tom Boellstorff and colleagues (2012) to define an ethics of care as being built on “relations of trust and mutual respect” (p. 130) that require researchers to go beyond avoiding harm (Tiidenberg, 2018, p. 676). In practice, an ethics of care involves “dialogic consent, accurate portrayal, ethical fabrication, and doing good” (Tiidenberg, 2018, p. 676). The ethical considerations undertaken in the ‘doing’ of this research as a whole – in digital and non-digital, Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts – were thus built on ethnographic and feminist research traditions that “advocate for informed consent as a continuous negotiation” (Tiidenberg, 2018, p. 676, see also Beaulieu & Estalella, 2011; Lawson, 2004; Lomborg, 2012). For example, I used the notion of dialogic consent as a prompt to check in with research partners as new stages of the research began, asking again whether data could be used in new presentations or publications, and providing time for research partners to review, refute, and suggest amendments to my analysis prior to public release.

**Ethical mechanisms in practice**

At the outset of the research, I developed research partnerships with the people responsible for each field site. Research partners (as well as individual participants, discussed further below) were provided with detailed information regarding “the purpose, duration, and methods … [as well as] the risks and benefits deriving from participation”, and provided with “an absolute … right to withdraw at any time” (Marzano, 2012, p. 443). In the context of Desert Mob 2017, this meant gaining support and consent from (1) the Araluen Cultural Precinct, (2) Desart and the Desart board (comprised of elders and respected persons representative of art centres from across the Central Australian region); and (3) individual art centres that directly participated in the research via semi-structured interviews (but not all Desert Mob 2017 participating...
art centres, as discussed below). For Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project, support and consent were gained from (1) the Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria; and (2) the Lara and Wangaratta Returned & Service League Sub-Branches. In addition, consultation was undertaken with the Veterans Branch of the Victorian Government as funders of the Veterans Heritage Project.

These research partnerships were collaborative and intended to provide mutual benefit. For example, the scheduling of fieldwork was driven in part by the interests of each cultural platform. Araluen and Desart were interested in understanding digital participation in relation to Desert Mob, so I conducted my fieldwork in the lead up to, and opening weekend of, Desert Mob 2017. Similarly, the Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria were interested in how barriers to digital participation might be impinging on the delivery and results of the Veterans Heritage Project, so fieldwork was conducted during the delivery of the Veterans Heritage Project at the Lara RSL. Through examining aspects of digital participation that were of existing interest, the research provides direct benefit to my research partners. Simultaneously, through developing methods and conceptual frameworks that can be used to understand barriers to digital participation influencing other field sites, the research provides benefit to the broader cultural sector.

The multiple methods used in the ‘doing’ of this thesis were designed with the aim of respecting research partners and participants explicitly in mind. As discussed above, ethnographic methods were deployed to make the voices of those within each field

\footnote{Although I restrict my discussion to the Veterans Heritage Project as delivered at the Lara RSL, I also interviewed members of the Wangaratta RSL who had completed the Veterans Heritage Project in 2016. These interviews were used to gain insight into how Veterans Heritage Project workshops were delivered elsewhere. To facilitate involvement with the research, the Wangaratta RSL also provided their informed consent.}
site audible. And, as Gillian Cowlishaw (2013) argues, qualitative research of the kind described here is entirely dependent on “voluntary cooperation – [participants] choose whether and how to participate and hence are by no means powerless in this context” (p. np). To explicitly enable this agency, I developed feedback mechanisms. Each individual research participant was provided with a full interview transcript (unless they opted out), and invited to amend and approve or withdraw any or all information provided. As data was collected and analysis began, I practiced dialogic consent (Tiidenberg, 2018). I checked in with participants and research partners regularly, feeding information back and iterating analysis. In addition, prior to submission and public release of the thesis, research partners were provided with the sections of the draft thesis pertaining to each field site. At this stage, an additional round of consultation occurred, with research partners given the opportunity to amend factual information, as well as to question, refute, and provide additional information regarding the findings of the thesis. As such, the argument and analysis within this thesis, as well as the submitted thesis as a whole, has been reviewed and validated by multiple members of multiple organisations (see Appendix A).

Despite carefully planning my research methods with ethical considerations in mind, there were unanticipated complications that had to be dealt with as they arose. In particular, while the ethics procedures approved for this research provided participants with two weeks to provide initial changes to their interview transcript, and an additional two weeks to review and approve the amended transcript, this proved unworkable in practice. My research participants were staff or volunteers at cultural platforms that were underfunded and understaffed, and my research did not fall high on their list of priorities. It could take months for participants to get back to me with approval, particularly after I had left the field. Although I had ethics approval to assume consent if no comments were received within the above timeframes, this sat uncomfortably.
Again, I resolved this through practicing an ethics of care. Data derived from research participants that had provided informed consent, but had not directly approved their interview transcript are discussed in the aggregate. These participants thus informed the discussion that follows, but do not explicitly appear within it.

Other complications arose because, as Tiidenberg (2018, p. 667) notes, the socio-technical context of the internet can make the application of traditional ethical considerations difficult. This is because questions about what is public and what is private – and how existing understandings of privacy are or can be transposed to digital contexts (Convery & Cox, 2012; Zimmer, 2010) – have uncertain answers. For Gunther Eysenbach and James Till (2001), ethical engagement is predicated on whether or not the observed content can reasonably be considered public by the instigator. While some scholars propose that the public nature of most digital content is unintended (Merriman, 2015), others suggest that these public outcomes are closer to informal discussions than they are to public announcements (Treadwell, 2014), and others still argue that “under certain regulatory conditions” the academic use of public digital content “may not meet the criteria of research involving human subjects” (Fiesler & Proferes, 2018, p. 1). Given the range of opinions, it is not surprising that debates over best practice digital ethics are ongoing (Flick, 2016; Markham & Buchanan, 2015; Mauthner, 2012).

Professional organisations such as the Association of Internet Researchers (Markham & Buchanan, 2012) therefore recommend a “case-based, inductive approach” (Tiidenberg, 2018, p. 675) as opposed to providing specific guidelines. In this approach, the researcher is required to take on a “more proactive role in determining how best – on a case-by-case basis – to enact beneficence, justice, and respect for persons” (Markham & Buchanan, 2015, p. 8). Ethical decision-making thus becomes a “deliberative process”
(Tiidenberg, 2018, p. 675) that occurs throughout the research: from design, to field work, to analysis, and extending into the write-up.

In designing this research, I set out to examine the intersection of the cultural sector with barriers to digital participation. I felt comfortable that informed consent had been received from each cultural platform through the process of establishing our research partnerships. In agreeing to participate and host the research, each cultural platform provided consent for data collection. In the context of Desert Mob 2017, art centre managers who participated directly in the research through semi-structured interviews provided informed consent on the behalf of the art centre. Through consultation with Desart, the peak agency for remote Central Australian Aboriginal art centres, it was decided that public digital platforms used by art centres such as Instagram – even those not directly participating in the research and thus not providing informed consent – could be included within the research due to their public nature. As Philip, Desart’s CEO, described: “their posts are in the public domain” (Watkins, personal communication, August 21, 2017). Likewise, while both the Lara and Wangaratta RSLs provided informed consent for their direct involvement in the research, community collecting-organisations that used Victorian Collections outside these two organisations did not. However, given that using Victorian Collections also came with a choice as to whether the organisation’s collections were displayed publicly or not, it was decided that public collections were likewise within the public domain and could be included within the research.

As I conducted the research, however, it became clear that examining the interactions that occurred between the public cultural platform and private individuals was critical for understanding whether and how barriers to digital participation impinged upon the
formation of publics. While my research partners and I felt confident that comments made by private individuals on the public posts of public accounts could not reasonably be considered private, nor could they reasonably be considered public. Or at least, the private individuals might not reasonably conclude that their comments would be the subject of academic research. Furthermore, given the specific contexts of this research, if these individuals did confront barriers to digital participation, it seemed unreasonable to expect that they have awareness of the public nature of their digital practices. Such concerns about participation and consent were articulated throughout my data collection. In each field site, research participants described the practices of private individuals, following such anecdotes with a request that I anonymise the example. Guided by my ethics of care, I followed the wishes of my participants, and discuss such anecdotes in the aggregate where possible, and anonymise any that are discussed individually.

Taken cumulatively, this thesis advocates for a research practice that engages with what is readily observable or that you are invited to observe, rather than accessed via intervention or intrusion. The ethical considerations of this research, and the mechanisms they triggered thus informed the methods used (Markham, 2006). Ethnographic methods were used not to reveal secrets or sensitive information, but rather to document the public practices enacted on the behalf of, and in relation to, public cultural platforms. However, as John Postill (2008) notes, studying digital media fundamentally presents a “set of logistic, methodological and conceptual challenges” (p. 414; see also Kozinets, Dolbec, & Earley, 2014). To resolve these, I developed a media ecologies (Fuller, 2005) framework comprised of digital and non-digital platforms, practices, and publics (McCosker, 2016).
While I take the notion of media ecologies from media studies, metaphors of ecologies and ecosystems have also been used within the cultural sector. Genevieve Bell (2002), for example, describes museums in terms of “cultural ecologies” (p. 4), while Ron Wakkary and Dale Evernden (2005) describe the museum as an ecology. Ross Parry and colleagues (2018) borrow from “employment studies scholarship” to conceptualise “museum digital skills as an ‘ecosystem’” (p. np; see also Bowen & Giannini, 2019, p. 552), Kajsa Hartig (2018) describes a “museum ecosystem” (p. np) that is both digital and non-digital, and Jenny Kidd (2018) suggests that the contemporary museum visitor exists within a broad media ecology. In the next section, I detail the literature this media ecologies framework was built upon before turning to define each component: platforms, practices, and publics.

Developing a media ecologies framework

Media ecology is a “slippery term” (Slayton, 2005, p. x), and this slipperiness is emphasised by “the overtones it acquires in its use by different authors” (de Seta, 2015, p. 119). Developing from linear systems thinking and theoretical ecosystems (Scolari, 2012), media ecology research seeks to acknowledge the contemporary multi-modal or polymedia environment (Madianou & Miller, 2012; Miller et al., 2016). In this context, communicative practices are “distributed across multiple sites” (Baym, 2007, p. np) resulting in symbiotic relationships between “people and the media technologies they create and use” (Lum, 2014, p. 137). Using a media ecology framework thus facilitates an understanding of media that goes beyond examining communicative practices in isolation (Miller et al., 2016, p. 4), to encompass their relationship to other media and their context (Benkler, 2006; Coleman, 2010; Hearn & Foth, 2007). As Nick Couldry and colleagues (2014) argue, media and their associated infrastructures do not exist in a vacuum but
rather are “constituted through social relations and practices” (p. 616). Contemporary media ecology research thus examines the contexts in which communication processes occur to illuminate not only the relationships amongst media, but “on another level, between media and the various forces in society” (Lum, 2000, p. 1).

This research draws primarily on Matthew Fuller’s (2005) notion of media ecologies (in the plural) to align my discussion with what Michael Goddard (2011) describes as an “ecological as opposed to environmental conception of media ecologies” (p. 8). According to Fuller (2005), the environmental approach – media ecology, singular – implies “there has passed, or that there will be reached, a state of equilibrium: that there is a resilient and harmonic balance to be achieved with some ingenious and beneficent mix of media” (p. 4; see also Goddard, 2011, pp. 7-8). In contrast, the ecological approach “focus[es] more on dynamic systems in which any one part is always multiply connected, acting by virtue of these connections and always variable” (Fuller, 2005, p. 4). These connections are constantly articulated and re-configured through the “massive and dynamic” (Fuller, 2005, p. 2), “radically contingent … prone to change” (Goddard & Parikka, 2011, p. 1), and inherently unstable (Fuller, 2005; de Seta, 2015) interactions that occur between the constituent components (de Seta, 2015, p. 119, 122). In the context of this thesis, I understand these components as digital and non-digital platforms, practices, and publics (McCosker, 2016).

In Table 1, I offer a visualisation of how the media ecologies’ components interact. In doing so, I reduce a symbiotic and iterative process to a one-dimensional, one-way diagram for the sake of clarity.
As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, I treat each of my field sites as cultural platforms. I define these through bringing together a combination of museum and media studies literature. In order to do this, I specifically follow the established tradition of examining cultural institutions (such as museums) as media (Henning, 2006; Kelly, 2013; Kidd, 2014; Parry, 2007; Russo, 2012). I particularly draw on Nancy Proctor’s (2010) extension of this tradition, in which she conceptualises the museum as a platform that is distributed across multiple digital and non-digital platforms.

From media studies, I draw on literature that conceives of platforms as the non-digital and digital modes by which people enact communicative practices that afford sociality (Geismar, 2012; Wakeford, 1999, 2003; see also Van Dijck’s, 2013, discussion of ‘connective’ media, which draws on Actor Network Theory by Latour, 2005, and Political Economy concepts from Castells, 2009). As Tarleton Gillespie (2010) explains, “‘platforms’ are ‘platforms’ not necessarily because they allow code to be written or run, but because they afford an opportunity to communicate [and] interact” (p. 351).

When taken together, these literatures facilitate an approach to ‘holders’ of cultural content that allows analysis to move beyond both disciplinary and sectoral boundaries.
That is, the digital and non-digital platforms that comprise an annual art festival can be discussed in the same breath as the digital and non-digital platforms deployed by community collecting organisations such as the Lara RSL. In the context of the cultural platform, then, these non-digital opportunities to “communicate [and] interact” (Gillespie, 2010, p. 351) are enhanced by digital platforms such as Instagram through their capacity “to foster social connectivity and re-encounter experiences beyond the museum walls” (Stuedahl & Lowe, 2013, p. 305).

Platforms are thus digital websites or applications such as Facebook or Instagram as well as the non-digital gallery in which Desert Mob 2017 was hung, or the non-digital heritage-listed building in which the Lara RSL was situated, and the Veterans Heritage Project delivered. However, beyond just identifying and analysing these platforms, it is also important to question how they are used.

Practices
Practices are how people and publics (defined below) access and use platforms. To understand this access and use, I adopt a practice theory approach. Although practice theory research is often criticised for failing “to make clear just what … practices are” (Barnes, 2001, p. 18), these critiques miss the utility of such an open approach. Given my interest in two very different field sites, there was little sense in articulating a set of practices likely to occur across both (Kennedy, Meese, & van der Nagel, 2016, p. 147). Further, as discussed in Chapter One, digital participation is not predicated on a static skill set (Walton et al., 2013) but rather requires a repertoire of practices that enable individuals to “use information critically, creatively and responsibly” (Hughes et al., 2017, p. 185). I therefore piece together an understanding of practices that draws from both media and museum studies.
From a media studies perspective, a practice approach forms part of a longer trajectory of examining domestic practices in relation to media (Bakardjieva, 2005; Silverstone, 1994; Silverstone, Hirsch & Morley, 1992). Becoming increasingly prevalent over the past two decades (see, for example, Bräuchler & Postill, 2010; Couldry, 2004), a practice approach is concerned with “what, quite simply, are people doing in relation to media?” (Couldry, 2010, p. 39). In turn, although the work undertaken within the cultural sector is often referred to using the term ‘practice’ (think, for example, of ‘museum practice’), a practice theory approach to the sector has been developed only relatively recently. Conal McCarthy (2015), for example, draws on work by social theorists who describe a practice as a set of actions as well as a “nexus of doings and sayings” (Schatzki, 1996, p. 89) to notice “how the everyday doings and sayings of professionals in museums is not simply a codified activity but a constantly evolving, lived phenomenon” (McCarthy, 2015, p. lvi).

I link each of these approaches together by following McCarthy’s (2015) use of Gerard Corsane’s (2005) proposal that museum work is comprised of “processes of meaning making” (p. 2), which I use to suggest that museum work be understood as a practice of communication (McCarthy, 2015, p. xxxv). In doing so, I align my conceptual framework with my approach to digital participation.

Given my interest in barriers to digital participation, my framework needed to encompass both use and non-use (practices as well as their absence). This created a methodological sticking point. As Nancy Van House (2015) asks, “how can we understand use and non-use, when the latter is, by definition, non-existent?” (p. np). To resolve this, I worked to differentiate between barriers and agency. While in some cases practices were not enacted because of barriers participation, in others they were absent out of choice. As I discuss in Chapter Four, although some Desert Mob 2017 artists had personal Instagram accounts, public-facing practices were enacted via the art centre-specific platforms. Likewise, as
explained in Chapter Six, Elizabeth (a Lara RSL member) chose to enact digital practices in the context of the Veterans Heritage Project, but not her private life. Digital participation in these contexts was thus “not only a matter of individual choice but a socially situated assessment of what will work and what will not” (Rennie et al., 2019, p. 115; see also Eynon & Helsper, 2010; Malde & Kennedy, 2018). My understanding of practices therefore encompasses the agency of users in choosing when to use digital or non-digital practices, and in choosing which contexts these practices were used.

If, as Kelty (2013) explains, “participation in a public is at some level structured by ‘platforms’” (p. 25), then it is the practices conducted on platforms that create publics.

Publics

Although the cultural sector has “conceptualised the people on their premises” (Runnel & Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt & Runnell, 2012, p. 331) through a variety of terms ranging from prosumers (Toffler, 1980), to produsers (Bruns, 2006), to customers (Peacock & Brownbill, 2007), and beyond, I am particularly interested in their collective form, which I conceive of as publics. However, as boyd (2010) reminds us, the notion of publics is conceptually messy as it is used by “different disciplines to signal different concepts” (p. 40). This messiness extended into my field sites: research participants used an array of terms, often referring to ‘audiences’, ‘visitors’, or ‘users’ to describe what I understand as publics.7 Embracing this messiness, as boyd (2008) does, is useful “because the concepts addressed by ‘public’ are interconnected” (p. 21), and sometimes interchangeable. For example, Sonia Livingstone (2005) argues, ‘publics’ can be ‘audiences’, and ‘audiences’ can be ‘publics’, and as John Postill (2015) suggests,

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7 boyd describes a similar experience in her doctoral research: “during my interviews, I found that teens also struggle to define this term and rely on multiple meanings to approach a definition from different angles” (2008, p. 16).
“sociality may take on plural forms even within a single universe of practice” (p. 61).

Similarly, for audience studies scholar Patricia Gillard (2000), “there is no such thing as a mass audience, ‘audiences’ are multiple” (p. 123). Taking, as Livingstone (2005, p. 11) does, that audiences can be publics, I follow Gillard (2000) to identify multiple cultural platform-based publics. Cultural platforms thus do not correspond with singular publics, “but rather function as social venues” (Parks, 2010, p. 105) around which many publics may or may not form. The multiple publics that I observed were “not always distinct from one another, and there [were] often smaller publics inside broader publics” (boyd, 2008, p. 18). Individuals were involved with multiple publics and “move[d] between them fluidly” (boyd, 2008, p. 18).

Following boyd (2010), I do not seek to re-draw conceptual lines over what does or does not constitute a public but rather to identify key conceptual points that are useful for my research. I also draw from literature that deals with notions of sociality more broadly as dictated by my empirical data, using these studies to focus in on concepts such as audiences, and communities of practice. In the context of this research, cultural platform-based publics were social groups (Kemmis et al., 2014), that formed around media (Baym, 2015; Hartley, 2012; Hartley and Potts, 2014; Jenkins and Carpentier, 2013; Miller et al., 2016; Rennie & Hartley, 2004; Papacharissi, 2002, 2009) – media in this case being platforms and inclusive of the museum as per Proctor (2010). In addition, I understand digital, or online, publics as what Victoria Bernal (2014) describes as networked forms of community or what Mizuko Ito (2008), and boyd (2008) have termed ‘networked publics’.

According to boyd (2007, 2010), networked publics are characterised by four criteria: persistency, searchability, replicability, and the presence of an invisible audience.
Networked publics are “not just publics networked together, but … publics that have been transformed by networked media, its properties and its potential” (boyd, 2010, p. 42). Although the notion of networked publics provides a useful set of criteria for examining digital sociality, it does not deal with non-digital contexts. And, in the digitally disparate contexts this thesis deals with, the restructuring of publics that networked platforms have enabled was not always afforded by the digital participation available to each cultural platform. I thus follow Jason Potts and John Hartley (2014) to understand both digital and non-digital publics as demes: knowledge communities, or forms of social affiliation and identification that form around “culturally made meaningful identities” (p. 41) through the innately human trait of storytelling or narrative building. According to Hartley and Potts (2014), such narrative building produces two publics: ‘we’ groups (comprised of the tellers of the narrative), and ‘they’ groups (comprised of people to whom the narrative is told). In this research, I extend Hartley and Potts’ (2014) analysis by identifying a third public: ‘the told about’, comprised of people who are the subject of such narratives.

Over the following chapters, I differentiate between different forms of cultural platform-based publics through examining the practices they each enacted (Kelly & Russo, 2008). Specifically, I distinguish between enactive and receptive publics. Enactive publics were typically located within the cultural platform, and enacted digital and non-digital practices on the behalf of the cultural platform. Receptive publics, on the other hand, received these practices. Importantly, as Henry Jenkins (2006) explains, receptive publics (which he understands as audiences) are not necessarily passive. Kidd (2014) similarly argues that although “much has been made of the shift from ‘passivity’ to ‘activity’ in participatory culture”, such a binary analysis is problematic (p. 10). Drawing on work by Jacques Rancière (2009), Kidd (2014) points out that spectatorship can be as participatory
a practice as enacting that which is being viewed (pp. 10-11). And, as Michel de Certeau (1984) argues, the production and consumption of culture is, or at least can be, intimately connected. Ito (2008) extends this notion, reconfiguring receptive publics as enactive reactors, (re)makers and (re)distributors (p. 3). Indeed, Ito (2008) argues that this encompassing of action is precisely what the term publics offers (in contrast to audience or consumer): “rather than assum[ing] that everyday media engagement is passive or consumptive, the term publics foregrounds a more engaged stance” (p. 3).

However, as I discuss in greater depth in relation to each cultural platform in Chapters Four and Six, in the ‘doing’ of this research I did not directly engage with members of these receptive publics. As such, I draw on Benedict Anderson's (1983/2006) notion of an imagined community to understand receptive publics as they were perceived by members of the enactive public. That is, as Anatoliy Gruzd, Barry Wellman and Yuri Takhteyv (2011) argue in applying Anderson's (1983/2006) theory to Twitter, when Twitter users “write a message, they are writing for their intended audience” of followers (p. 1298). And, as Amelia Wong (2015) explains, “museums use social media to create and imagine community online” (p. 303; see also Litt & Hargittai, 2016). Accordingly, I detail how each cultural platform “create[d] and imagine[d]” (Wong, 2015, p. 303) their publics through digital participation. This approach to understanding imagined receptive publics is consistent with my approach to understanding (digital) participation as an emic, or vernacular, undertaking, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Enactive and receptive publics were spatially and temporally determined. As Gillard (2000) demonstrates, cultural platform-based publics “are created around contents … brought into being by institutions and by the places, media and contents they produce” (p. 124). For example, the non-digital public comprised of attendees at Desert Mob’s opening weekend
existed only during that opening weekend. Likewise, the non-digital public comprised of representatives from the Victorian Government’s Veterans Branch came in, and out, of involvement with the Veterans Heritage Project based on funding and reporting cycles.

There were also enactive and receptive publics that were hidden or silenced. As Gillard (2000) explains, “some [publics] … are deliberately ignored, others prized. Certainly, some … are more visible than others” (p. 126). As I argue in Chapter Four, the Aboriginal artists whose work was exhibited at Desert Mob 2017 were configured as a highly visible digital public, but this visibility was not the result of digital practices they enacted. Similarly, as I discuss in Chapter Six, a public comprised of Victorian Collections consumers was restricted in part by the digital capacities of the cataloguing public. Such hidden or restricted participation was due to the barriers to digital participation present in each field site. As such, in the next section, I define the typology of three barriers to participation that this research develops.

Making barriers to participation visible

The media ecologies we exist within “specify what we can do and what we cannot” (Scolari, 2012, p. 207; see also Benkler, 2006; Coleman, 2010; Couldry et al., 2014). As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, I follow Parry’s (2007) use of McLuhan’s (1964) reminder that each media contains “personal and social consequences” (p. 1) to understand such consequences as barriers to participation. Understanding museums as cultural platforms thus facilitates the thinking through of inclusive and accessible (and, conversely, exclusive) possibilities. Although digital participation might enable a more broadly accessible cultural sector through the mediation of distance and the ‘unlocking’ of cultural collections, those publics confronting barriers to digital participation may yet remain disconnected.
While scholars have taken a range of approaches in working to understanding “what we cannot” do (Scolari, 2012, p. 207; see, for example, Burrell, 2011; Larkin, 2008; Wyatt, Thomas, & Terranova, 2002), my own approach involves pairing my media ecologies framework with a typology of three barriers to digital participation: non-digital, digital, and postdigital. I define non-digital and digital barriers through drawing on the digital participation literature discussed in Chapter One. Non-digital barriers are understood in relation to access (and thus aligned with first-level digital divide studies), while digital barriers are understood through second-level digital divide literature around questions of use and literacies. Postdigital barriers, however, are defined through borrowing Parry’s (2013) notion of the postdigital museum: a cultural institution in which the distinction between digital and non-digital has been negated.

My pairing of Fuller’s (2005) notion of media ecologies with a conceptual understanding of postdigital contexts borrows from Gabriele de Seta’s (2015) doctoral work on practices of vernacular creativity in China. As de Seta (2015) explains, “the concept of postdigital media emphasises the ubiquity and pervasivity of a wide range of convergent communication technologies in the context of everyday life” (p. 119). In turn, Fuller’s (2005) understanding of media ecologies “provides the depth to follow how these media are articulated and configured by the interaction between their affordances and the practices of users” (de Seta, 2015, p. 119; for other approaches that use this pairing, but do not explicate the connections between the two, see Apperley, Jayemane, & Nansen, 2016; or Contreras-Koterbay & Mirocha, 2016).

While I draw on Parry’s (2013) use of postdigital within museum studies, the concept is not derived from that field. Partly inspired by Nicholas Negroponte’s (1998) declaration that “the digital revolution is over” (p. np), postdigital was initially used to describe ‘glitch aesthetics’
in contemporary electronic music (Andrews, 2002; Cascone, 2000; Pepperell & Punt, 2000). The term has since been appropriated by numerous disciplines: from the “digital humanities, software studies, digital studies … [to] media archaeology” (Taffel, 2016, p. 326). Today, postdigital is widely used to define “a state in which the disruption brought upon by digital [media] has already occurred” (Cramer, 2014, p. 12; see also Snodgrass, 2014).

Importantly, the concept of a postdigital museum does not suppose that full adoption or universal acceptance of digital technologies has occurred (Parry, 2013, p. 36), but rather suggests that within the contemporary cultural sector, digital is no longer “emergent and technologically nascent … [but] has become normative” (p. 36; see also Bowen & Giannini, 2019, p. 561; Cramer, 2014, pp. 3-4; Snodgrass, 2014, pp. 9-10; Taffel, 2016, p. 329). Accordingly, although the distinction between digital and non-digital remained evident in both Desert Mob 2017 and Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project, each cultural platform existed within the context of a postdigital cultural sector in which digital participation was expected. In articulating a policy narrative that requires the cultural sector to mediate distance and unlock cultural collections via digital participation, Creative Nation (Department of Communications and the Arts, 1994) and Creative Australia (Australian Government, 2013) make a postdigital assumption that this is possible by all people and all places. As I demonstrate across the following chapters, this was not always the case, and had significant implications for the inclusivity and accessibility of cultural platforms’ responses to these policy narratives.

In Table 2, I demonstrate how a barrier to digital participation (whether non-digital, digital, or postdigital) might disrupt the processes of articulation between the components of platforms, practices, and publics that constitute my media ecologies framework.
Table 2: Visualising a barrier between the media ecologies’ components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Articulation</th>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Postdigital Barrier to Participation</th>
<th>Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>•••••</td>
<td>Re-sharing user-generated content</td>
<td>Assumes non-digital publics post content to Instagram; because they do not, there is nothing to re-share.</td>
<td>Instagram followers have nothing to follow or respond to.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over the following chapters, I identify and locate these barriers to digital participation within the media ecologies of the two cultural platforms this thesis engages with. Applying the media ecologies framework to each field site encouraged me to consider each element as an active construct in isolation as well as part of an interrelated whole. Through examining the digital and non-digital platforms these cultural platforms developed and used, the practices that were or were not enacted on them, and the publics that formed or did not as a result, I determined whether (and, if so, how) non-digital, digital, and postdigital barriers were impinging on their digital participation.

In the ‘doing’ of this research, these conceptual frameworks were operationalised via multiple methods: digital and non-digital ethnographic techniques of participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and the collection and analysis of existing organisational data. In the next section, I detail these methods broadly, before identifying how my application differed in each field site, and outlining the data that resulted.
Multiple methods

Developed in alignment with my conceptual approach as well as my understanding of the field as a network (Burrell, 2009; discussed below), multiple methods were used in response to Riitta Perälä’s (2014) suggestion that “different methods assist in the collection of rich data from several viewpoints” (p. 277). I was also informed by Bill Gillham’s (2000) reminder that “no one kind or source of evidence is likely to be sufficient … on its own” (p. 2). I thus followed the example of rapid ethnographers such as James Beebe (1995) and David Millen (2000) to develop iterative modes of gathering data. Ethnographic data was triangulated via collection and analysis of organisational records, and follow up interviews were conducted where possible, during which tentative analysis was fed back to participants and either expanded on and enriched, or clarified and re-developed.

Although this research is situated at the intersection of museum studies and digital participation literature specifically, and media studies more broadly, I drew primarily from media studies methods. Ethnographic participant observation and semi-structured interviews were chosen because they provide a useful toolkit for examining everyday practices and resulting sociality (Burrell, 2009; Madden, 2010). Equivalent digital methods were developed by following the work of scholars such as boyd (2007, 2008, 2010), John Postill and Sarah Pink (2012), and Daniel Miller and colleagues (2016). Organisational data and records were collected and analysed to gain access to the institutional and structural understandings and decisions that underpinned the digital and non-digital contexts of each field site. These methods have been used successfully in similar studies: participant observation and interviews have been used to understand digital experiences since the 1990s (Baym, 1995), while archival research methods (similar to my repurposing of existing organisational data and records), interviews and
participant observation have been usefully employed by those such as Dyson and Brady (2013) to examine technology use in contexts where barriers to digital participation were present.

Although examining digital participation, I chose not to use survey methods which is a dominant method in this field (see, for example, the Australian Digital Inclusion Index, Thomas et al., 2018). Conducting survey delivery in my field sites would have been problematic for a number of reasons. As noted by Rennie and colleagues (2016), sample surveys typically bypass remote Aboriginal residents due to the “lack of landlines (generally used to administer surveys), as well as language and cultural barriers” (p. 54; see also Donner, 2008, pp. 23-4). Because of this, delivery would have been difficult in the context of Desert Mob 2017. Further, given the relatively small size and specificity of each field site, it is unlikely that surveys would have produced statistically significant evidence.

Likewise, although investigating digital participation, I used ethnographic methods rather than ‘big data’-based digital humanities methods. This decision was made in response to both my research aims and objectives as well as the specific field sites I was working with. While some of the methods deployed (discussed below) could have been automated, I was committed to responding to Rogers’ (2013) call for researchers to “reorient the field of internet-related research by studying and repurposing … the methods of the medium … to think along with them” (p. 1; see also Pink et al., 2016). Given that each of my field sites were likely to confront barriers to digital participation, it was considered unlikely they would be, for example, writing scripts to mine data from

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8 The Australian Digital Inclusion Index Supplementary Survey delivered in Ali Curung (Thomas et al., 2018) discussed in Chapter One provides an important exception to this rule.
Instagram. Accordingly, I worked to re-purpose the tools, data and insights each cultural platform could already access.

However, “think[ing] along” (Rogers, 2013, p. 1) with each of my field sites had consequences. Firstly, it revealed some of the barriers to digital participation within each field site. For example, research partners and participants were invited to share internal datasets (such as Facebook or Instagram Insights, or Google Analytics), but not all were aware that these existed. Indeed, it was not until our interview when one art centre manager (ACM9, personal communication, September 15, 2017) realised this was possible:

Holcombe-James: Do you have your Instagram account set up to receive [Instagram] Insights?

ACM9: I have a feeling it isn’t because I haven’t seen any insights. If it is, how are they delivered to you?

Holcombe-James: When you go to your Instagram page, up the top along the buttons where the settings are, you get an extra button.

ACM9: I’d have to check that. What’s the advantage of it? Being able to see who’s engaging with you?

Holcombe-James: It gives you data around demographics. So, gender split, where they’re based geographically …

ACM9: That would be super interesting. Can you change your account?

Holcombe-James: Yeah. You just have to connect it to your Facebook page. Essentially, you just click on and it will flick across [to a business account].

ACM9: Okay. So, you go up to the three dots …
Holcombe-James: Hold on, I’ll just get mine open. Yeah, so, up to the three dots, and then down to switch to business profile.

ACM9: Oh, yeah.

Holcombe-James: And then you keep going across and it will say, ‘connect to Facebook’.

ACM9: Oh, switch to business profile. Welcome to Instagram Business. Cool. Continue ... Continue ... So, we are connected. ‘Reach your customers’ ... ‘Get new contact options’ ... Oh my gosh. You’ve revolutionised this. Rather than me answering your questions, you’ve answered mine. I think that worked. This is insane.

Secondly, “think[ing] along” (Rogers, 2013, p. 1) with the cultural platforms revealed internal attitudes towards digital participation. For example, although Victorian Collections staff were technically able to access all public comments made since the cultural platform’s launch in 2009, they were not comfortable with doing so, feeling this would go beyond the privacy expectations of their publics.

Having described my research approach, I now discuss each of my methods in detail. I begin by locating my use of ethnography within a theoretical trajectory.

**Digital and non-digital ethnography: In theory**

Ethnography is comprised of a “complex of epistemological framings, methodological techniques and writing practices” (Burrell, 2009, p. 1). With intellectual roots extending back to cultural anthropology (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Geertz, 1973; Malinowski, 1922), ethnographic research provides ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) of everyday life.
and social practices (Burrell, 2009; Whitehead, 2005) through locating the researcher with the researched in a spatially defined field site (Madden, 2010, p. 16). As Raymond Madden (2010) describes, ethnography is “description and analysis coming together to answer questions and build theories” (p. 17).

Updated in the mid-1990s with the understanding that the field is constructed, rather than discovered (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997), ethnographic investigations were expanded into multi-sited inquiries (Green, 1999; Marcus, 1995), the study of media (Ginsburg, 1995, 1999) and further, to the study of digital and social media (Baym, 1993; Kozinets, 2010; Kozinets et al., 2014; Miller & Slater, 2000). Importantly, early ethnographic studies of digital media examined digital and non-digital contexts separately (see, for example, Bruckman & Resnick, 1995; Soukup, 2006). While valuable, this work missed how people and publics moved between digital and non-digital contexts. In order to account for these movements in each of my field sites, I followed Jenna Burrell (2009) to understand the field as a “network comprised of fixed and moving points including spaces, people and objects” (p. 189), using this understanding to relate digital and non-digital sites to one another (boyd, 2008, pp. 54-5).

Approaching each field site as a network enabled me to examine the communicative practices of each cultural platform as they occurred across both digital and non-digital platforms. In addition, this ensured digital platforms were not privileged in my analysis over their non-digital counterparts, or vice versa. Each cultural platform (and therefore each field site) was multi-sited – that is, comprised of multiple platforms – that existed on a relational network, each identified in relation to the cultural platform. In the next section, I discuss what this looked like in practice.
Digital and non-digital ethnography: In practice
I was a digital and non-digital participant observer in each field site, following each cultural platform across their digital and non-digital platforms to understand their practices as, how, when, and where they were enacted. Sometimes this meant face-to-face interviews and sitting in non-digital platforms such as galleries or RSLs, while at other times this meant conducting interviews via Facetime or phone and following the cultural platform on Instagram or Facebook. My methods thus overlapped in the same way the field sites did. Platforms, practices, and publics occurred across digital and non-digital contexts, and I oscillated between field notes and screenshots.

Semi-structured interviews
Examining cultural platform-based digital participation required research participants to remember and make visible the often-mundane practices that made up their roles. Semi-structured interviews were used due to their utility for providing insight into both practices and the discourses surrounding those practices (Flick, 2014). However, semi-structured interviews are dependent on the participant’s subjective recollections, and thus provide data “only about a particular research conversation that occurred at a particular time and place” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 1). As a result, data generated from these semi-structured interviews provided insight only into how that particular participant understood their own practices in relation to the cultural platform at that particular point in time. Accordingly, although the production of such data is aligned with my approach to emic, or vernacular, understandings of digital participation, in order to verify the resulting insights, interview data was augmented by participant observation as well as collection and analysis of organisational data and records.
Prior to entering the field, I conducted scoping interviews with key stakeholders in the Australian cultural sector. These were invaluable for refining not only my interview questions but also the focus of my research, and in ensuring my orientation towards industry. I am indebted to their influence on my work. Once in the field, possible interview participants were over 18 years of age and either: (1) within the cultural platform, (2) directly connected to the cultural platform, (3) surrounding the cultural platform, or (4) outside the cultural platform but within the cultural sector. Participants were identified in partnership with my research partners: those within the cultural platform pointed me towards those without. Across the two field sites, and inclusive of interviews with key sector stakeholders, 67 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 57 participants (accounting for 10 follow up interviews with key participants).

With permission, interviews were audio recorded. As noted above, although guiding questions (included as Appendix D) were developed, questions were asked in the order that each interview required rather than in the order written. I personally transcribed each as soon as practical after completion and returned the full transcript to the participant for approval. I then analysed the data thematically. While thematic analysis is a widely used method of analysis due to its flexibility, Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006) argue researchers must make clear “what they are doing and why, and include the often-omitted ‘how’ they did their analysis” (p. 79). I conducted an initial round of deductive thematic analysis, during which I re-grouped the data according to the aspect of the framework it was associated with. I then embarked on an additional inductive process, coding, generating, reviewing and defining themes.
Participant observation

Participant observation is a mode of generating data that involves the researcher being directly in the field, “so that they can experience and observe at first hand a range of dimensions in and of that setting” (Mason, 2017, p. 84). As Jennifer Mason (2017) notes, “not all knowledge is … articulable, recountable or constructable in an interview” (p. 85). Participant observation thus offers an opportunity for collecting more ephemeral data.

Non-digital participant observation involved being in the Araluen galleries and observing visitors, or being at the Lara RSL and participating in Victorian Collections’ cataloguing workshops. In contrast, digital participant observation involved following the cultural platforms on social media platforms, such as Instagram, and scrolling through their feeds, or signing up to receive newsletters from Victorian Collections. I was made an administrator on Facebook and Instagram pages associated with Desert Mob, and provided with a Victorian Collections’ log in. With permission I was able to access the data these platforms generated (such as Facebook Analytics and Instagram Insights), as well as to catalogue collection items alongside the Veterans Heritage Project participants at the Lara RSL.

Background participants were comprised of individuals who could reasonably be assumed to be over 18 and entered into the cultural platform but did not directly participate in the research. As my time in each field site continued, background participants often became known to me and, in some instances, became directly relevant to the thesis. At this point, they were invited to participate through a semi-structured interview. In this way, the application of my research methods was predicated on, and reflective of, the observed participation of these individuals. In relation to Desert Mob
2017, these background participants were often opening night attendees, some of whom included art centre managers who later formally participated in the research. During the Veterans Heritage Project, background participants typically constituted Lara RSL members who visited during workshops and interacted but did not participate, as well as workshop participants from neighbouring cultural platforms such as the Lara Heritage and Historical Inc [sic].

Collection and analysis of organisational data and records

Primary data collected through the above methods was triangulated via collection and analysis of existing organisational records. In doing so, I continued to “think along with” (Rogers, 2013, p. 1) each cultural platform. By repurposing internal data, I make an argument in this thesis that is predicated on methods and means that each cultural platform had pre-existing access to. In relation to Desert Mob, I was granted access to various existing internal datasets, such as the deidentified residential postcodes of visitors to Desert Mob exhibitions since 2010, and the destination postcodes of art sold during these exhibitions. Through browsing the Victorian Collections’ catalogue, I documented the digital practices enacted by community collecting-organisations across Victoria.

Having described each of my methods, I now detail how these were used and the data they produced. I discuss each field site separately because this thesis does not offer a comparative study, but rather brings the two very different field sites together through acknowledging their experience of barriers to digital participation. My methods were thus asynchronous: employed as, when, and how required.
Desert Mob 2017: Data

I officially entered the digital field on receipt of ethics approval and remained there until I analysed and wrote up my findings. Non-digitally, I was in the Desert Mob field for the six weeks leading up to, and including, Desert Mob Weekend: opening night (Thursday evening), the Symposium (Friday), and the MarketPlace (Saturday). Accordingly, although the Desert Mob exhibition remained on display for the weeks following my departure, and there were ‘unofficial’ platforms programmed to coincide with both opening weekend and the extended exhibition, these fell outside the scope of the thesis.9 Table 3 visualises the application of my media ecologies framework to this field site.

Based in the Araluen Cultural Precinct offices three days per week, I worked directly with Lisa-Marie, the Media and Communications Manager, fulfilling various tasks such as researching and developing social media content. When not in the office, I spent time in the galleries observing visitors as well as interviewing staff members and key stakeholders at Araluen, Desart, and the Alice Springs cultural sector more broadly.

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9 For example, the Desart Artworkers Photography Prize, a “photographic exhibition that aims to encourage artists and art centre staff … to document their communities and their art using digital technology” (Raja, 2012, p. 92), has been held concurrently since Desert Mob 2012. Additionally, the “major galleries and town-based art centres program their exhibitions and major projects to coincide with … [Desert Mob weekend], tailoring them to the differing markets each draws inland” (Köthe, 2014, p. 46).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platforms</th>
<th>Practices</th>
<th>Publics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desert Mob 2017</td>
<td>Hanging the exhibition</td>
<td>Enactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Opening Night</td>
<td>Visiting the exhibition</td>
<td>• Araluen staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Symposium</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Desart staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• MarketPlace</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Art centre managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Catalogue</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Artists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 x art centres</td>
<td>Speaking to curators and artists</td>
<td>• Opening night attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Araluen Cultural Precinct</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Purchasers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Three galleries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Yayes Café</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cinema/Theatre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desart</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promoting the event</td>
<td>Enactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital</td>
<td>Purchasing art</td>
<td>• Art centre managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desert Mob 2017</td>
<td>Posting to social media sites</td>
<td>• Araluen staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Online gallery</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Desart staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Art centre managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Araluen Cultural Precinct</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Artists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Desert Mob</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Opening night attendees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Desart</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Purchasers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Art centres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Araluen Cultural Precinct</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Desert Mob</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Desart</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Art Centres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Araluen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Desart</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WI-FI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uploading photos</td>
<td>Enactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Art centre managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Araluen staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Desart staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>• Art centre managers</td>
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<td>• Opening night attendees</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Purchasers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Facebook/Instagram followers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Artists</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the 35 Desart member art centres (Desart, 2019), 28 participated in Desert Mob 2017. This cohort can be segmented in a number of ways. Desart categorises each art centre by location within one of five Central Australian regions: Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) South, Barkly, Central Desert, Ngaanyatjara West, and North West (see Table 4).

Table 4: Segmenting Desart member art centres by region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Number of Desart member centres</th>
<th>Number of Desert Mob 2017 participating centres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APY South</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barkly</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Desert</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngaanyatjarra West</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Six of the 28 Desert Mob 2017 participating art centres were located in what is considered remote Australia, while 22 were from very remote communities (Australian Department of Health, n.d., see Table 5). This division, however, is complicated by some of the art centre models. The Papunya Tula art centre, for example, is located in the Todd Mall in Alice Springs and is thus considered remote. But the Papunya Tula artists themselves are based in Kintore, which is a 16-hour drive from Alice Springs,
and considered very remote. Similarly, while the Tjanpi Desert Weavers art centre is in Alice Springs, their artists are located throughout the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Lands. Given that I was interested in digital participation, and this (as I discuss in Chapters Three and Four) was typically enacted by art centre managers rather than artists, I focussed my analysis on the locations of art centres.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remoteness Measure</th>
<th>Number of Desart Member Centres</th>
<th>Number of Desert Mob 2017 Participating Centres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Remote</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13 of the 28 Desert Mob 2017 art centres directly participated in the research via semi-structured interviews (Table 6). The majority of these were conducted over Desert Mob opening weekend in Alice Springs while everyone was in town, although some were conducted prior (with those art centres based in Alice Springs), and others were conducted afterwards via phone. In order to answer how or whether the digital divide’s spatial dynamics influenced the digital participation of the cultural platform as a whole, it was important that art centres located across the spectrum of remoteness participated in the research. I was also conscious of my research partners’ preference that, where possible, the regions were engaged with evenly (Table 7).
Table 6: Demonstrating direct engagement of art centres within the research by remoteness measure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remoteness measure</th>
<th>Number of Desert Mob 2017 participating centres</th>
<th>Directly included within the study via semi-structured interview</th>
<th>% Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Remote</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Demonstrating direct engagement of art centres within the research by region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Number of Desert Mob 2017 participating centres</th>
<th>Directly included within the study via semi-structured interview</th>
<th>% Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APY South</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barkly</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Desert</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngaanyatjarra West</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In both the Ngaanyatjarra West and North West regions, this proved difficult. After Desart introduced me and my research to all art centres via email, I called twice,
following up each call with emails offering to schedule an interview. Given the lack of response from art centres in these regions, I decided to finish recruiting participants. Interviews were conducted until informational redundancy was reached (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Sandelowski, 2008). As a whole, data for the Desert Mob 2017 component of the thesis is derived from semi-structured interviews with 27 participants. It is important to note, however, that in gathering the data that this thesis draws on, I did not speak directly with any artists. This was due to the art centre model, discussed further in Chapter Three. While Aboriginal owned and governed, each art centre employed a manager who was usually non-Indigenous and who typically enacted the digital participation I was most interested in. While in the field, I found artists were disinclined to speak to practices they did not enact. The following discussion is thus derived from the reflections of non-Indigenous staff within both art centres and Araluen, as well as my own non-Indigenous observations. Philip Watkins, CEO of Desart, and member of the Arrernte and Larakia peoples, as well as the Indigenous Desart staff, artists, and arts workers at the 2019 Desart conference provided a much-needed Indigenous perspective on the work. These perspectives were provided through participation in interviews, and processes of reviewing and responding to data and analysis.

As many art centre managers (and thus art centres) chose not to be named in the research, I do not refer to any by name. This is due to the small size of the remote Indigenous art sector and part of an effort to protect the internal confidentiality within the group of participants. I use ‘art centre managers’ to refer to the role generally, and AC (art centre) and ACM (art centre manager) with the number of the participant (for example, AC21 and ACM21) when discussing a specific example or to attribute a direct quote.
Digitally, I followed all those involved in Desert Mob 2017 (Araluen, Desart, Desert Mob, and the art centres) across all existing digital platforms. I spent time tracing the digital practices of each: identifying which platforms were used, the size of the associated publics, and when they were established. As discussed above, I was made administrator on the Araluen, Desart and Desert Mob Facebook and Instagram accounts, and was thus provided access to internal analytics.

I also collected Instagram data from each participating art centre, the Araluen Cultural Precinct, Desart, and the official Desert Mob account. Although automated methods for collecting such data exist, these were not within the existing repertoires of my participants. In line with my commitment to use the methods of the medium (Rogers, 2013) discussed above, I manually described the 2,657 Instagram posts and transcribed the associated captions made in 2017 by Desert Mob participating art centres and Araluen, Desart, and Desert Mob, as well as the accompanying 8,580 comments (discussed further in Chapter Four). Although I restrict my non-digital analysis to the six-weeks in which I was ‘in the field’, I provide an analysis of digital participation enacted throughout the entirety of 2017 to provide context for participation that was specific to Desert Mob.

**Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project: Data**

I entered the Veterans Heritage Project field by accompanying the Victorian Collections staff over four weeks in July 2017 as they delivered the Veterans Heritage Project at the Lara RSL. While I began this time as a participant, by the end I was often called upon to assist. Since the completion of the workshop, the RSL has continued their cataloguing
work every Thursday, and I returned regularly to assist, gauge progress, and catch up.

In Table 8, I demonstrate the application of my media ecologies framework to the field site.

Table 8: Applying the media ecologies framework to Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project at the Lara RSL Sub-Branch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platforms</th>
<th>Practices</th>
<th>Publics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Digital</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria</td>
<td>• Developing (e.g. developing the platform)</td>
<td>Enactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne Museum</td>
<td>• Training (e.g. delivering the Veterans Heritage Project workshops)</td>
<td>• Funders (e.g. the Veterans Branch)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans Heritage Project</td>
<td>• Cataloguing (e.g. choosing an item)</td>
<td>• Developers (e.g. Museums Victoria staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lara RSL</td>
<td>• Promotion (e.g. public talks about the cultural platform)</td>
<td>• Trainers (e.g. Victorian Collections staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laptops</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Cataloguers (e.g. Lara RSL members)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iPads</td>
<td></td>
<td>Receptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telstra dongles (mobile internet connection)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Cataloguers (e.g. Lara RSL members)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Consumers (e.g. Lara RSL visitors)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table continued on following page.
The Victorian Collections’ media ecologies contained a number of platforms that fell outside the scope of this research. Veterans Heritage Project workshops, for example, were often augmented by an additional series of workshops intended to document oral histories. However, since the Lara RSL did not participate in these workshops, they were outside the scope of my research. Likewise, Victorian Collections used additional
digital platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. While the Lara RSL had a Facebook page, they did not use this in relation to their cataloguing work, nor did they interact with the Victorian Collections’ Facebook page. As such, social media also fell outside the scope of this research. Further, Victorian Collections provided cataloguing publics with the option to integrate their collections with Trove, an Australia-wide aggregator of cultural content “from libraries, museums, archives, repositories and other research and collecting organisations big and small” (Trove, n.d., p. np). However, at the time of my research, the Lara RSL chose not to integrate their catalogue. Finally, although the Veterans Heritage Project now has its own website, this had not yet been launched during the time of my research.

Veterans Heritage Project workshop participants were invited to participate directly in the research via semi-structured interviews. I interviewed members from three distinct groups within the Lara RSL to gauge how different members approached digital participation. Interviews with the leadership committee enabled understanding of the RSL’s digital participation from a top-down perspective, while those with Veterans Heritage Project participants were used to examine direct engagement with Victorian Collections as a cultural platform. Additionally, interviews with members who chose not to participate in the Veterans Heritage Project were used to assess the absence of digital participation. Seven Lara RSL members were interviewed, with follow up interviews conducted informally throughout workshops and during return visits.

As discussed in Chapters Five and Six, participating in the Veterans Heritage Project alongside Lara RSL members were members of other local heritage organisations that were interested in learning about Victorian Collections. These participants were made aware of my presence and role as soon as practical and invited to participate directly in
the research or to opt out. As a result, I interviewed four members of the Lara Heritage and Historical Inc. I also interviewed a member of the Wangaratta RSL via FaceTime as they had participated in the Victorian Collections workshops the year prior. During my return visits to Lara after the conclusion of the Veterans Heritage Project workshops, I often found additional members had joined the cataloguing public. In these instances, new members were informed about the research and invited to participate directly via semi-structured interview.

The Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria and Museums Victoria staff directly related to Victorian Collections were interviewed, resulting in seven participants and thirteen interview transcripts (accounting for six follow up interviews). I also interviewed key stakeholders involved in establishing, and funding, Victorian Collections (and, as discussed in Chapter Three, historical precedents for similar platforms). Given that I accompanied the Victorian Collections staff to and from Lara via train, multiple informal conversations about the workshops made their way into my field notes. As with Desert Mob 2017, interviews were conducted until informational redundancy was reached (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Sandelowski, 2008).

Digitally, I followed the Victorian Collections and the Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria Facebook pages, and signed up for all available newsletters, endeavouring to locate myself within their digital publics. Through participating in the Veterans Heritage Project workshops at Lara, I gained internal access to Victorian Collections and thus spent time exploring and documenting the digital experience of cataloguers and consumers. I also spent time on the external-facing website, exploring the distributed state collection and documenting the observable engagement demonstrated by public comments made on public items. Finally, to more
fully understand the Lara RSL’s digital participation, I spent time on their associated
digital platforms, observing and documenting their website and Facebook pages. As
discussed above in relation to Desert Mob, although I restrict my analysis of non-digital
participation to the time that I was directly ‘in the field’, I provide an analysis of digital
participation that was enacted throughout 2017 to provide context for participation that
was Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project-specific.

Conclusion
In this chapter, I have detailed the multiple methods that this thesis deploys. I began
by locating myself within the research, and describing the ethical and methodological
considerations used to make myself visible. I then introduced my media ecologies
framework of digital and non-digital platforms, practices, and publics that I used to
facilitate my approach to each field site, as well as the typology of three barriers to
participation that I developed: non-digital, digital, and postdigital. The multiple methods
used – digital and non-digital ethnographic techniques augmented by collection and
analysis of existing organisational data and records – were then detailed, before
narrowing to how they were specifically used in each field site – as, when, and how
required.

I now turn to the data that these methods produced, discussing each field site separately
before bringing them together in the conclusion. I begin with Desert Mob 2017.
Chapter Three:

“A coming together”: The convergence of creators and consumers
In order to provide context for my discussion of digital participation in Chapter Four, this chapter sets out to describe how Desert Mob, since its inception, has non-digitally mediated the multiple distances inherent within the remote Aboriginal art sector: the distance between art centres, and the distance between art centres and consumers. To do so, I begin by describing the development of the remote Indigenous art sector, providing a brief overview of the policy context that facilitated the sector’s development, before detailing the contemporary art centre model. By paying attention to the publics within this model – comprised of artists and art centre managers – and the practices they each enact, I provide insight into the dynamics underpinning this model, and demonstrate that the remote Indigenous art sector was established to facilitate the cultural participation of distant consumers.

As argued by Jon Altman and colleagues (2002), “art centres … facilitate the collection and sale of art from remote localities” (p. 10), because the production of art by remote dwelling Aboriginal artists occurs:

In such situations where there is a geographic distance between the artists and their prospective audiences … consequently, selling Aboriginal art requires careful and considered mediation over vast … distance. (Altman, 2005a, p. 2)

The practices underpinning this mediation vary (Altman et al., 2002; Wright, 1999). While some art centres are located in regional centres like Alice Springs, where practices of visitation are common (Wright, 1999, p. 99), others are in closed communities where such practices are less viable. In this chapter, I am particularly interested in those practices of mediation that collectively comprise what Tim Acker and Tod Jones (2014) describe as a gallery model of distribution.10 Art is sent out of the remote communities

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10 This model is currently being disrupted. Although commercial agents such as galleries typically mediate between artists and the market due to their “social and geographic proximity” (Booth, 2014, p. 10) to consumers, art centres
in which it is produced to distant publics comprised of “urban consumers” (Bendor et al., 2013, p. 2).

In contrast to this art centre model, Indigenous art fairs such as Desert Mob mediate distance through the convergence of both creators and consumers. Desert Mob is thus a “coming together” (Araluen Cultural Precinct, 2017, p. 7) that draws “Aboriginal art centres from the [Central Australian] region” (Köthe, 2014, p. 46) and “private collectors and representatives of … galleries from around the country” (Finnane, 2010, p. 21; Jones, Booth, & Acker, 2016). In 1991, as Stephen Williamson, Araluen’s curator explained, “the [Aboriginal] fine art market was still evolving” (S. Williamson, personal communication, August 8, 2017). And, as Tim Chatwin, Araluen’s Exhibitions Officer, told me, there was “no easy way to communicate with an art centre” (T. Chatwin, personal communication, August 11, 2017). Desert Mob was thus established as a mechanism for “increasing people’s awareness about art from Central Australia, and to provide a platform for those art centres to gain greater exposure” (S. Williamson, personal communication, August 8, 2017). In doing so, Desert Mob became “one of the few interfaces where people could come to central Australia, to the one location, and see work from all across the region” (T. Chatwin, personal communication, August 11, 2017). This convergence of creators and consumers was significant because, as Stephen explained, the participating art centres were remote not only from consumers, but from each other:

In terms of the sheer size of where these art centres come from … it’s massive. I think it’s a couple million square kilometres in area … To actually travel to those art centres and view the work would be … tricky. (S. Williamson, personal communication, August 8, 2017)

are increasingly “occupy[ing] this space too”, developing direct “relationships with collectors and staging international exhibitions” (Booth, 2014, p. 10). Although an altered set of practices, this disruption does not alter the fundamental dynamic that this chapter demonstrates underpins the art centre model. Unlike other arts sectors, remote dwelling Aboriginal artists tend not to interact directly with the market – even in this disrupted model, the art centre (and therefore the art centre manager) remains primarily responsible for this mediation.
Indeed, “to take in less than half”, as art centre manager Erica Izzet wrote in the Desert Mob 2010 catalogue, “would take thousands of kms [kilometres], a couple of months, 10 tanks of fuel, three spare tyres, a few years off your life and certainly a large dent in the bank account” (Araluen Cultural Precinct, 2010, p. 44).

Having described the development of the remote Indigenous visual arts sector, I provide a brief overview of existing literature on Indigenous art fairs, as well as the publics that attend and purchase remote Indigenous art. Through placing this literature alongside empirical data, I confirm the non-digital publics that have coalesced around Desert Mob since 2010 have been primarily distant: remote from the participating art centres as well as Desert Mob itself. As I discuss in Chapter Four, given this thesis’ interest in the spatial dynamics of digital participation, that Desert Mob consumers are predominantly located elsewhere is significant.

“Institutional mechanisms for collecting and distributing”

There is a vast body of literature that engages with remote Aboriginal art centres. Since the 1980s, three “industry defining reports” have been produced (Acker et al., 2013, p. 7): The Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Industry Report of the Review Committee (widely referred to as the Altman Review; Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Industry Review Committee, 1989), The Art Centre Story (a series of three reports: Wright, 1999, Wright, 2000, and Wright & Morphy, 2000); and Indigenous Art – Securing the Future (Standing Committee on Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, 2007). As Acker and colleagues (2013) note, in addition to these major reports are “a number of supporting and supplementary reports and reviews of interest” (p. 8). Following the Altman Review (Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Industry Review Committee, 1989) an industry forum was held, resulting in Marketing Aboriginal Art in the 1990s (Altman & Taylor, 1990).

In addition to these industry-focussed texts, scholars from economics to anthropology have written on the “aesthetic, social, cultural and economic dynamics” of remote art centres (Acker et al., 2013, p. 3; see, for example: Altman, 2001; Michaels, 1994; Myers, 2002). While Nicholas Rothwell (2015) argues for critical interventions, Jennifer Loureide Biddle (2016) provides evidence for the role of art centres in supporting political representation and self-determination (see also Jorgensen, 2011). Given I am solely interested in the role played by the art centre as a cultural platform — as opposed to the art created within them — I restrict my discussion here to literature that details how art centres were developed and continue to operate today. Further, although I am specifically interested in Desart-member art centres (as it is this membership that enables participation in Desert Mob, and therefore inclusion within this research), Desart was not established until 1992. Since art centres that participated in Desert Mob 2017 have histories preceding this date, I draw here on literature referring to the development of all art centres.

In 1965, Australia’s first comprehensive tourism report (Harris, Kerr, Forster, Stanton Robbins & Co., 1965) – commonly referred to as the Harris Report – identified an
increase in domestic and inbound international tourism that was facilitating “demand for ‘authentic’ Indigenous cultural product” (Altman et al., 2002, p. 2). In highlighting a possible opportunity for an Aboriginal arts industry, the Harris Report (1965) likewise recommended the establishing of supporting institutions. Because the majority of these “‘authentic’ Indigenous cultural product[s]” were being produced in “extremely remote communities [that were largely] inaccessible to tourists” (Altman et al., 2002, p. 2), it was recognised that any such industry would have to mediate the distance between creators and consumers. And, since these remote communities “lacked institutional mechanisms for collecting and distributing” such cultural products, “new institutions – community controlled art centres – were established” (Altman et al., 2002, p. 2).

Following the Harris Report’s (1965) recommendation that the government intervene to ensure “quality control and authenticity” (Altman, 2005a, p. 4), Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Pty Ltd was established in 1971 (Altman, 2005a, p. 4; see also Acker et al., 2013, p. 7; Altman et al., 2002, p. 2; Genocchio, 2008, pp. 82-3; Jones & Birdsall-Jones, 2014, p. 301). Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Pty Ltd was intended to control “the supply of art by buying … with the purpose of creating a market” (Jones & Birdsall-Jones, 2014, p. 301), and was “instrumental in initiating [the] commercial interest and art world legitimacy” that underwrote the developing remote art sector (Acker et al., 2013, p. 7; see also Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Industry Review Committee, 1989; Altman, 2005a; Caruana, 2003; Healey, 2002; McLean, 2011; Myers, 2002).

The founding of Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Pty Ltd, alongside other governmental bodies such as the Aboriginal Arts Advisory Committee – formed in 1970 and replaced in 1973 by the Aboriginal Arts Board as part of the Australia Council for the Arts (Thorley, 2016, p. 136; see also Altman, 2005a, p. 4; Fisher, 2015, p. 38; Jones & Birdsall-Jones,
2014) – occurred in tandem with broader changes in Aboriginal affairs policy (Altman, 2005a, p. 4). Of particular significance was the 1972 election of the Whitlam government, which brought policy commitments to both the arts and Indigenous Australians (Altman, 2005a, p. 4). At around the same time, the Papunya Tula Artists Cooperative was founded (Acker et al., 2013, p. 5; Bardon, 1979, 1991; Bardon & Bardon, 2004; Healey, 2002; Hodges, 2011; Johnson, 2008, 2010; Myers, 1999). As Tim Acker, Lisa Stefanoff, and Alice Woodhead (2013) explain, Papunya Tula created the “template for … economic activities of organised production and community-controlled institutions that characterise the contemporary remote arts sector” (p. 5; see also Fisher, 2012, p. 253; Fisher, 2015, p. 38).

Following the mid-1987 closure of Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Pty Ltd (Congreve & Acker, 2015, p. 2), the first industry peak agency – the Association of Northern and Central Australian Aboriginal Artists (ANCAAA) – was established in Darwin (Arnhem, Northern, and Kimberley Artists Aboriginal Corporation, 2017, p. 9; Biddle, 2016, pp. 16–7; Van den Bosch & Rentschler, 2009, p. 120). In part due to the “logistical challenges associated with the distances between art centres” (Congreve & Acker, 2015, p. 2), ANCAAA auspiced the founding of the Central Australian Aboriginal Art Industry Support Unit in Alice Springs in 1992. This division was eventually formalised, and two distinct organisations established: Desart in Alice Springs and the Association of Northern, Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists in Darwin (Congreve & Acker, 2015, p. 2; Van den Bosch & Rentschler, 2009, p. 120). As the sector expanded in the late 1990s and early 2000s, additional peak agencies were established. Ananguku Arts in South Australia was founded in 1997, the Aboriginal Art Centre Hub of Western Australia in 2009, UMI Arts based in Cairns was founded in 2005, and the Indigenous Art Centre Alliance, representing far north Queensland, Tiwi and Bathurst Island communities, was formed in 2011 (Biddle, 2016, pp. 16–7; Congreve & Acker, 2015, pp.
2-3). Today, these peak agencies are supplemented by region-specific organisations such as the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Art Centre Collective (n.d.).

Tasked with “advocacy, development and support role[s]” (Congreve & Acker, 2015, p. 1), peak agencies such as Desart are recognised by Australian state, territory and federal governments as enablers of the remote Indigenous arts sector, and funded accordingly (Altman, 2003). Each is directed by an Indigenous board or advisory group, and run by “a small contingent of full-time and part-time staff” (Congreve & Acker, 2015, p. 3) that support their member centres. This support extends to digital participation, with the Indigenous Art Centre Plan (Department of Communications and the Arts, 2018b) allocating peak agencies with responsibility for “maintain[ing] a website and provid[ing] links to member art centres” as well as “initiatives that will improve art centres’ business and marketing outcomes, including … assistance with websites” (p. 6).

Having discussed the development of the remote Indigenous arts sector, and shown that the mediation of distance between creators and consumers was a critical motivating factor for the sector’s development, I turn now to describe the contemporary “art centre model” (Altman, 2005a, p. 6). The dynamics underpinning this model, and how these dynamics delineate particular practices, are vital for understanding digital participation in relation to Desert Mob 2017.

“The art centre model”¹² and its publics

Art centres are “at once cultural and commercial, local and global, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal” (Altman, 2005a, p. 6). In many remote communities, art centres provide the

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¹² Altman, 2005, p. 6
only source of non-government income (Biddle, 2016, pp. 14-5; Jones & Birdsall-Jones, 2014, p. 302). While such economic outcomes are significant, work by Felicity Wright and Frances Morphy (2000) suggests senior artists and traditional custodians place less importance on resultant income, rather emphasising art centres as places of cultural maintenance. Art centres are thus “neither entirely cultural nor entirely commercial enterprises” (Wright, et al., p. 6), and it is this blend that locates the art centre model within Altman’s (2001, 2005b) notion of a hybrid economy, which is based on the interaction of the state, tradition or custom and the market.

Although providing remote artists and their communities with significant financial opportunities, art centres are not necessarily economically sustainable and so remain supported by a complex interplay of “policies, initiatives and strategies (Acker et al., 2013, p. 11). These funding mechanisms – particularly since the development of the Commonwealth Government’s Closing the Gap agenda (2012) – see the production of art as going beyond aesthetics and cultural maintenance, and contributing to “health, employment, training, safety [within] communities, governance and economic participation” (Acker et al., 2013, p. 11; see also McHenry, 2009, 2011). As Hetti Perkins reminded those at Desert Mob 2014: “art centres build community pools, set up aged care and dialysis services, work with schools, help with sorry business, the list goes on and on” (Rubuntja, Sharpe, Wallace, & Sheedy, 2015, p. 221; see also Biddle, 2016, p. 199; Stolte, 2012, p. 232). The roles that art centres take on thus extend “well beyond the production of art” (Altman et al., 2002, p. vii, 6; see also Jones & Birdsall-Jones, 2014, p. 302; Stolte, 2012, p. 237).

Today, over 100 Aboriginal art centres are located across Australia (Acker et al., 2013, p. 11). Although all are referred to as art centres, each is unique (Stolte, 2012, p. 232).
There are “significant regional variations … owing to differing histories of development and … locations” (Altman, 2005a, p. 6; see also Altman et al., 2002, p. 8). Some work in a highly localised fashion with ten artists, “while others service over 200 … [and] are regional in their scope” (Altman et al., 2002, p. 8). For definitional purposes, I follow Wright (1999), who describes the contemporary Aboriginal art centre as: “any organisation operating in remote Australia that is owned and controlled by Aboriginal people, where the principal activity is facilitating the production and marketing of arts and crafts” (p. 7; see also Altman, 2005a, p. 6; Stolte, 2012, p. 231).

Art centres are typically staffed by at least one manager (sometimes referred to as an art advisor, or art centre coordinator), who is “directly accountable to the artists” (Jones & Birdsell-Jones, 2014, p. 301). While, “as a general rule” art centre managers are not “easy to stereotype” they tend to be non-Indigenous (Altman, 2005, p. 7; see also Fisher, 2012, p. 254; Healey, 2002; Oster, 2009, p. 69; Wright, 2011, p. 137). Writing in 2000, Altman explained that “the most Indigenous element” of the Aboriginal art industry is “production … [whereas] distribution and consumption … are largely non-Indigenous domains” (p. 86). Kamilaroi, Kooma, Jiman, and Gurang Gurang artist Richard Bell’s (2003) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award winning art work, Bell’s Theorem: Aboriginal Art – it’s a white thing! further explicates that the “key players in the industry are not Aboriginal” (p. np; see also Bullen, 2014, p. 40). More recently, Acker and colleagues (2013) affirm that this remains the case:

It is a notable characteristic of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art

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13 That art centre managers are predominantly non-Indigenous is explicitly acknowledged within the sector. A survey conducted by Desart revealed that there were as few as 13 Aboriginal people employed in member centres in non-art producing roles (Oster, 2009, p. 70). Steps towards rectifying this imbalance such as the Aboriginal Arts Worker Program have been undertaken (Boyle, 2009, p. 3; Oster, 2009, p. 70). Intended to increase the employment of Aboriginal people “not as artists but in some kind of support capacity, either as manual labourers or administrative and clerical workers”, the Aboriginal Arts Worker Program engaged with 70 participants in its first year of operation (Oster, 2009, p. 70), and continues today.
sector that almost all of the people participating in the non-art making roles (art centre staff, gallerists, dealers, collectors and audiences …) are non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. (Acker et al, 2013, p. 17)

This delineation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous publics is similarly articulated in arts coverage within the popular press. Jeremy Eccles (2008), for example, portrays the “devoted, usually white manager” (p. 10), which Philip Batty (2009) depicts as being “usually white, young and enthusiastic” (p. 22). However, as Dr Mark Crees, Senior Director of the Araluen Cultural Precinct, reminded me, the Indigenous art sector is today not “a white vs black binary” (personal communication, March 18, 2019). Indeed, as Acker and colleagues (2013) note, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander curators in major cultural institutions across the country are an important and increasing force within the sector. Accordingly, for Altman (2005a), “the critical mediating institutions, community-controlled art centres are not white institutions, they are both inter-cultural and hybrid – they have been born of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal processes” (p. 1).

In the next section, I describe these “Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal processes” (Altman, 2005a, p. 1) through discussing the practices enacted by artists and art centre managers. According to Altman (2005a) it is precisely the delineation of practices between artists and art centre managers that has ensured the art centre model’s success: “it suits the artists whose prime interest and speciality is producing art. Staff employed, on the other hand, provide a very different skills set – marketing and an understanding of commerce and the fine arts market” (p. 6; see also Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Industry Review Committee, 1989; Myers, 2002; Wright, 1999, 2000; Wright & Morphy, 2000). In Chapter Four I demonstrate that the delineation between these publics extended into the digital participation associated with Desert Mob 2017: non-Indigenous art centre managers were almost entirely responsible for digital practices, while Indigenous artists appeared
within them. As such, developing an understanding of the practices enacted by each public is important for what follows.

**Artists**

As noted above, artists’ “prime interest and speciality is producing art” (Altman, 2005a, p. 6). I follow John Carty (2011) to understand the practices that this production requires as “a form of meaningful action … a form of ‘work’” (p. 13) to acknowledge “the fact that people earn money from painting” (p. 61). This approach follows work by Howard Morphy (2005), who examines art from the perspective of political economy. Framing art making as work in this way is useful because it explicitly acknowledges the economic function of both art making and art centres. While Carty (2011) suggests that the utility of such an approach is in how it facilitates an integrated analysis of both economic and aesthetic aspects of art production, I restrict my analysis to the representation of these practices within the digital participation associated with Desert Mob 2017. Although outside the scope of this thesis, a study of the aesthetic qualities of the represented artworks, and the interrelationship between such digital participation and economic outcomes, would meaningfully build on the work presented here.

When seen through my media ecologies framework, I understand art-making as non-digital practices with both economic and cultural outcomes that are afforded through the non-digital platform of the art centre. Taking this approach enables a strategic rhetorical move that makes artists active participants in the mediation of distance, a notion I return to in Chapter Four. Most important for this chapter, however, is that understanding art-making as work further illuminates the relationship and resulting delineation of practices between artists and art centre managers.
Art centre managers

Art centre managers work at the intersection of creation and consumption: “mediat[ing] between the artists’ domain and the demands of the international art market” (Fisher, 2012, p. 254; see also Altman, 2005a, p. 12; Healey, 2002). As such, Françoise Dussart (2006) suggests that for Aboriginal artists in Yuendumu (a remote Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory, five hours drive from Alice Springs), the art centre manager effectively acted as a stand in “for non-Aboriginal audiences and more broadly the state” (p. 159). Carty (2011), however, suggests art centre managers can be more specifically understood as “an embodiment of ‘the market’” (p. 70). This is because:

Apart from a handful of tourists, collectors and community workers who buy paintings directly from the art centre – the vast majority of paintings are sold via transactions (by phone, email, and through interstate exhibitions) entirely invisible to the artists. The paintings go to the [art centre manager] … and the money comes back to the artist through them. (Carty, 2011, p. 70)

Accordingly, where artists enact art-making practices, art centre managers facilitate the cultural participation of consumers.

Wright (2011) divides these practices enacted by art centre managers into two categories: facilitation, such as “managing the logistics of art making and selling” (p. 137), and administration and marketing. Taken together, art centre managers

- buy, sell, document, conserve and transport art … accompany artists to exhibitions, host visitors, deal with intellectual property issues, administer grants, run projects, look after a small business, manage other staff, supply artists with materials, and support the governing boards who employ them. (Altman, 2005a, pp. 6-7; see also Seet, Jones, Acker, & Whittle, 2015, p. 764, 766, 796)

With regards to digital participation, more recent work likewise locates such practices with art centre managers (Altman, 2005a; Seet et al., 2015). For example, a recent position description for an art centre manager role at the Iltja Ntjarra Many Hands
Art Centre (Desart, 2018, 09 April) in Alice Springs identified digital practices such as “maintain[ing] a regular social media presence and driv[ing] online sales through the Art Centre’s website” (p. np). Similarly, the position description for an art centre manager role at Warlayirti Artists in Balgo (2018) identified digital practices such as “maintain[ing] and updat[ing the] Warlayirti Artists social media accounts … [and] the … website” (Desart, 05 April, p. np).

Drawing on a dataset comprising interviews with 21 art centre managers, Pi-Shen Seet, Janice Jones, Tim Acker and Michelle Whittle (2015) provide insight into ‘who’ a contemporary art centre manager is. Ranging in age from mid-20s to mid-60s, over 75% of the cohort identified as women, and 100% were non-Indigenous (Seet et al., 2015, p. 771). 90% held a tertiary qualification, 74% of which were in fine arts or arts administration, with the remainder across cultural anthropological studies, museum studies, education, politics, or business (Seet et al., 2015, p. 771). Citing anecdotes from industry insiders, Seet and colleagues (2015) suggest that the majority of art centre managers stay in the role “for around two years, or at a maximum three” (pp. 763-4). However, tenures of respondents within Seet and colleagues (2015) data set ranged from six weeks to 16-years (p. 771). In addition, 14.28%, or three art centre managers, had worked in the role more than once, while one had worked in the same art centre for 11 years (Seet et al., 2015, p. 771).

Empirical data gathered in the course of this research adds to our understanding of art centre manager tenures, as well as movements between art centres. For each Desert Mob exhibition, a corresponding catalogue was produced. Towards the back of each catalogue the contact details for participating art centres are listed. Drawing on the archive of catalogues from 1991-2017, I compiled a list of 252 art centre manager names.
This data comes with a number of caveats. Firstly, because the catalogues for Desert Mob 1991, 1995 and 1998 did not include art centre contact details, the dataset does not account for those years. Further, this total (252 art centre manager names) includes points at which some art centres had multiple managers. Figures 1 and 2 offer an example of the insights that developing this dataset facilitated. At the request of my research partners, I have removed the art centre’s name, as well as those of the art centre manager. As such, I have also chosen not to include the entire dataset. Due to the relatively small size of the remote Indigenous arts sector, this would have compromised the internal confidentiality of the dataset.

In Figure 1, each coloured circle represents a different art centre manager at the one art centre. Over the 27 years between 1991 and 2017, this art centre had 11 different managers, with three periods of co-management. In Figure 2 I demonstrate the movement of an art centre manager between multiple art centres. Each row corresponds with a different art centre. As is evident, the art centre manager in question spent one year at Art Centre A, before spending six years at Art Centre B, and four years at their most recent post, Art Centre C.

The average tenure of an art centre manager within this cohort was 2.65 years (approximately 2 years and 8 months), correlating with the anecdotal evidence that Seet and colleagues (2015) provide, discussed above. 40% of the cohort appeared only once within the dataset, indicating that they worked at only one Desert Mob participating art centre for only one year. 18% were listed twice (indicating a tenure of at least two years), and 10% were listed four times (indicating a tenure of at least four years). Less than 5% (4.25%) of the dataset was associated with more than one art centre. 76.49% of the listed art centre managers had identifiably female names, confirming the predominant
Figure 1: Tenures of art centre managers at one Desert Mob participating art centre, 1991-2017
Figure 2: One art centre manager’s tenure at multiple Desert Mob participating art centres, 1991-2017
femaleness of the role identified by Seet and colleagues (2015). Slightly less than 20% were male (19.52%), and just under 4% (3.98%) were either ambiguous, not named, or listed as ‘Desart’ (see Figure 3).

So far, this chapter has demonstrated that remote art centres mediate distance as a barrier to cultural participation. Through articulating the contemporary art centre model and discussing the practices enacted by the publics contained within, I have demonstrated that art centre managers enact the practices that mediate the distance between “the artists and the market” (Alman et al., 2002, p. 10). That is, art centre managers mediate the distance between publics comprised of creators and consumers in order to facilitate the cultural participation of consumers (such as viewing, or purchasing, the work). In the next section,
I argue that just as the art centre model mediates distance as a barrier to the cultural participation of consumers, so too do Indigenous art fairs such as Desert Mob.

**Indigenous art fairs: The convergence of creators and consumers**

Although the oldest of all Australian Indigenous art fairs, Desert Mob today sits alongside the Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair, Revealed (in Perth, Western Australia), the Cairns Indigenous Arts Festival in Queensland, and the annual National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award held at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory in Darwin. Programmed “within a few weeks of each other, creating a kind of tourist trail for the committed attendee” (Jones et al., 2016, p. 115), Indigenous art fairs “draw national [media] coverage and international visitors” (Acker & Jones, 2014, p. 83). Accordingly, in contrast to the mediation of distance enacted by art centres described above – where art is sent out to distant consumers – Indigenous art fairs mediate distance to facilitate cultural participation through the convergence of creators and consumers. While each Indigenous art fair has “their own methodologies” (Acker & Jones, 2014, p. 83), given this research’s focus, I pause here to describe the ‘methodology’ of Desert Mob 2017.

**Desert Mob Weekend**

The Desert Mob exhibition is self-curated, with participating “art centres choos[ing] the body of work that they want represented” (Raja, 2015, p. 17). Each art centre submits a maximum of ten works, with the resulting cohort organised by art centre and hung within Araluen’s three galleries (Acker & Jones, 2014, p. 83; Jones, Booth, & Acker, 2016, pp. 113-4). On opening night in 2017, the Araluen grounds were filled with a sense
of palpable excitement. Pieces exhibited at Desert Mob are typically “competitively sought after” (Healy, 2006, p. 257) ensuring dedicated attendees began queuing in the Araluen foyer hours before the exhibition opened. As Jacqueline Healy (2006) describes, “the scenario of queuing and little time to contemplate the works [is] not unusual … keen buyers attend the exhibition in pairs so one may select the works while the other stands in the queue” to pay (p. 257). Upon entry, attendees were invited to purchase the annual catalogue that “include[d] a floor plan of the galleries, show[ing] where each art centre [wa]s located” (S. Williamson, personal communication, September 11, 2017). This was partially intended to respond to the anticipation of those attending. As Stephen explained:
If you know your art centres, and your artists, you [can use the map] to get a sense of which direction you should head when you get into the gallery … so you know which direction to run! (S. Williamson, personal communication, September 11, 2017)

Since Desert Mob 2005, opening night has been followed by a public symposium delivered by Desart. Consisting of presentations by art centres, artists, and industry stakeholders, the Desert Mob Symposium showcases “art centre projects and innovations” (Jones et al., 2016, p. 114; see also Acker & Jones, 2014, p. 83). Finally, on Saturday morning, the Desert Mob 2017 MarketPlace was held. Unlike the Desert Mob exhibition-proper, where sales were mediated through Araluen, here art centres sold directly to the public, creating “the feel of a bustling crafts market” (Booth, 2014, p. 77). Established “primarily to add an income stream for artists and art centres” (Finnane, 2010, p. 21), the MarketPlace catered to “the tourist trade” (Mahood, 2018, p. 45), with all items priced under $500 (Acker & Jones, 2014, p. 83).

For the remainder of this section, I shift my focus from the artists and art centres that exhibit at Desert Mob, to the publics that attend Indigenous art fairs: those distant
consumers drawn inland (Köhle, 2014, p. 46). Since enumerating and interviewing each Desert Mob 2017 opening weekend attendee – let alone over the course of the exhibition – was outside the scope of this thesis, I begin with a brief discussion of the available literature on this topic. However, Indigenous art fair attendees and purchasers of Indigenous art, whether at art fairs or elsewhere, are under researched (Acker et al., 2013), and little existing data (for example, that held by the sellers of such art) is made publicly available. What we know of them is thus “ad hoc and anecdotal” (Booth, 2014, p. 15). Accordingly, to gain greater insight into the attending publics that coalesced specifically around Desert Mob, I repurpose data initially collected by Araluen and Desart from 2010-2017.

Publics comprised of consumers: Attendees and purchasers

While Todd Jones, Jessica Booth, and Tim Acker (2016) follow Greg Richards and Marisa de Brito (2013) to suggest that Indigenous art fair attendees can be divided into two groups – comprised of industry insiders and new attendees – I am more interested in differentiating between attendees and purchasers. As discussed in Chapter Two, I differentiate between receptive and enactive publics based on their participation, making this differentiation visible through attending to their practices. Given that art centres and art fairs such as Desert Mob fulfil a combination of “commercial, cultural and creative priorities” (Acker & Jones, 2014, p. 82), understanding who viewed and purchased the exhibited art – and therefore who had successfully mediated distance as a barrier to cultural participation – is of significance to this thesis.

However, as noted above, there is only a limited literature dealing with art fair attendees, and little existing data is made publicly available. For example, although the Australia
Council for the Arts (2017a), reports that the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair had a receptive public in 2016 of 50,000 visitors, and “$670,000 worth of artworks [was sold] to consumers, collectors and public institutions” (p. 15), information regarding the geographic distribution of the 50,000 visitors, or where the purchased artworks were sold to, is not provided. In turn, the Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Foundation reported 10,683 attendees across the three-day event in 2017 (Australia Council for the Arts, 2017a, p. 4), with 47% of this cohort (5,021 people) coming from outside Darwin (p. 2). In 2017, $2,224,000 worth of art was purchased over the three days (Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Foundation, 2017, p. np). This total is divided amongst the total attendees, equating to an “average spend per person per day of $208 on art” (Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Foundation, 2017, p. np). Again, information about who these purchases were made by, or where those doing the purchasing were from, is not provided.

Examining research about purchasers of Aboriginal art more broadly provides additional insight. According to Acker and colleagues (2013), auction sales data suggests a significant proportion are from overseas (p. 9; Genocchio, 2008, p. 10). More recent research conducted as part of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Economies project (concluded in 2016) suggests that while the largest cohort of international purchasers were from Europe and North America, the vast majority of Aboriginal art is purchased by Australians: “three-quarters of Aboriginal art sales are to Australian buyers” (Ninti One, 2017, p. np). Indeed, according to Tim Acker and Alice Woodhead (2015) the primary purchasing public of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is made up of “Australian private buyers from New South Wales or Victoria” (p. 11). More than three-quarters of the art products purchased by this public were created in remote locations, and more than 60% purchased through art centres (Acker & Woodhead, 2015, p. 14), such as those that exhibited at Desert Mob 2017. While Jones and colleagues
(2016) suggest the majority of buyers at Aboriginal art fairs “only purchase works in the lower price tiers” (p. 116), this does not tell us where these non-digital publics reside. In the next section, I repurpose data that was initially collected by Araluen and Desart to answer this question in relation to Desert Mob.

Desert Mob publics

In interviews undertaken for this research, Desert Mob attendees were described anecdotally as having come from “all over. A lot of local people … a lot of interstate visitors … down from Darwin, up from Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney” (S. Williamson, personal communication, August 8, 2017). Desart’s 2017-2018 Annual Report described the approximately 2,000-strong Desert Mob 2017 Marketplace attendees similarly vaguely, identifying members of this public as “local, national and international visitors” (2018, p. 38). Jessica Booth (2014) surveyed a sample of Desert Mob 2012 Marketplace attendees as part of the Aboriginal Arts Economies Project, finding 38% were from Alice Springs (p. 112). For Booth (2014), this indicated “strong local visitation” (p. 111), as the next largest cohort were from Melbourne (11%) and South Australia (11%).

Although Araluen staff typically collected details such as residential postcodes from gallery visitors, during Desert Mob 2017 opening night, “people just come in and see everything … It’s too big, and there’s no mechanism to [record where they are from]” (M. Crees, personal communication, September 11, 2017). Instead, a staff member was placed at the gallery entrance, where they kept count as best they could. In 2017, “over 6,000 people [were on site] across the [opening] weekend … 1,421 literally through the turnstile on opening night into the gallery itself” (M. Crees, personal communication,
September 11, 2017). Thousands more were in the Araluen grounds on opening night, 378 attended the Symposium on Friday, and an estimated 2,000 local, national and international visitors returned for the MarketPlace on Saturday (Desart, 2018, p. 38).

When seen through the media ecologies framework this thesis deploys, the Desert Mob opening weekend attendees collectively comprised a non-digital receptive public. I follow boyd (2008) to acknowledge that there were likewise publics within this public. Art centre managers from particular regions came together as cohesive publics, describing Desert Mob as one of their opportunities to ‘catch up’ and maintain these relationships face to face. Similarly, Desert Mob Symposium attendees were a public within the broader Desert Mob 2017 public.

Usefully for this research, in 2017, Desert Mob Symposium attendees were required to register in advance and in doing so, provided their contact details. Compiling the de-identified postcode data revealed the geographic distribution of this public. The majority (55.53%) were from the Northern Territory. Figure 4 illustrates this finding. Importantly, this data visualisation includes 45 attendees (10.59% of the cohort) who did not provide their postcode upon registration, and so their location of origin is unknown.

Although the comparatively high levels of Northern Territory-based Symposium attendance might be used to support Booth’s (2014) finding that Desert Mob 2012 had strong local participation, there is a difference between being local to the Northern Territory and being local to the participating remote art centres. Unfortunately, however, this data does not include the number and therefore neither the residential location of Indigenous artists in attendance. That is, although 100 artists from 10 art centres
Figure 4: Residential location of Desert Mob 2017 Symposium attendees
delivered presentations during the Symposium (Desart, 2018, p. 38), and attended the presentations delivered by others, they were not registered as Symposium attendees, and thus not counted within the receptive public just described. Accordingly, although interviewees described a large portion of the Symposium’s receptive public as being comprised of Indigenous artists and their peers, this is not verifiable. As a result, although highly visible within the non-digital context of the Symposium, the participating artists are rendered invisible in this data. I return to this disparity between digital and non-digital visibility in the following chapter.

While information regarding Desert Mob 2017 opening night attendees was not recorded beyond the number of individuals on site, data was collected from attendees throughout the exhibition’s six-week duration. Upon entry, visitors were asked by gallery attendants to provide their location of origin for visitor reporting purposes. Compiling this data provides additional insight into where Desert Mob attending publics were from (Table 9). However, there were some inconsistencies in how this information was collected. For example, some gallery attendants recorded general information (such as Asia, or Europe), while others were more specific (such as Japan, or Germany). To account for this, I have grouped all international attendees into the one category. Further, although Desert Mob is held at around the same time each year, the specific dates vary slightly. This data thus encompasses the weeks that are most consistently within the exhibition’s duration each year (from the beginning of September, to the end of October). These data are shown in Table 9, which is segmented by the states of Australia, international guests (Int), and those who arrived as part of a tour group, and whose place(s) of origin were not recorded. Figure 5 provides greater insight into the geographic spread of the Desert Mob 2017 receptive public.
Table 9: Residential location of visitors to the Araluen Galleries during the Desert Mob exhibition, September 01 – October 31, 2010-2017

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>26.57%</td>
<td>30.33%</td>
<td>47.21%</td>
<td>38.04%</td>
<td>42.67%</td>
<td>40.66%</td>
<td>38.24%</td>
<td>32.25%</td>
<td>36.75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>18.00%</td>
<td>15.70%</td>
<td>13.70%</td>
<td>16.29%</td>
<td>15.10%</td>
<td>11.95%</td>
<td>13.72%</td>
<td>17.07%</td>
<td>15.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>17.47%</td>
<td>16.30%</td>
<td>12.58%</td>
<td>14.17%</td>
<td>14.92%</td>
<td>13.54%</td>
<td>17.33%</td>
<td>14.52%</td>
<td>15.15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>INT</td>
<td>11.59%</td>
<td>10.17%</td>
<td>8.17%</td>
<td>11.52%</td>
<td>9.67%</td>
<td>15.81%</td>
<td>9.98%</td>
<td>10.41%</td>
<td>10.96%</td>
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<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>10.93%</td>
<td>10.03%</td>
<td>5.96%</td>
<td>7.68%</td>
<td>5.73%</td>
<td>5.97%</td>
<td>7.31%</td>
<td>9.01%</td>
<td>7.87%</td>
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<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>6.62%</td>
<td>4.97%</td>
<td>4.41%</td>
<td>3.79%</td>
<td>5.25%</td>
<td>6.73%</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
<td>5.58%</td>
<td>5.53%</td>
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<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>5.17%</td>
<td>5.81%</td>
<td>4.22%</td>
<td>4.28%</td>
<td>3.46%</td>
<td>2.35%</td>
<td>4.03%</td>
<td>3.82%</td>
<td>4.10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>2.52%</td>
<td>1.95%</td>
<td>1.45%</td>
<td>1.57%</td>
<td>1.93%</td>
<td>1.31%</td>
<td>2.15%</td>
<td>1.27%</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>1.12%</td>
<td>2.42%</td>
<td>2.02%</td>
<td>2.56%</td>
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<td>0.98%</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOURS</td>
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<td>2.32%</td>
<td>0.28%</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.52%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>4.67%</td>
<td>1.11%</td>
</tr>
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This data demonstrates that although the percentage of Northern Territory-based visitors to the Desert Mob exhibition fluctuated between 2010 and 2017, this cohort has comprised at least one quarter of all visitors since 2010, and, in 2017, comprised over 30% (illustrated in Figure 5). Unfortunately, this attendance data was again not granular enough to determine whether these Northern Territory visitors also included residents of remote communities.
Figure 5: Residential location of visitors to the Araluen Galleries between September 01 – October 31, Desert Mob 2017
Figure 6 Residential location of visitors to the Araluen Galleries during the Desert Mob 2017 exhibition: Highlighting dominance of non-Northern Territory visitors.
Of most interest to this research is that the vast majority of attendees (when taken together) were from outside the Northern Territory (comprising 63.09% in 2017), as demonstrated in Figure 6. Indeed, in 2017, international attendees comprised 10.41% of the exhibition’s receptive public, more than from Western Australia (3.82%), Tasmania (1.40%), and the Australian Capital Territory (1.27%) combined. Accordingly, the receptive publics that have coalesced around Desert Mob (at least since 2010) were distant from both the participating art centres and Desert Mob in Alice Springs.

As discussed, I am particularly interested in those publics that purchased the exhibited art, as such purchases indicate that distance as a barrier to the cultural participation of consumers had been successfully mediated. In 2017, 147 of the 256 exhibited artworks were sold. While one purchase may have corresponded with multiple individuals (that is, a purchase may have been made on the behalf of an institution), or one individual may have purchased multiple pieces, these purchases signify participation that went beyond receptive practices of attendance and viewing. By purchasing an exhibited artwork, attendees (members of a receptive non-digital public) were reconfigured as an enactive public. As discussed in Chapter Two, cultural platform-based publics can be reactors, (re)makers and (re)distributors (Ito, 2008, p. 3). Members of the Desert Mob purchasing public effectively reacted to the exhibition and redistributed the art. In doing so, the locative spread of this public is revealed: “because we have postcode details … we know where … every work from Desert Mob has gone” (M. Crees, personal communication, August 10, 2017). Data derived from artwork sales since Desert Mob 2010 is displayed in Table 10 to identify an enactive purchasing public that, as with the receptive attending public just discussed, was distant from both the participating art centres and Desert Mob in Alice Springs. Figure 7 provides a detailed visualisation of this dynamic in relation to Desert Mob 2017.
This data suggests that the assertion of auction sales data (Acker et al., 2013, p. 9) – that a significant portion of Aboriginal art is purchased by overseas visitors – is not necessarily applicable to Desert Mob. The percentage of works sold and sent to international buyers between 2010 and 2017 was at its highest in 2017 and even then comprised only 9.52% of total sales. At its lowest point in 2012, a mere 0.76% of the exhibited artworks were sent overseas. Instead, this data conforms with Acker and Woodhead’s (2015) finding that the primary purchasers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art were “from New South Wales or Victoria” (p. 11). Of particular significance is that this data shows that between 2010 and 2017, only around a quarter of works sold
remained in the Northern Territory. Indeed, of the artwork that did stay in the Northern Territory (23.81% in 2017, and 24.80% between 2010-2017), it did not return to the communities in which it was produced. Further analysing the available data using deidentified postcodes, rather than states, provides greater insight into this dynamic.

Before showing the results of this analysis, however, it is important to note that postcodes offer only a “make-shift” representation of particular regions (ABS, 2018, p. np). Postcodes are “a four digit number used … [by Australia Post] to assist with mail delivery” (ABS, 2016c, p. np) comprised of “aggregates of gazetted Suburb/Locality boundaries” (ABS, 2018, p. np), rather than a geospatially accurate rendering of a location. Accordingly, the below images illustrate indicative locations, rather than a precise record of purchase. Also important to note is that international sales have been precluded from these visualisations to improve their clarity.

Figure 8, demonstrates the trajectory of each artwork purchased at Desert Mob 2017. The pink circles represent the participating art centres – and therefore the site of creation – while the blue circles indicate where the sold pieces of art were shipped to, illustrating the sites of consumption. The grey circle in the centre represents the Araluen Cultural Precinct, where Desert Mob is held. The exhibited art travelled from the art centres into Alice Springs, and then out, to the distant publics who purchased it.
Figure 7: Delivery destinations for all works sold, Desert Mob 2017
Figure 8: Trajectory of each art work sold at Desert Mob 2017
In the rare instances when residents of another remote community purchased exhibited artworks, these purchases corresponded with artworks created in an entirely separate community (Figure 9). Accordingly, even in those instances where artworks remained in the Northern Territory, the mediation of distance between sites of creation and consumption remained significant.

Maps have been compiled for each Desert Mob between 2010 and 2017 revealing similar dynamics, and are included as Appendix E. Figure 10 demonstrates the cumulative influence of these dynamics, detailing the distribution of each artwork sold at Desert Mob between 2010 and 2017.
Figure 10: Trajectory of each artwork sold during Desert Mob 2010-2017
Including each point – the participating art centres, Desert Mob, and the geographic spread of the purchasing publics – in the one map clearly demonstrates the multiple distances inherent within the remote Aboriginal art sector: the distance between art centres, and the distance between art centres and consumers. Not only were the sites of creation (the art centres) distant from the Araluen Cultural Precinct (and thus Desert Mob), so too were the publics who consumed the exhibited art. Through the convergence of the two, Desert Mob 2017 non-digitally mediated distance as a barrier to the cultural participation of distant publics comprised of consumers.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have positioned Desert Mob 2017 in relation to the participating remote Aboriginal art centres. I have demonstrated that in this context, distance presented a barrier to cultural participation, and that both remote Indigenous art centres and art fairs such as Desert Mob were established in response to this distance. Each was intended to mediate this distance between the sites of creation and consumption of Aboriginal art. Where art centres mediated this distance by sending art out of the communities in which it was produced, Desert Mob mediated distance through the convergence of creators and consumers in Alice Springs. When seen through the media ecologies framework this thesis deploys, both art centres and art festivals were non-digital platforms that mediated distance as a barrier to the cultural participation of consumers. Maps documenting the destination of artworks sold during Desert Mob 2010-2017 were used to locate this distant public, confirming that even in instances where purchases corresponded with a remote community, the distance between sites of consumption and creation remained relevant.
Given this thesis’ focus on the spatial dynamics of digital participation, that Desert Mob’s receptive publics were predominantly located elsewhere is significant. In Chapter Four, I explore the influence that this had on the digital participation enacted in relation to Desert Mob 2017, and argue that this can be productively understood as an extension of the non-digital practices that this chapter has outlined. Digital participation was focussed outwards and towards these distant publics conceived of as consumers.
Chapter Four:

*A digital Desert Mob: Making the cultural platform “accessible to people beyond the region”*
In Chapter Three, I demonstrated that Desert Mob was established to mediate distance as a barrier to the participation of distant publics conceived of as consumers. In this chapter, I argue that digital participation in relation to Desert Mob 2017 was an extension of these existing non-digital practices. In the same way that Desert Mob was intended to non-digitally mediate distance (through the convergence of creators and consumers), so too was the associated digital participation. As Stephen, Araluen’s curator, explained, digital platforms were first introduced to “make [Desert Mob] accessible … [to] people beyond the region” (S. Williamson, personal communication, August 8, 2017). And, as Art Centre Manager 10 (ACM10) reiterated, this digital participation was intended to facilitate the cultural participation of geographically distant publics “because [Desert Mob] has a limited physical audience due to its location and size … [through digital platforms] people can choose to be part of it and not necessarily be in Alice Springs” (personal communication, October 2, 2017). Desert Mob 2017 digital participation was thus used to mediate distance as a barrier to the cultural participation of consumers.

Taken in this sense, Desert Mob 2017 digital participation was aligned with the dominant policy narrative: through digital participation, distance was mediated. In doing so, however, a choice was made between barriers to participation, and thus between which publics participated, and how. While the exhibited artists were highly visible in non-digital contexts – on Desert Mob opening night, the Araluen galleries were filled with artists and their families – and this visibility extended into digital contexts, this visibility was not the result of digital practices enacted by them. Instead, digital participation was almost exclusively the domain of non-Indigenous art centre managers and Araluen staff. This lack of artist-led digital participation was typically attributed to the non-digital and digital barriers that confronted these artists, such as a lack of access, or lack of practice, derived at least in part from the digital divide’s spatial dynamics and Indigenous/non-Indigenous
digital inequity. In choosing to mediate distance as a barrier to the cultural participation of consumers, distance as a barrier to the digital participation of artists remained.

I present this argument in four parts. I begin this chapter by describing the digital platforms used in relation to Desert Mob 2017, before detailing the digital publics depicted on these platforms. In doing so, I identify three publics: (1) those that enacted digital practices (comprised predominantly of non-Indigenous art centre managers and Araluen’s Exhibition Officer), (2) those depicted within the digital practices (typically the participating artists), and (3) those imagined as receiving them (distant consumers). In the third section, I show that Desert Mob 2017 digital participation was intended for distant publics conceived of as consumers, rather than creators. However, through analysing the digital participation enacted by this receptive public of consumers, I show that there was a disconnect between Desert Mob 2017’s digital and non-digital publics. Although art centre managers and Araluen staff enacted the Desert Mob 2017 digital participation, consumers appeared to engage directly with the artists depicted. Finally, I connect these findings to the non-digital practices underpinning the remote Indigenous arts sector detailed in Chapter Three, demonstrating that Desert Mob 2017 digital participation comprised an extension of the art centre model.

A digital Desert Mob

In 2017, digital platforms remained a relatively recent addition to the Desert Mob media ecologies. These comprised an online gallery on the Desart website (since Desert Mob 2011), the Desert Mob Facebook page (active since Desert Mob 2012), an Instagram account (established for Desert Mob 2016), as well as the year specific hashtag (#desertmob2017). In addition to these were those digital platforms associated with Araluen and Desart, and the
28 participating art centres. As Figure 11 demonstrates, Desert Mob 2017 participating art centres used a wide variety of digital platforms, ranging from websites to LinkedIn profiles.

Although preceded in breadth of use by both websites (92.85%) and Facebook (85.71%), I predominantly restrict the discussion that follows to Instagram (used by 82.14% of the cohort). Given the increasingly prominent role that Instagram is taking in the cultural sector due to its visual and social affordances (Budge, 2017; Budge & Burness, 2018; Russo & Pond, 2018), an analysis of this platform and the practices enacted on it was considered most likely to produce knowledge that was of benefit to my research partners (see Chapter Two for a discussion of how the interests of my research partners were of methodological concern to the research). Further, it was precisely through the platform’s visual affordances that I would literally be able to ‘see’ the publics that were or were not depicted within the digital practices associated with Desert Mob 2017.

Digital publics depicted on Instagram

As described in the introduction of this chapter, the non-digital visibility of the exhibited Indigenous artists on opening night extended to the associated digital participation. In 2017, the Desert Mob media ecologies included the 23 art centre Instagram accounts just described, plus the Desert Mob account (@desert_mob), as well as the accounts associated with Araluen (@araluenartscentre) and Desart (@desartinc). Cumulatively, these 26 accounts made 2,657 posts in 2017. Of these, 81.42% (2,164 images) featured either an image of an artist (17.31%), an artwork by an artist (32.33%), or an artist with an artwork (31.80%). 0.83% of the dataset (22 images) depicted an Indigenous arts worker (Figure 12).14

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14 Aboriginal staff employed in a non-art making capacity, such as through administrative roles (see, for example, Oster, 2009, p. 70).
Figure 11: Digital platforms used by Desert Mob 2017 participating art centres as of October 2017
As I discuss below, Araluen (and therefore Desert Mob 2017) existed within a particular structural context which meant that they tended to reshare posts originally made by art centres. As such, for the remainder of this section, I restrict my discussion to the digital publics depicted within the Instagram posts of participating art centres.

Although highly visible within the Desert Mob 2017 digital participation, the artists within these images were not consistently named (Figure 13). Of the 2,459 Instagram posts made by art centres in 2017, 40.59% (998 posts) included the depicted artist’s name in the caption, 4.03% (99 posts) used either a first name or surname in the caption, and slightly fewer than 30% (721 posts) made no reference to the artist in the caption. One art centre manager reported using artists’ names as hashtags to increase their individual visibility: “We use … the names of the people [artists], so that there’s an archive in relation to certain names” (ACM9, personal communication, September 15, 2017). When asked to describe this practice further, the art centre manager explained that they were drawing on their own digital practices enacted “outside of the art centre”:

> When I’m looking up an artist that I like, if I want to see something that they’ve done recently, I’ll hashtag their name, and you can usually see their latest show. If they’re a major contemporary artist, you can normally see a lot of photos. So [using artist names as a hashtag] is a good way to build that up [for the art centre]. (ACM9, personal communication, September 15, 2017)

However, the data shows this practice was ad hoc, both within the posts made by this particular art centre, as well as across the cohort of art centres. Within AC9’s posts (106 posts in 2017), only 36.79% (39 posts) used an artist’s name as a hashtag, 50% (53 posts) acknowledged the depicted artist within the caption text, and 12.26% (13 posts) included no acknowledgement. The remaining 0.94% (1 post) used either the artists’ first or last name in the caption text, rather than as a hashtag. Of the entire corpus of Instagram
Figure 12: Typology of Instagram posts made by Instagram accounts within the Desert Mob 2017 media ecologies.
Figure 13: Attribution of artists in Instagram post captions made by Desert Mob 2017 participating art centres in 2017
posts made by art centres in 2017, only 25.45% (628 posts) used an artist’s name as a hashtag, while 0.24% (6 posts) used either the artist’s first name or surname as a hashtag.

Only 0.28% (7) of the Instagram posts made by art centres in 2017 tagged an artist’s Instagram account in the post caption or image. The incredibly low rate of this practice suggests participating artists might have confronted barriers to digital participation that precluded their having an Instagram account intended for public consumption. I return to discuss this point below in relation to evidence of artist-led digital participation. Also significant is that images of non-Indigenous art centre managers and Araluen staff were rarely visible within the dataset. Only 2.75% (73 posts) of the entire cohort of Instagram posts made in 2017 featured the image of a non-Indigenous art centre manager, and only 0.33% (9 posts) featured acknowledgement of non-Indigenous staff in the image caption.

Having identified that the overwhelming majority of the Instagram posts associated with Desert Mob 2017 featured either an image of an artist, an artwork by an artist, or an artist with an artwork, in the next section, I identify the publics that enacted the digital participation required to produce these posts. In doing so, I provide evidence of the multifaceted digital inequity in this field site, and demonstrate that the digital visibility of the artists described above was not the result of practices enacted by them.

**Enactive publics and their digital practices**

As Stephen, Araluen’s curator, explained, numerous staff from multiple non-digital platforms worked together to deliver Desert Mob 2017. Araluen staff were “one of many … It’s Araluen … Desart … the artists … the art centres” (S. Williamson, personal communication, August 8, 2017). Together, these individuals comprised enactive publics that shifted in size and membership around the cultural platform. For example, Araluen
staff comprised an enactive non-digital public that facilitated Desert Mob 2017 opening night. In turn, associated digital participation was enacted by Araluen staff alongside art centre managers. In framing the shifting combinations of these individuals as enactive publics, I borrow from scholarship that engages with sociality in the work place. For Wenger and colleagues (2002) such collectives are best understood as communities of practice: social groups that “share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 4). Through coming together to deliver Desert Mob 2017, these individuals formed a public that coalesced around the shared concern of delivering the exhibition.

Understanding these publics as communities of practice also accounts for their transition between digital and non-digital contexts. Art centre managers and Araluen staff interacted via digital participation in the lead up to the Desert Mob opening weekend, shifting to non-digital contexts once on site. As Gilpin (2010) explains, communities of practice “may combine online or offline means of communication and collaboration” (p. 244; see also Cox, 2008; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002). Simultaneously, however, these publics were also demic. As Jason Potts and John Hartley (2014) argue, publics (which they refer to as demes) form through narrative building that results in oppositional ‘we’ and ‘they’ groups: the teller and the told (p. 39). In this section, I discuss the enactive publics that comprised the ‘tellers’ of the Desert Mob 2017 narrative.

Interconnected enactive publics:
Araluen staff and art centre managers

During my fieldwork, Araluen’s digital participation was typically the preserve of the Publicity and Promotions Manager, Lisa-Marie. As she explained, these practices were
associated with multiple platforms:

So, my job is to manage all marketing activity for Araluen Arts Centre and the Cultural Precinct. That involves the theatre, which includes both theatrical performance[s] and [the] cinema, the galleries and then the cultural precinct as a whole. [My work is] mainly aimed at tourists. It includes doing media releases, creating advertisements, including radio, television, social media and print. (L. Ryan, personal communication, August 15, 2017)

As noted throughout this thesis, Desert Mob is the result of a partnership between the Araluen Cultural Precinct and Desart, the peak agency for remote Aboriginal art centres. Due to the delineation of this partnership, Lisa-Marie was also tasked with the Desert Mob-associated digital platforms (Facebook and Instagram). Given that this was in addition to her existing roles, Lisa-Marie was often stretched to capacity. And, as stated by Araluen’s Senior Director Mark, “resourcing wise, it would be more effective if we had someone who was fulltime in that space [of digital participation], either in partnership with Desart (a shared resource) or at Araluen, provided we had budget to facilitate it” (M. Cree, personal communication, August 10, 2017). In the meantime, in an effort to distribute digital practices across the team more evenly, Tim, Araluen’s Exhibitions Officer, was allocated responsibility for the Desert Mob-specific Facebook and Instagram accounts. As Tim explained:

In many ways, it was about efficiencies in terms of it was less work for us to post for ourselves, and develop content, than to be liaising with Lisa-Marie to get it done. Often, we’re the ones in the galleries when stuff is happening and work is being delivered, so it was just deemed easier for us to handle it. (Chatwin, personal communication, August 11, 2017)

In practice, however, although this re-delegation of responsibility reduced Lisa-Marie’s workload, it increased Tim’s: “of course … that hasn’t worked out quite [as we planned] … We’re time poor as well, even when we’re [the visual arts team] developing our own content” (T, Chatwin, personal communication, August 11, 2017).
Ideally, Tim explained, digital practices associated with Desert Mob 2017 would be planned “early in the year, during our down time”, when “a lot of local residents leave town … for quite long periods, and … tourists aren’t coming in” (T. Chatwin, personal communication, August 11, 2017). As Tim described, “as a way of ticking over the Desert Mob page” he would “often just share what art centres [we]re doing” (T. Chatwin, personal communication, August 11, 2017). Then, three months out from Desert Mob 2017 opening weekend, Tim started with “one post per week”:

Then we might do flashbacks or focus on some works that were acquired [from previous Desert Mob’s], or key works that were shown. Then we ramp it up… as it gets closer, we increase the frequency of the posts and they start to become more relevant to [the current] Desert Mob. (T. Chatwin, personal communication, August 11, 2017)

This practice of “shar[ing] what art centres are doing” (T. Chatwin, personal communication, August 11, 2017) was largely due to the structural context within which Araluen existed. Founded in 1984, the Araluen Arts Centre was originally owned and run by the Alice Springs town council. In 1991, it was renamed the Araluen Cultural Precinct and came under the management of the Northern Territory Government. During my field work in 2017, Araluen sat within the Department of Tourism and Culture, and as such, came under departmental oversight, which required everything to be “approved along a chain of command” (L. Ryan, personal communication, August 15, 2017). Through taking responsibility for the Desert Mob Facebook and Instagram accounts, this departmental oversight was extended to Desert Mob, with guidelines provided for what should or should not be posted on the associated digital platforms. As Lisa-Marie explained,

When we were awarded the Instagram account for Desert Mob … It was sort of suggested to us by the Department that we utilise sharing as much as possible … The Government gave us the example of [the] Tourism NT [Northern Territory]
This suggestion to “utilise sharing as much as possible” (L. Ryan, personal communication, August 15, 2017) was evident within the typology of posts made on Araluen’s Instagram account (Figure 14). Of the 120 posts made in 2017, just under 40% (45 posts) were re-shares of content initially posted by others. This dynamic extended to the digital participation enacted in relation to Desert Mob 2017 (Figure 15).

Of the 39 posts made on the Desert Mob Instagram account in 2017, slightly under 60% (23 posts) were re-shares. Only 41.02% (16 posts) comprised original content.

While informed by the departmental oversight discussed above, these practices of re-sharing were also due to pragmatism. As Tim explained, “[art centre managers] will give us images to post … because we can’t be out on communities” (T. Chatwin, personal communication, August 11, 2017). As a result, the enactive public associated with the Desert Mob Instagram account shifted in size and geographic scope through interaction with art centre managers. Likewise, this enactive public was temporally specific: banding together in relation to the lead up to Desert Mob, and disbanding in its wake. As ACM10 explained:

There’s probably a period of six months where that relationship happens: organizing artworks, sending artworks, organizing installations and photos … That process will start again around January. But from now [September] until then, we’ll have a bit of a break from each other. (ACM10, personal communication, September 25, 2017)
Figure 14: Araluen Instagram posts made in 2017: Original and reshared content

Figure 15: Desert Mob Instagram posts made in 2017: Original and reshared content
Araluen’s digital practices were thus directly intertwined with those of art centre managers. However, not all art centres used digital platforms, whether at all, or to the same extent. Accordingly, Araluen’s re-sharing practices were complicated by the unevenness of digital participation. Because Desert Mob required Araluen to maintain relationships with “around thirty art centres at once”, there was a “real need to make sure that digital content [was] not showing favouritism” (T. Chatwin, personal communication, August 11, 2017). As a result, the digital participation that was enacted – or not enacted – by art centres mattered.

In an early interview, Stephen explained that “access to social media and the like in this region is actually a lot more advanced than what it was even five years ago … almost all communities have mobile towers now, and mobile phones are prolific” (S. Williamson, personal communication, August 8, 2017). However, as Park and colleagues (2019) note, “the concept of access has various levels of meaning in rural contexts … complex layers of infrastructural … factors … influence whether … access is sufficient” (p. 143). For the 28 art centres that participated in Desert Mob 2017, digital access (and thereby participation) remained variable. For example, while AC3 had access to 3G coverage, the community lost power, which knocked out their internet connection, on a regular basis: “maybe four or five times a week” (ACM3, personal communication, September 9, 2017). AC8, on the other hand, had access to satellite connectivity, however their download limit was restricted to only 5GB per month (ACM8, personal communication, September 9, 2017).

Even in those communities where access was available, digital participation was not guaranteed, because some art centre managers did not consider it particularly important. ACM13, for example, said, “I don’t really care. It [digital participation] is a one-sided
thing” (personal communication, September 9, 2017). ACM5 agreed, explaining that the
digital public that coalesced around their Instagram account was “whoever goes on there … if people are interested, they come on, they like the page, and then they get it in their feed”, rather than a cohesive, or useful, public (personal communication, September 15, 2017). Digital participation for Desert Mob 2017 participating art centres was thus confronted by multifaceted inequity, influenced not only by infrastructure (non-digital barriers), but interpersonal dimensions (digital barriers), and meant that not all used digital platforms, whether at all or to the same extent.

This unevenness of art centre digital participation meant that although “you could share a great post from [some art centres] everyday”, Tim chose “to actually do nothing, rather than to share [content from the same art centres] all the time” (T. Chatwin, personal communication, August 11, 2017).15 In this example is evidence of the intersection of digital practices enacted by members of multiple publics: Araluen’s (and therefore Desert Mob’s) re-sharing practices intersected with their need to maintain relationships with all art centres, which was made difficult by the varied nature of art centre digital participation.

However, this interaction – between the practices enacted by art centres and the practices enacted by Araluen – also confronted non-digital and postdigital barriers. Firstly, Tim had an iPhone 4, which the Instagram application was no longer compatible with: “I’ve got a 4S and you can’t do it [Instagram] anymore! This is soon to be upgraded … I’ll get something that I can install the Instagram app on. That will help, I think” (T. Chatwin, personal communication, August 11, 2017). Tim thus confronted a non-

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15 Importantly, this conundrum was not unique to digital contexts. The same issues of equitable representation were evident within the non-digital platform of the annual Desert Mob catalogue. As with the posts on Instagram, Tim was “conscious of democratising the distribution of those images” (T. Chatwin, personal communication, August 11, 2017). For this, art centres supplied photographs “of artists in the [art centre], and in the landscapes, which we put into the catalogue” (T. Chatwin, personal communication, August 11, 2017).
digital barrier to participation: a lack of access to an appropriate platform. Secondly, some art centre managers, such as ACM11 “didn’t try to [post to Instagram] … because [they] felt that it was being done [by Desart or Araluen], so [they] could focus on more immediate tasks” (personal communication, September 26, 2017). As such, there was also a postdigital barrier to participation: art centre managers assumed that Desert Mob 2017 digital participation was “being looked after by the organisers” (ACM11, personal communication, September 26, 2017). As this section has demonstrated, however, this was not entirely the case. Because ACM11 chose not to post to Instagram on the assumption Araluen was enacting those practices, Tim had nothing to re-share.

As a direct consequence of these non-digital, digital, and postdigital barriers to participation, Tim’s plan for Desert Mob 2017 did not translate fluently to Instagram. As Figure 16 demonstrates, rather than beginning three months out as Tim had suggested, posts were made to the official Desert Mob Instagram account within a much shorter time frame, beginning one week out from 2017’s opening night. Instead, Tim focussed primarily on Facebook because it was possible to enact the practices required on his work desktop computer, rather than being reliant on his older iPhone. The resulting Facebook participation enacted during 2017 is demonstrated in Figure 17.
Figure 16: All Instagram posts made by the Desert Mobs Instagram account in 2017:
Measured by comments and likes received.
Figure 17: All Facebook posts made in 2017 by the Desert Mob Facebook account: Measured by comments and likes received
Araluen’s preponderance for re-sharing practices were likewise evident on the Desert Mob Facebook page. As shown in Figure 18, of the 79 posts made to the Facebook page in 2017, 50.63% (40 posts) were original, while 49.36% (39 posts) were comprised of reshared content originally posted by other users. Of particular interest are the temporal shifts in these practices of resharing over 2017. As Tim explained, as Desert Mob 2017 got “closer … the posts … bec[ame] more relevant” (T. Chatwin, personal communication, August 11, 2017). As shown in Figure 19, the vast majority of posts made between February and May on the Desert Mob Facebook page were comprised of reshared content. In contrast, from July onwards, the posted content was increasingly ‘original’.

Given the interconnectedness that this section has described between Araluen’s (and therefore Desert Mob 2017’s) digital participation and that of art centres, I now turn to discuss the digital practices enacted by art centres. As discussed above, I restrict my focus for the remainder of this chapter to the use of Instagram.

Art centre managers

At the time of my fieldwork, 23 (82.14%) of the 28 Desert Mob 2017 participating art centres had an Instagram account. By scrolling back to the first post of each account, a timeline of the platform’s introduction to the remote art sector is revealed (Figure 20). The first art centre amongst the cohort to use Instagram was Barkly Regional Artists, posting for the first time on May 2, 2013 (a mere three years after the platform’s launch in 2010). In contrast, the Artists of Ampilartwatja were the most recent art centre to start using the platform, posting their first image on May 10, 2017. The majority of the cohort (Mimili Maku Arts, Maruku Arts and Crafts, Iwantja Arts and Crafts, Kaltjiti Arts, Tjarlirli Art, Papunya Tula, Tangentyere Artists, Warakurna Artists, and Yarrenyty Arltere) commenced use of the platform in 2015.
Figure 18: Desert Mob Facebook posts: Original and reshared content
Figure 19: Desert Mob Facebook posts: Original and reshared content, by month
Figure 20: Timeline of Instagram's introduction to the remote art sector.
Importantly, early uptake of Instagram did not correspond with the number of posts made. Although the first art centre to post on the platform, at the time of data collection Barkly Regional Arts had made only 113 posts, while Iwantja Arts – one of the art centres to make their first post in 2015 – had the greatest number of posts at 623 (Figure 21). Likewise, early adoption did not necessarily correlate with greater numbers of followers (Figure 22). The two art centres with the most followers at the time of data collection (Tjala Arts with 9,502 and Tjanpi Desert Weavers with 7,830), each started using the platform around the same time in 2014 (September 29 and 16, respectively). Although the earliest to use the platform, Barkly Regional Arts had the second lowest number of followers (342).

As discussed in Chapter Three, Indigenous art fairs such as Desert Mob set the “rhythms of the year for many remote artists and art centres” (Acker & Jones, 2014, p. 85). Through documenting the date of each Instagram post made by each Desert Mob 2017 participating art centre during 2017, I demonstrate that these rhythms extended to the digital. Figure 23 documents each Instagram post made throughout 2017 by one art centre (unnamed here as per my ethics of care approach, outlined in Chapter Two). The chart has been annotated to demonstrate that specific clusters of Instagram-based participation correlated with the lead up to, and in the wake of, these Indigenous art fairs.
Figure 21: Number of Instagram posts made by Desert Mob 2017 participating art centres as of October 2017
Figure 22: Number of Instagram followers for each Desert Mob 2017 participating art centre as of October 2017.
Figure 24 depicts each Instagram post enacted by all Desert Mob 2017 participating art centres against the same timeline, demonstrating that while less clearly delineated, similar clusters of participation were evident across the entire cohort. By narrowing the data to include only those posts made in the month leading up to Desert Mob 2017 (Figure 25), the increase in Instagram posts is made clearer. Distinct spikes in participation can be discerned around both the Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair and Desert Mob 2017.

In each of the art centres that participated directly in the research via semi-structured interviews, digital participation was entirely the domain of the non-Indigenous art centre manager. I discuss two important exceptions to this below. Although Instagram posts could, theoretically, be made entirely within the application, art centre managers tended to describe practices that intersected with multiple platforms. ACM3, for example, described using a camera, a computer, and an iPhone “because the camera on [their] phone was really shit” (personal communication, September 19, 2017). While these practices indicate the presence of a non-digital barrier to digital participation (in that their phone camera was not able to adequately fulfil the task), they simultaneously provide evidence of the perceived importance of Instagram, with significant time and effort warranted for getting the ‘right’ photo. This perceived importance was reiterated in reported posting practices, which were often described in relation to temporal and geographic considerations. Both ACM3 (personal communication, September 19, 2017) and ACM7 (personal communication, September 15, 2017), explained that they had “heard” Instagram posts would receive the most likes when timed with “people’s commute to and from work”. Because Central Australia is, depending on the time of year, “half an hour, or an hour and a half, behind east coast time”, this art centre manager would, “where possible … [cater] to the east coast commute” (ACM3, personal communication, September 19, 2017). As I discuss below, in their consideration
Figure 23: An example of one Desert Mob 2017 participating art centre’s posts on Instagram in 2017: Measured by comments and likes received
Figure 24: Every Instagram post made by Desert Mob 2017 participating art centres in 2017: Measured by comments and likes received
Figure 25: All Instagram posts made by Desert Mob 2017 participating art centres made August 01 – September 31, 2017: Measured by comments and likes received
of both temporality and geography, these practices gesture towards a receptive digital public that was conceived of as being located elsewhere, and based in a different time zone to that of the art centre. They also indicate platform-specific literacies: knowledge that more likes were most likely to accrue at specific times. However, these literacies might be out of date. Given that the Instagram timeline is no longer determined by the chronology of posts, it seems unlikely such strategies of targeting time zones and east coast commutes would be effectual.

Having described the digital practices of Desert Mob 2017 participating art centres – and thus the practices of art centre managers – in the next section, I discuss the digital participation of artists.

**Artists**

As discussed in Chapter Two, in conducting this research I did not speak directly with artists. While in the field, I found that artists were disinclined to speak to practices that they did not themselves enact. However, when I asked art centre managers about the lack of artist-led digital participation that I had observed, this was typically attributed to non-digital and digital barriers. For example, ACM13 suggested that even if artists at their art centre established ‘official’ or ‘public’ Instagram accounts, they would be difficult to maintain because the artists often changed phones and social media accounts: “it’s like their phones, you know? A new number every six month, and then on [Facebook] messenger, they’ll have three different accounts” (personal communication, September 15, 2017). ACM13’s insight accords with research that demonstrates a high preponderance for device sharing and the use of multiple accounts in remote Aboriginal communities (see, for example, Rennie et al., 2016; Rennie et al., 2018a; Rennie et al., 2018c).
However, ACM13’s suggestion also positions the Desert Mob artists as being pre- or non-digital, and thus unable to enact the practices that would facilitate a public digital presence. This positioning does not correspond with the existing literature on remote Indigenous digital participation (see, for example, Ginsburg, 2008). Although, as Bronwyn Carlson and Ryan Frazer explain (2016), “accurate statistics are difficult to obtain”, research “suggests that Indigenous people use social media at rates 20% higher than non-Indigenous Australians” actively contradicting “common racist stereotypes of Indigenous people as somehow anti-technology” (pp. 118-9; see also Callinan, 2014). Indeed, Carlson and Frazer (2016) report that “over 60% of Aboriginal people in specifically ‘remote’ communities are active Facebook users” (p. 118; see also Callinan, 2014). While statistics regarding the use of Instagram by remote-dwelling Indigenous peoples are not available, according to ACM1, “a lot of the young people [in community] are using Instagram, so we’ve been using it to communicate with our artists and their families” (personal communication, October 2, 2017). Such communication between the art centre and artists or artist’s families could happen via comments or direct messages, and would often involve a younger relative sending messages on the behalf of an older artist:

A lot of people will [get in touch] when they’ve seen their Auntie online …
And definitely the old[er] ladies like to see themselves on film, but they don’t necessarily have a phone. It’s mostly the younger ones who are looking for their Aunties. (ACM1, personal communication, October 2, 2017)

ACM10 reported a similar dynamic on Instagram (personal communication, September 25, 2017). This art centre manager had noticed that artists and their relatives would follow the art centre account, and would comment on or like, relevant photos.

ACM10: Some of [the artists] do follow us, yes. Especially when we post something about them or their family members. They’ll comment on it then, and
they’re definitely engaging and part of it, that’s for sure. Particularly the younger generation. A couple of our older artists are online, but not using it so much. They don’t often post a photo, that’s the younger ones.

Holcombe-James: So, if you posted a photo of an artist, will they comment or like it?

ACM10: Sometimes. Or maybe one of their family members.

In both ACM1’s and AC10’s observation, artist-led digital participation appeared to be prohibited by an intersecting ‘grey digital divide’: the gaps in access and use that influence those over the age of 65. This was reiterated by ACM5, who explained low levels of artist-led digital participation in relation to Desert Mob 2017 were likely due to the demography of the art centre:

[because] we have a lot of senior artists, [as well as] from [more remote communities]. They’re still totally ninti [clever] with the phone, but it’s mostly calling people on the telephone [rather than via social media]. (ACM5, personal communication, September 8, 2017).

The influence of older age on artist-led digital participation was reiterated during fieldwork I conducted for another research project with Associate Professor Ellie Rennie (Rennie et al., 2018b). Returning to Northern Territory communities to conduct follow up interviews, Rennie and I interviewed a senior woman who was also an artist at a Desert Mob 2017 participating art centre. When we discussed the internet generally, she was dismissive: for the most part, she chose not to engage with it. However, when we mentioned we had seen her artwork on Instagram, she became more engaged:

Rennie: Have you seen what [the art centre] is sharing?

Artist: No. I don’t get on there. I haven’t had a look.
Holcombe-James: Do you want to? ... All of these photos are from your art centre. Can you see any that you’ve made?

Artist: [laughs at a photo of herself with an artwork]. That’s mine, I’m holding it.

Rennie: Has anyone commented on them?

Holcombe-James: Yeah. Someone says: ‘These are just lovely, can we buy them online?’ Someone says, ‘I love them all. I wish I could be there’. Another sent lots of love hearts … Another person said they’d ‘like to buy them’.

Rennie: You’re a super star!

Holcombe-James: Yeah. Famous. 200 people have liked that photo of you.

Artist: 200 people! That’s good.

The likely influence of age on the lack of artist-led digital participation described above is supported by other research. As noted by Acker (2015, p. 4), over 31% of all Indigenous artists at remote art centres are over the age of 55. And, as documented by the Australia Council, First Nations artists over the age of 65 are those “most likely to be earning income” from their art (Australia Council for the Arts, 2017b, p. np). While the average age of those artists who participated in Desert Mob 2017 is not publicly available, it appears likely that age was a relevant barrier to artist-led digital participation.

In line with these observations, ACM5 reported digital participation was more prevalent amongst younger artists. One of the art centre’s “very few, but very precious younger artists” had an Instagram account, but it was private, rather than public (personal communication, September 8, 2017). Similarly, ACM3 suggested that “some of the
younger artists have Facebook, and potentially Instagram, but no professional ‘artist’ pages” (personal communication, September 19, 2017).

In describing instances where artists or their families were commenting on, or liking art centre content, art centre managers (ACM1, ACM3, ACM5, ACM10) indicated that there were artists with social media accounts who were digitally participating, at least in the context of a private individual, if not a public artist. Indeed, examples of artist-led digital participation were littered throughout the Desert Mob catalogues. In the Desert Mob 2015 catalogue, for example, artist Anne Thompson explained:

In Pukatja we have mobile phone reception, Wi-Fi, digital television, iPads, all the technology … Everyone has Facebook and we use it to connect up and keep in touch with families and friends. We put photos of our work on Instagram. (Araluen Cultural Precinct, 2015, p. 24)

Similarly, in the Desert Mob 2018 catalogue, artist Vanessa Inkamala described how taking photos with her phone was integral to her painting practice:

This painting [Phone on the Road to Ntaria] is about when we go out bush and we look out the car window and see our country. When I look at the country I am always looking at it like it was a painting, looking for a good part to paint. When I find a good spot, I take a photo on my phone so I can remember it for later. This is a painting about the way I use my phone when I make paintings. (Araluen Cultural Precinct, 2018, p. 25)

However, only two art centre managers (ACM3 and ACM7) provided evidence of Indigenous artists or arts workers directly enacting digital practices on the behalf of the art centre. ACM3, for example, reported one of the AC3 artists (who chose not to be named) used “the [AC3] Instagram and Facebook, and [they] often d[id] the posts together [with the art centre manager]” (personal communication, September 19, 2017). When I asked whether the artist had considered developing their own professional
platforms, ACM3 again emphasised the influence of older age as a barrier to digital participation:

The artist is a bit older, they’re not that interested in having a Facebook profile as an artist. They’re interested in looking at the galleries and other art centres on Instagram, but I don’t think they want a social media presence… They’re happy to have input into the posts on the Facebook and Instagram rather than having their own. (ACM3, personal communication, September 19, 2017)

Similarly, ACM7 explained that one of the art centre’s Indigenous arts workers would often take and post photos directly to the Instagram account:

[their] main role is in the gallery, but because [they’re] involved in sales, [they’ll] come to markets and things, or art fairs, and [they’ll] also document and take photos of those things to post … Sometimes [they are] in the images that we post, and sometimes [they] are posting them. (ACM7, personal communication, August 31, 2017)

As ACM7 continued to explain, this arts worker would collaborate with the art centre manager to write the captions, and tag the appropriate people in the picture, or in the caption (personal communication, August 31, 2017). According to ACM7, this delineation of practices was linked to the arts workers’ existing digital participation: “[they] are across all that stuff [posting photos, writing captions, and tagging other users] from [their] personal life” (ACM7, personal communication, August 31, 2017). Because this arts worker had an existing personal practice on Instagram, they were able to enact the practices required by the art centre.

**Summary**

So far, this chapter has demonstrated that although Desert Mob 2017 exhibited artists were a highly visible public in both digital and non-digital contexts, this visibility was not the result of digital participation enacted by them. Instead, digital participation remained the preserve of the typically non-Indigenous art centre managers and Araluen staff.
members. Jason Potts and John Hartley (2014; see also Hartley & Potts, 2014) argue
that publics (which they refer to as demes) form we- and they-groups around culturally
made meaningful narratives: ‘the teller’ and ‘the told’. Following this logic, art centre
managers and Araluen staff members constituted a public comprised of ‘tellers’ that
communicated the culturally made meaningful narrative surrounding Desert Mob 2017.
Extending this logic, the participating artists comprised a public that was ‘told about’.

In Chapter Three, I demonstrated that Desert Mob mediated distance as a barrier to
the cultural participation of distant publics conceived of as consumers. I now turn to
argue that Desert Mob 2017 digital participation can be productively conceived of as
an extension of these non-digital dynamics, and thus aligned with the dominant cultural
policy narrative. Through digital participation, distance was mediated.

**Conceiving of receptive publics as consumers**

As described in the introduction to this chapter, digital platforms were first introduced
to “make [Desert Mob] accessible … [to] people beyond the region” (S. Williamson,
personal communication, August 8, 2017). And, as ACM5 explained, digital participation
offered art centres a means for “raising awareness that we’re around, so that we’re not
forgotten … Distance is definitely a big thing. Particularly where we are. I feel like the
desert … is relatively invisible” (personal communication, September 8, 2017).
When I asked art centre managers to identify where their Instagram followers were
from, ACM1 suggested their digital receptive public was located primarily “in other
states … mostly on the east coast, in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Queensland”
(personal communication, October 2, 2017). In contrast, ACM5 described their
Instagram followers as being “pretty broad … Anyone that’s following us”, specifying
that it was likely “quite Alice Springs centric … probably mostly Central Australia, Perth and the NT” (personal communication, September 8, 2017). Although ACM5 thought there would probably be “some followers on the east coast”, they did not think it would “really be that big a contingent”. However, in the months following Desert Mob 2017, ACM5 followed up with an email to clarify after checking their Instagram Insights:

> Our [Instagram followers are] mostly Perth and Sydney centric, for the record, which is a little contrary to what I initially thought … I think I was under the impression they were [Northern Territory/central Australia] based due to … Council staff and services being based in Alice [Springs], however, there are also offices in Perth, and so I think local agencies and people who have become followers of ours while working on the lands are [now] based in Perth or Kalgoorlie, rather than Alice Springs. (ACM5, personal communication, November 13, 2017)

In the same way that the non-digital publics that formed around Desert Mob (whether through attending or purchasing the exhibited art) identified in the previous chapter were distant from both the art centres and Desert Mob itself, so too were the associated digital publics.

Engaging these distant publics motivated the digital practices enacted in relation to Desert Mob 2017. As ACM5 explained, these practices were intended to “raise awareness that we [the art centres] are in town [Alice Springs] … come and see us” (personal communication, September 8, 2017). ACM1 similarly described the digital practices enacted during Desert Mob opening weekend as being intended to “generate information about what we were up to” for those in Alice Springs, while also “linking to the website for people who [weren’t there]” (personal communication, October 2, 2017). Likewise, for ACM3, Instagram enabled “awareness raising of [the art centre]” (personal communication, September 19, 2017). However, as ACM5 explained, “[although] the best thing would be for Instagram to correlate with sales or acquisitions
… unfortunately, I don’t find that it’s a … sales tool, but it is a good visibility tool” (personal communication, September 8, 2017).

Text-based practices such as hashtags were used to further this visibility. Although, as demonstrated above, individual artist names were hashtagged in an ad hoc fashion, art centre managers described the use of hashtags generally as part of an effort to “make [the art centres] part of a larger conversation” (ACM1, personal communication, October 2, 2017). This was reiterated by ACM10 who described hashtags as a practice of “networking, and promoting the event to a much broader network” (personal communication, September 25, 2017). Hashtags were also utilised to locate and associate art centres within particular spheres of cultural consumption. ACM1, for example, suggested that alongside cultural platform-specific hashtags (such as #desertmob2017), there were “standard ones that [they] use[d], like #aboriginalart, and #buyethically” (personal communication, October 2, 2017). Through using such hashtags, content posted by the art centre was inserted into existing narratives around the ethics of consuming Indigenous art. In contrast, ACM9 used #contemporarypainting rather than #aboriginalart, to associate their artists’ work “with the best contemporary painters of Australia” as opposed to a specifically Indigenous art world (personal communication, September 15, 2017).

These hashtagging practices align with the findings of existing research. According to Kylie Budge (2018), hashtags play a “communicative role in relation to social presence” (p. 117). That is, hashtags “act to connect [posts] with others, and in doing so, convey and create the possibility for social presence activity” (Budge, 2018, p. 117). By using hashtags such as #contemporarypainting, ACM9 opened “the possibility of connecting with a broader public beyond those who follow them” (Budge, 2018, p. 117), as well
as beyond those interested in specifically Aboriginal art. Through using alternative hashtags, ACM9 mediated the distance not only between the art centre and potential consumers, but also the distance between particular aesthetics of consumption.

In this section, I have demonstrated that the digital receptive publics associated with Desert Mob 2017 were thought of as being both distant from the art centres and the cultural platform itself, as well as being conceived of as consumers. Digital participation was enacted to facilitate the participation of these consumers, and thus to mediate distance. In the next section, however, I show that there was a disconnect between Desert Mob 2017’s digital and non-digital publics. Through an analysis of the digital participation enacted by this public comprised of consumers, I demonstrate that although art centre managers and Araluen staff enacted the associated digital participation, consumers appeared to engage directly with the artists depicted.

Consumers, artists, art centre managers: Disconnected publics

2,980 distinct accounts made 8,580 comments on the Instagram posts made by Desert Mob 2017 participating art centres in 2017. Over 60% (1,829) of this cohort commented only once on only one post. The remaining 40% commented between two (15.7%) and 301 (0.03%) times across multiple posts. Figure 26 details the digital practices enacted by the 20 most frequent commenters across the cohort of Desert Mob participating art centres. Importantly, Instagram account handles have been removed as per my ethics of care approach. These have been replaced with categories (such as private individual, Australian art gallery or art centre manager). Art centres continue to be named.
Figure 26: Top 20 commenters on Instagram posts made by Desert Mob 2017 participating art centres in 2017.
This data shows that the most frequent commenter was a private individual, enacting 301 comments across 15 different art centre accounts. When I asked art centre managers whether they noticed particular ‘regulars’ within their digital publics, this individual was often referred to. As ACM9 explained:

ACM9: [they] comment on everything, all the time …

Holcombe-James: Are there other similarly engaged people or [are they] a unique example?

ACM9: Not as dedicated as [they are], but I mean … [they] comment on a lot of stuff. (ACM9, personal communication, September 15, 2017)

And, as reiterated by ACM3:

[They’re] probably the keenest. I can’t think of any others [that are as keen], to be honest. [They’re] pretty active on Instagram … Other than [them], I can’t think of anyone who’s that active on Instagram who’s not within the industry. But you almost question whether it’s a good post if [they’re] not commenting or liking it within an hour. (ACM3, personal communication, September 9, 2017)

Ikuntji Artists – a Desert Mob 2017 participating art centre – was the second most frequently commenting account, commenting 300 times in 2017. However, the bulk of these comments (297 comments, or 99%) were on their own posts. Delving deeper into this data revealed that this art centre tended to put their image captions as comments, thereby explaining this high rate of participation and revealing a possible digital barrier to participation comprised of a lack of awareness regarding the platform’s differentiation between captions and comments. The same practice was evident in the sixth most frequent commenting account, Warlukurlangu Artists (another Desert Mob 2017 participating art centre). This art centre posted 85 comments in 2017, 100% of which were on their own photos.
Figure 27: 35 most frequently used words in comments on Instagram posts made by Desert Mob 2017 participating art centres in 2017
Cumulatively, these 8,580 comments comprised 39,235 words. The most frequently used words (Figure 27) were: beautiful (956 times), love (788 times), work (469 times), amazing (380 times) and wow (375), suggesting that members of this receptive public were typically engaging with the aesthetic qualities of the posted images. Although the majority of comments were directed towards aesthetics, there were a number of examples that went beyond this, comprising genuine attempts at communication with the depicted artists. I offer evidence of this occurring below. Both the names of commenters, and the specific examples of art centre-digital participation they were responding to have been removed. While this has reduced the nuance of these examples, the ethical considerations surrounding the public practices of private individuals were deemed more important.

Some commenters appeared to be aware of the dynamics underpinning the digital participation they were responding to:

Hello my big sisters … [art centre account tag], tell them [family update].

Fuck yeah [artist’s name]! This is stella [sic] … Tell him from me.

Please say hello to [artist’s name] for me.

[Artist’s name], the superstar. Let her know [commenter’s name] said hello.

Hello [artist’s name]!!! Lovely to see you hitting the brushes!!! Big star!

Please tell [artist’s name] that [commenter’s name] says hello.

That is, these commenters were aware that the artists themselves were not posting the images, and that any communication was being mediated through art centre managers.
Others, however, appeared to be speaking directly to the artists:

   Lovely [artwork], looking fabulous [artist’s name]. See you in a month or so.

   Hello ladies!

   Cracking work, [artist's name]!

   Hello [artist’s name], powerful painting.

   Beautiful, sis.

   Hello uncle [family name]

This data suggests that there was a disconnect between Desert Mob 2017’s digital and non-digital publics. Although art centre managers suggested artists did not digitally participate because they confronted barriers to such participation derived from the digital divide’s spatial dynamics, artists were digitally participating, at least in the context of a private individual, if not as a public artist. Indeed, in the Desert Mob 2018 catalogue, artist Elaine Sandy explained that she was “personally very involved in social media, and … really want[ed] to use more social media to promote our art centre activities, to share what we are achieving every day” (Araluen Cultural Precinct, 2018, p. 7). Accordingly, while digital participation mediated the distance between Desert Mob 2017 and possible consumers, it did not result in direct communication between creators and consumers. Although digital participation mediated distance as a barrier to the cultural participation of consumers, distance remained as a barrier to the digital participation of creators.
Digital participation and non-digital dynamics: 
An extension of the art centre model

The delineation between publics, practices, and consequent visibility that this chapter has described is not a new arrangement. As argued in Chapter Three, non-Indigenous art centre managers have mediated the relationship between remote dwelling Indigenous artists and the publics that consume their art since the establishment of art centres. The findings discussed here show that the digital participation enacted in relation to Desert Mob 2017 comprised an extension of these non-digital practices, intended to mediate distance as a barrier to the cultural participation of consumers.

Because of this connection to pre-existing practices, these dynamics accord with the literature discussed in the preceding chapter. Altman (2005a), for example, suggests it is precisely the division of labour between artists and art centre managers that has ensured the art centre model’s success (p. 6). This is not to argue, however, that the depicted artists lacked agency. While Instagram posts enacted by art centre managers were typically photos of artists, or of paintings by artists, these posts would not have been possible without the artists’ active participation. As discussed in Chapter Three, this research conceives of art-making as non-digital practices that have both economic and cultural outcomes. Artists thus directly participated in the mediation of distance through creating the consumed content. Further, these posts would not have been possible without the willing delineation of these practices as per the art centre model described above.

Towards the end of my field work, I spoke with ACM1 about my emergent findings. We discussed the representation of artists by art centres, and their comparative lack of direct digital participation. In response, they paused, and said:

It’s not so much that [art centres] are gate keepers, but they are doing the job
of promoting an artist in a different way than an artist working by themselves would. The artists could have their own profiles … It’s an interesting thought to have, too, given that our mission is to promote the voice of [the artists] – not just [the art centre]. (ACM1, personal communication, October 2, 2017)

When seen through the conceptual frameworks that this research used, the data presented here raises questions about the inclusivity of the digital participation enacted in relation to Desert Mob 2017. As Kidd (2018) argues, new museology – and the resulting digital participation enacted as a communicative practice with the capacity for facilitating inclusive and accessible outcomes – introduced polyvocality into the museum space (p. 200; Kidd, 2011, p. 68). That is, museums and cultural institutions tend to use “multiple voices and perspectives” on digital platforms such as Instagram, “not indicating a correct or preferred interpretation” (Kidd, 2018, p. 200). While introducing multiple voices and perspectives might support the further democratisation of the cultural sector (Kidd, 2009b, p. np), it presents certain difficulties for members of the publics receiving these multiple voices and perspectives. As Kidd (2018) continues to explain:

How do visitors distinguish between the different modes of address? The official and authoritative, the playful or the voices of other visitors (in retweets for example)? Does it matter if they cannot? Is it always clear who is talking and who they speak for? Such questions are, at their core, questions about truth and its interpretation … They also bring us to a consideration of power relations. (Kidd, 2018, p. 200)

This chapter has demonstrated that the digital participation associated with Desert Mob 2017 was primarily enacted by non-Indigenous staff (such as art centre managers and Araluen exhibition officers) on the behalf of Indigenous artists. Likewise, distant publics conceived of as consumers appeared to respond directly to the depicted Indigenous artists, rather than the non-Indigenous persons that had enacted the practices they were responding to. As such, “the relationship between face and voice is also important here”
(Kidd, 2011b, p. 68). Although the faces of Indigenous artists were represented within the Desert Mob 2017 digital participation, their voices were less evident. The comparative invisibility of non-Indigenous faces both in images and in text ensured that it was not “always clear who [was] talking and who they sp[oke] for” (Kidd, 2018, p. 200). Desert Mob 2017 exhibited artists thus comprised what Hartley and Potts (2014) might describe as a public that was ‘told about’. Although, as Healy (2006) suggests, “in recent years, technology … [such as] email and the development of websites … have brought art centres closer to their clients” (p. 256), it has not done the same for the artists themselves. Accordingly, while “physical remoteness” may have ceased to be the predominant issue in marketing [remote] Aboriginal artworks” (Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, 2004, p. 14; see also Cardamone & Rentschler, 2008, p. 112), distance remained a significant barrier to participation for the Desert Mob 2017 participating artists.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have described the digital participation observed in relation to Desert Mob 2017. Through paying attention to the publics depicted within this digital participation, I demonstrated that Desert Mob 2017 exhibited artists were highly visible in both digital and non-digital contexts. I then identified the publics that enacted this digital participation, showing that this visibility was not the result of digital participation enacted by these artists. Non-Indigenous art centre managers and Araluen staff enacted digital practices, and artists appeared within them, rendering the non-digital public comprised of participating Aboriginal artists a digital public that was ‘told about’. Furthermore, I argued that these practices comprised a digital extension of the non-digital art centre model: intended to mediate distance and facilitate the participation of a distant public conceived of as consumers.
While this delineation of practices and visibility accords with the art centre model, it was also described as a consequence of the barriers to digital participation that confronted the artists. Not only did the spatial dynamics of the digital divide influence Desert Mob 2017’s digital participation, but so too did demographic dynamics, such as a grey digital divide. While the incredibly low instances of artist-led digital participation that this chapter has documented might suggest that the majority of participating artists either did not have an Instagram account, or that their account was not for public consumption, artists were digitally participating, at least in a personal capacity, if not as a public artist. Digital participation in the context of Desert Mob 2017 was therefore shaped by a choice between barriers to participation, and thus between which publics participated, and how. Distance was mediated as a barrier to the cultural participation of consumers, rather than the digital participation of creators. Digital participation in this context thus had implications for inclusivity, influencing who (digitally) participated, and who articulated (digital) cultural narratives.

In contrast, Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project took a very different approach and demonstrates what it means to privilege a public made up of those who experience low digital inclusion.
Chapter Five

‘Unlocking’ cultural collections: From Australian Museums On Line to Victorian Collections
In this chapter, I locate Victorian Collections within a trajectory of preceding Australian efforts to 'unlock' cultural collections through digital participation. I begin by providing an overview of what was initially the Australian Museum Integrated Services, that became Australian Museums On Line, and finally was the Collections Australia Network. Importantly, this is not an exhaustive discussion (for those interested, Strong & Letch, 2012, 2013, and Dewhurst & Sumption, 2012, provide useful, detailed histories), but rather is used here to demonstrate that the barriers to digital participation confronting community collecting-organisations – such as digital access and use – have long been acknowledged. As Klaus Müller (2002) notes, these predecessors set “standards for digital collaborations among museums and for digital outreach” (p. 25; see also Australian Museums and Galleries Association, 2017; Sumption, 2000). Understanding previous efforts to ameliorate such barriers is thus vital for understanding the context in which Victorian Collections was developed, and exists within, today.

I then introduce Victorian Collections, and demonstrate that in developing the cultural platform, the barriers to digital participation confronting community collecting-organisations were identified, and platform features and practices developed to ameliorate them. In this section, I provide three examples of this: (1) the Victorian Collections’ cataloguing interface; (2) the provision of digital access through a loan service; and (3) the development of training workshops such as the Veterans Heritage Project. Where appropriate, I illustrate both barriers and amelioration through reference to my fieldwork at the Lara RSL. Finally, I conclude the chapter by identifying how these platform features were aligned with the existing literature on possible

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16 Although I restrict my focus to Australian initiatives, these were developed in parallel to a number of international digital heritage projects, such as the National Initiative for a Networked Cultural Heritage in the United States, the Canadian Heritage Information Network, the Arts and Humanities Data Service in the United Kingdom, and the Digital Heritage Initiative of the European Commission (Dewhurst & Sumption, 2012, p. 224; Kenderdine, 1998, p. 66; Kenderdine, 1999, p. np; Müller, 2002, p. 25).
solutions to the grey digital divide discussed in Chapter One.

Victorian Collections is a “free, web-based collections management system” (Victorian Collections, n.d.-a) for small to medium community collecting-organisations (referred to, from now on, as community collecting-organisations). Developed and delivered by the Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria (known then as Museums Australia [Victoria]) and Museums Victoria, Victorian Collections was established to fill a gap in the documentation and preservation of Victoria’s cultural heritage. While the state collections are held by major collecting institutions\(^{17}\) and exist via legislative mandates extending back to the early 1850s (Victorian Collections, n.d.-b), those held by the community have remained largely undocumented. In Victoria, these collections are thought to comprise around 10 million items (Hawkins et al., 2015, p. np) in over 750 organisations, ranging from “metro-regional galleries, museums, historical societies, RSLs, sporting clubs, church, hospitals and schools” (Victorian Collections, n.d.-b; see also Strong & Letch, 2013, p. 329; Pope, 2009).\(^{18}\)

Taken together, the individual collections held by each of these organisations comprise the Victorian distributed collections, which reflect “local and regional history and culture … [as well as] key state and national developments” (Victorian Collections, n.d.-b, p. np; see also Crooke, 2007; Pope, 2009; Sandell, 2002). As McShane (2009) explains,

\(^{17}\) The Arts Centre Melbourne, Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI), Museums Victoria, the National Gallery of Victoria, Public Record Office Victoria, the Royal Botanic Gardens, and the State Library of Victoria (Victorian Collections, 2018b).

\(^{18}\) Ten million items is a relatively recent estimate. As Martin Hallett (personal communication, April 5, 2017) explained in an interview conducted in the course of this research, there have been earlier attempts to measure the number of items held in the community collections. For example, Roger Trudgeon's 1984 survey of the Victorian museum sector, and Kirsten Freeman's 1993 report on a similar survey conducted in 1992. Unpublished research conducted by Hallett and the Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria updated these findings in 2003, estimating that there might be 1 to 1.5 million items in the community collections. With the development of Australian Museum Integrated Services, Australian Museums On Line and Collections Australia Network came more granular data, and, as Martin described, “suddenly the scale of it became different” (personal communication, April 5, 2017).
by “collect[ing] and preserv[ing] significant aspects of a region’s material and visual culture” (p. np), community collecting-organisations “engage with their surrounding histories, cultures and environments … interpret[ing] and reflect[ing] on the local past and deepen[ing] understanding of the present” (p. np). Accordingly, through providing community collecting-organisations with a free, web-based collections management system, Victorian Collections provides a means for “unlock[ing] the potential of digital collection access without the cost” (Victorian Collections, n.d.-a, p. np). In the words of the dominant cultural policy narrative that this research is concerned with, the digital participation that Victorian Collections facilitates is intended to ‘unlock’ the cultural collections held by the community.

Early attempts to ‘unlock’ distributed cultural collections

The Australian Museum Integrated Services, Australian Museums On Line, and the Collections Australia Network represent one of “the early efforts of Australian museums to provide online access … to the nation’s ‘distributed national collection’” (Dewhurst & Sumption, 2012, p. 125; Hart & Hallett, 2011, p. np; Kenderdine, 1998, p. 66; Marty, 2010, p. 3719; Müller, 2002, p. 25; Strong & Letch, 2012, p. 1). These efforts were the product of particular policy backdrops (McShane, 2005). In the 1970s, for example, policy interest in cultural collections arose out of “concern over loss of the nation’s heritage” (McShane, 2005, p. 21). And, as discussed in Chapter One, with the Piggott Report (Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections, 1975) came an increased emphasis on the value of cultural collections that generated discussion about how such collections could be “better manage[d]” (Strong & Letch, 2013, p. 329).

An interview with Martin Hallett conducted for this research provides greater insight into these discussions. With a forty-year career in the Australian cultural sector (Culture
Victoria, 2016), Martin was a key instigator in the use of “computer technology for the management of collection data” (Culture Victoria, 2016, p. np). As Martin (Hallett, personal communication, April 5, 2017) explained, “the emergence of the internet began to reshape [our] thinking. Across Australia, we began to think of [how to have] a collaborative approach” that would facilitate digital access to cultural collections (see also Dewhurst & Sumption, 2012, p. 125). In the words of the dominant policy narrative, these conversations were about how the nation’s cultural collections could be ‘unlocked’.

Development of this “collaborative approach” (Hallett, personal communication, April 5, 2017) began in earnest with the Cultural Ministers Council’s founding of the Heritage Collections Council in December 1996 (Cultural Ministers’ Council, Heritage Collections Council, 1998; Hart & Hallett, 2011; Strong & Letch, 2013). Intended to build on the work of the Heritage Collections Committee (itself formed in 1993), the Heritage Collections Council was tasked with improving access to the distributed collections alongside conservation standards (Strong & Letch, 2012, p. 4; Strong & Letch, 2013, p. 329). Recognising that “there was a real place for a technology that would show the collections as a whole – what we referred to as the distributed national collection” (M. Hallett, personal communication, April 5, 2017), the Heritage Collections Council established the On Line Working Party (Hart & Hallett, 2011; Kenderdine, 1998).

The On Line Working Party proposed the development of a digital platform that would provide access to the cultural collections held by “small, medium and large institutions across Australia” (Dewhurst & Sumption, 2012, p. 125; see also Department of Communications and the Arts, 1996, p. np; Strong & Letch, 2013, p. 329). Underpinned by principles of collaboration, comprehensiveness, convergence and with a regional and
national focus (Hart & Hallett, 2011), the proposed digital platform was envisioned as “an electronic register of moveable cultural heritage material” (Dewhurst & Sumption, 2012, p. 124). Through making “collection records freely available” (Dewhurst & Sumption, 2012, p. 125), the nation’s cultural collections would be ‘unlocked’ and made accessible to all Australians.

The platform pilot, Australian Museum Integrated Services, was launched in mid-1996, and listed 850 museums from across the country, alongside a database of 43,000 object records (Strong and & Letch, 2013, p. 329). In 1997, the platform was officially launched as Australian Museums On Line. As Sarah Kenderdine (1999) explains, the shift from the Australian Museum Integrated Services to Australian Museums On Line was based in part on a political agenda to “ensure that smaller, regional and specialist museums participate[d] as equal partners alongside higher profile, larger organisations” (p. np). Accordingly, Australian Museums On Line had an increased emphasis on regional and community collecting-organisations (Strong and Letch, 2012, p. 4; Strong & Letch, 2013, p. 329). For Dewhurst and Sumption (2012), this shift from the Australian Museum Integrated Services to Australian Museums On Line provides evidence that the platform was developing in tandem “with the specific needs and changing roles of cultural institutions” (p. 127). No longer solely a provider of online tools intended for cataloguing (and thus ‘unlocking’) cultural collections, Australian Museums On Line was to concern itself with the “operation and performance of museums” (Dewhurst & Sumption, 2012, p. 127). Australian Museums On Line accordingly, incorporated “services such as museum documentation and a museum professionals’ forum” (Strong & Letch, 2012, p. 4; Strong & Letch, 2013, p. 330), and, by 1998, listed over 1,000 museums and galleries, with a collection database comprising 51 collections and over 400,000 collection items (National Library of Australia, n.d.; see also Kenderdine, 1998,
Although Australian Museums On Line was intended to increase the digital participation of regional and community collecting-organisations, this proved difficult. In 1999, the On Line Working Party commissioned an independent review of the platform and the collecting organisations using it. The review found that those located in regional areas – most often community collecting-organisations – faced considerable barriers to their access to both digital technologies and the connectivity required to use them (Strong & Letch, 2013, p. 331). In the language of this thesis, these regional community collecting-organisations were confronted by non-digital and digital barriers to participation.

In 2002, researchers at Deakin University were commissioned by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts to evaluate existing initiatives around access to and preservation of Australia’s cultural heritage (including Australian Museums On Line), and to investigate the “current and future” needs of the cultural sector (Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia and the Pacific, 2002, p. 9). The resulting report confirmed that community collecting-organisations remained disproportionately disconnected. Although most communities were able to access the internet – whether through their local library or otherwise – this was not deemed sufficient for the digital participation that Australian Museums On Line required (Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia and the Pacific, 2002, p. 75). The researchers found that although such proximate connectivity was “often presented as a solution for small museums”,

To overcome resistance by older volunteers to using new technologies and to make rapid progress on documenting collections, it [was] preferable that collecting institutions have their own computer(s) with Internet/email access. (Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia and the Pacific, 2002, p. 75)
Despite observing an increase in widespread access, the report identified that community collecting-organisations remained confronted by barriers to participation.

Of particular interest to this research is that the report identified possible solutions to such barriers. These ranged from the “supply of suitable computer hardware” to “training course[s intended] … to overcome resistance to the new technologies” (Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia and the Pacific, 2002, p. 75). Similar findings were reiterated within an internal study undertaken by Australian Museums On Line in the following year. Investigating the current state of “access to computers, the Internet, digitisation equipment and expertise” amongst 400 small and medium museums and galleries in Australia (Dewhurst & Sumption, 2012, p. 129), the survey confirmed that community collecting-organisations faced significant barriers. Many “lacked the support and infrastructure” required for digital participation, ensuring “they were not in a position to utilise digital technologies to better manage and promote their collections” (Dewhurst & Sumption, 2012, p. 129), let alone use Australian Museums On Line.

Collectively, these reports identified non-digital and digital barriers (access and expertise, respectively) to the participation of community collection organisations, forming the basis for a final re-development of the platform. Funded by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, the redeveloped platform was launched as the Collections Australia Network in 2005 (Collections Australia Network, 2008, p. np; Dewhurst & Sumption, 2012, p. 129; Strong & Letch, 2012, p. 5; Strong and Letch, 2013, p. 331). Furthering Australian Museums On Line’s expanded remit, alongside galleries and museums, the Collections Australia Network took in the catalogues of libraries and archives, “including … small to medium regional institutions” (Collections Australia Network, 2008, p. np).
In response to the barriers to digital participation identified in the reports of 1999 and 2002, the newly launched Collections Australia Network was intended to “focus on the unique needs of small- and medium-sized collecting institutions … [that were] often staffed by dedicated groups of volunteers with little formal museological training” (Dewhurst & Sumption, 2012, p. 128). The shift to the Collections Australia Network was thus predicated on the observation that community collecting-organisations confronted barriers not only to digital participation, but also to cultural participation. As Basil Dewhurst & Kevin Sumption note (2012), such community collecting-organisations were often lacking “formal museological training” (p. 128). The Collections Australia Network thus resulted in an altered understanding of who those doing the work of cataloguing cultural collections were conceived of as comprising, as well as what they required to do this work. When first launched as the Australian Museum Integrated Services, the platform’s intended public was conceived of as those working or volunteering within cultural institutions. As a result, the platform and its affordances – what Dewhurst and Sumption (2012) describe as the platform’s “information architecture and online tools” (p. 125) – were explicitly designed to meet the needs of a professionalised cultural sector. In contrast, Collections Australia Network’s cataloguing interface was developed specifically for “users with little technical experience of the Internet to manage their own institution’s collection” (Dewhurst & Sumption, 2012, p. 129). For example, cataloguers were provided with platform features such as free cataloguing software and webpage hosting (McShane, 2005, p. 22; see also Dewhurst & Sumption, 2012, p. 128; Hart & Hallett, 2011, p. np).

Importantly, these shifts in understanding which publics the platform was intended for also required a shift in the publics who delivered it. Where the Australian Museum Integrated Services and Australian Museums On Line staff had been “geared towards
the technical”, requiring staff to possess “development and administrative skills”, Collections Australia Network’s expanded remit necessitated a “reappraisal of [the] staff skills and experience[s]” (Dewhurst & Sumption, 2012, p. 129) required. Given that the collecting-organisations the platform was intended to serve were typically “limited in their ability to exploit [technology] … effectively, either through internet access issues or lack of skills” (Collections Australia Network, 2009, p. np), Collections Australia Network staff needed to have a new focus training provision and facilitation.

The development of the Collections Australia Network was thus also a development in understanding “the fundamental needs and realities” (Dewhurst & Sumption, 2012, p. 129) of a cultural sector that was inclusive of community collecting-organisations. In the words of this research, the community collecting-organisations that Collections Australia Network was intended for confronted both non-digital and digital barriers to the participation that the platform necessitated. And, as had been noted by the Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia and the Pacific in 2002, community collecting-organisations were interested in possible solutions to these barriers. Such interest was reiterated in an outreach survey undertaken by the Collections Australia Network team in 2009, which found that there was “interest in tutorials on how to photograph objects, digitise collections, use metadata, keywords and write catalogue descriptions” (Collections Australia Network, 2009, p. np). The community collecting-organisations using the Collecting Australia Network were both aware of the barriers to digital participation that they confronted, and eager to resolve them.

In this section, I have described the development of an early Australian effort to unlock and provide access to the distributed cultural collections (Hart & Hallett, 2011, p. np): what was the Australian Museum Integrated Services, that became Australian Museums On Line, and that was eventually the Collections Australia Network. Writing in 1998,
Sarah Kenderdine described the platform (at that time, Australian Museums On Line) as going “some way to using the potential of the internet” (p. 70) for those aspects of the cultural sector that had typically been unable to participate. As per the dominant cultural policy narrative, these platforms were predicated on the premise that through digital participation, cultural collections could, and would, be ‘unlocked’. However, although the platform was provided, barriers to digital participation remained, particularly in relation to the community collecting-organisations this research is directly concerned with. As McShane (2005) notes, the shift from Australian Museums On Line to Collections Australia Network was, at least in part, based on a growing “concern about a digital divide between large and small museums” (p. 22).

In 2011, the Cultural Ministers Council funding for the Collections Australia Network was not renewed (Museums & Galleries of New South Wales, 2014, p. np). In the wake of this decision, the Collections Australia Network website was maintained by the Museum of Applied and Arts and Sciences, but by 2013 “the site and its contents were officially archived with the National Archives of Australia” (Museums & Galleries of NSW, 2014, p. np; see also Hart & Hallett, 2011). While this is a story in itself, in this research, I am interested in how “the opportunity … emerged” (M. Hallett, personal communication, April 5, 2017) in Victoria to ‘unlock’ the cultural collections held by the state’s community collecting-organisations. As such, in the next section, I connect the legacy of these preceding efforts to the development of Victorian Collections.

**Developing Victorian Collections**

In 2009, on what became known as Black Saturday, a series of devastating bushfires swept through Victoria. Amidst the overwhelming loss of life and property, “several community
collections were lost or narrowly avoided destruction” (Hawkins & Blake, 2013, p. np).

One of those collections lost was that held by the Marysville Historical Society (Hawkins & Blake, 2013; Rood, 2009). Despite packing and moving three trailers filled with “the town’s collective memories”, each “deliberately separated” to ensure the collection’s survival, “the best-laid fire plan failed” (Rood, 2009, p. np). All three trailers were destroyed.

Although, as evidenced by the preceding section, “the idea of providing a centralised, publicly searchable collection management system” (Hawkins & Blake, 2013, p. np; see also Australian Museums and Galleries Association, 2017; Hawkins et al., 2015) had been long held, Black Saturday’s events triggered “further discussion about the need for a safely centralised collection management system” (Hawkins & Blake, 2013, p. np) for community collecting-organisations. As a result, the Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria partnered with Museums Victoria to propose the development of a project that would:

- Develop and host a sustainable, freely available collection management system for use by Victorian Heritage Collecting organisations, expose information about Victorian heritage to the public in an engaging and interactive manner, and assist Victorian heritage collecting organisations to adopt sound and sustainable data management practices. (Hawkins & Blake, 2013, p. np; see also Hawkins et al., 2015)

The development of Victorian Collections was therefore motivated “by concerns of risk and by a desire to improve access, collaboration, information sharing, and awareness” throughout the sector (Hawkins & Blake, 2013, p. np; see also Australian Museums and Galleries Association, 2017; Hawkins et al., 2015). As Laura Miles, former executive officer of the Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria, explained, this was to be achieved through:

- Help[ing] organisations who were at risk from various climate or environmental
issues, who had limited capacity in terms of staffing to look after their collections, but also technological problems such as people using legacy databases or large groups of volunteer run museums where only one person knew how to use the database or were elderly, with little digital experience. (L. Miles, personal communication, June 28, 2017; see also Australian Museums and Galleries Association, 2017)

In other words, these community collecting-organisations confronted barriers to participation, the development of Victorian Collections was a direct response to these barriers, and the cultural platform itself was intended to ameliorate such barriers to digital participation.

The partnership between the Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria and Museums Victoria was clearly defined, with each oriented towards particular receptive publics. When seen through the media ecologies framework this research employs, this partnership was between two platforms, with the delineation between the two predicated on the practices enacted by the publics contained within each. As Laura explained:

“the technology for Victorian Collections [came] … from Museums Victoria … a world class institution with a very strong track record in providing technological solutions to museum problems” (L. Miles, personal communication, June 28, 2017). Accordingly, as Cameron Auty, former Victorian Collections manager, reiterated, this “technological team” provided “the technical skills and know how” (personal communication, June 26, 2017). This public thus enacted ‘developing’ practices, such as “coding, development, [and] technical support” (Australian Museums and Galleries Association, 2017) that were oriented towards multiple receptive publics. As Forbes Hawkins, the developer behind Victorian Collections explained, “there are the contributors [or cataloguers]

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19 In the case of the Veterans Heritage Project (discussed below, and in the following chapter), a third platform and additional practice was involved. The Victorian Government’s Veterans Branch (a non-digital platform) enacted the (non-digital) practice of funding the Veterans Heritage Project.
and then there are the consumers – the public browsers, the government and the industry advocates” (F. Hawkins, personal communication, February 22, 2018). In turn, Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria staff comprised a ‘training public’ that developed and delivered “face-to-face workshops and [managed] enquiries” (Australian Museums and Galleries Association, 2017). As a consequence, the training public was directed towards the cataloguers, delivering, as Cameron explained, “all of the face-to-face support and training to the people who use[d] the website” as a cataloguing platform (C. Auty, personal communication, June 26, 2017; see also Hawkins & Blake, 2013).

Taken together, these developing and training publics comprised non-digital communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) that were brought together through the common purpose of providing a cultural platform for community-based collecting organisations to catalogue – and thus ‘unlock’ – their collections. Through developing and delivering Victorian Collections, each had a sense that they were working towards a specific goal (Wenger et al., 2002). In the way that these publics understood themselves, however, they were also demic (Hartley & Potts, 2014): each identifying themselves in opposition to the other. The training public was a ‘we’-group that interfaced directly with cataloguers, while the developing public comprised a ‘they’-group that dealt with consumers.

In 2009, Victorian Collections was provided seed funding of $280,000 from the State Government of Victoria through the Collaborative Internet Innovation Fund (Australian Museums and Galleries Association, 2017). This fund “sought to promote the use of ‘next generation’ ICT [Information Communications Technology] in Victoria by supporting government agencies, industry, and community groups to innovate using Web 2.0 technologies” (Hawkins & Blake, 2013, p. np). Provided between 2009 and
2011, this funding was supplemented by in-kind sponsorship from Dell and Telstra (Australian Museums and Galleries Association, 2017). Since then, Victorian Collections has been funded by various state government sources, ranging from the Victorian Cultural Network, the Office of Multicultural Affairs, and the Victorian Veterans Branch, Department of Premier and Cabinet. Today, Victorian Collections is funded through Creative Victoria via the Victorian Cultural Network, while the Veterans Heritage Project (discussed below) is funded entirely by the Victorian Veterans Branch (Victorian Collections, n.d.-a).

Of particular significance to this research is the influence that funding providers have had on the development of the platform. An interview with Martin Hallett, who, at the time of Victorian Collections development worked at Arts Victoria (part of the Victorian Cultural Network, now known as Creative Victoria), provides greater insight into this process. As Martin described, funding for Victorian Collections was provided by Arts Victoria with “certain conditions” (M. Hallett, personal communication, April 5, 2017). For instance, the development of “a community portal” was encouraged, “so [that] more emphasis would be given to [the] public access” (M. Hallett, personal communication, April 5, 2017) that unlocking the cultural collections would facilitate. Similarly, the development of a “story module” was encouraged, intended to facilitate the identification of “a set of objects which [could] be treated as a coherent group, and then interpreted as an ‘online exhibition’” (M. Hallett, personal communication, April 5, 2017). Finally, “a collection-level description” (M. Hallett, personal communication, April 5, 2017) was suggested.

Typically, cataloguing works at the individual item level. As Martin explained, “when you catalogue, you describe an item” (M. Hallett, personal communication, April 5, 2017).
Given that Victorian Collections was to be used by community collecting-organisations, which at this point were thought to hold “tens of thousands of items”, it was necessary to recognise that “it might be decades” before these collections were “fully catalogued” (M. Hallett, personal communication, April 5, 2017). Accordingly, a collection-level description was implemented as a platform feature that would enable these community collecting-organisations to “articulate broadly what [wa]s in the collection, what the significance of the collection [wa]s, what key items [we]re included, [and] what stories [we]re central … [thereby] allow[ing] [members of the public] to at least be aware of the resource” (M. Hallett, personal communication, April 5, 2017), even if it wasn’t entirely ‘unlocked’.

Each of these platform features were developed in acknowledgement of the dynamics of digital participation available to community collecting-organisations and remain evident within Victorian Collections today. Simultaneously, these platform features provide evidence of the connections between Victorian Collections and the preceding efforts to unlock cultural collections via digital participation that this chapter has already discussed. For example, Victorian Collections’ “story module” (M. Hallett, personal communication, April 5, 2017) is reminiscent of the “series of stories generated from regional and remote local museums, communities and collections” (Kenderdine, 1998, p. 69) included within Australian Museums On Line. This platform feature remains today as Victorian Collections Stories: “each … bring[ing] together items gathered by different organisations, celebrating the diversity of collections held across Victoria” (Victorian Collections, n.d.-c, p. np). So too does the notion of collection-level descriptions. As Dewhurst and Sumption (2012) explain, these were implemented in the shift from Australian Museums On Line to Collections Australia Network as “high level finding aids”, designed to “substantially increase searching precision across collections” (p. 129).
In this section, I have positioned Victorian Collections in relation to preceding efforts to unlock cultural collections and to ameliorate the barriers confronting community collecting-organisations. Launched in 2009 – four years after the relaunch of the Collections Australia Network, and six years prior to its eventual defunding – Victorian Collections was intended to ‘unlock’ the cultural collections held by community collecting-organisations. In the next section, I turn my attention to the barriers to participation confronting members of the Victorian Collections cataloguing publics, identifying and explicitly naming these as elements of a ‘grey digital divide’. I then describe three cultural platform features that were developed to ameliorate these barriers to participation: (1) the Victorian Collections’ cataloguing interface, (2) the provision of digital access through a loan service, and (3) the development of training workshops such as the Veterans Heritage Project. Where appropriate, I illustrate both barriers and amelioration through reference to my fieldwork at the Lara RSL, and interviews with Bruce Challoner, the Sub-Branch’s president.

Identifying and ameliorating a ‘grey’ digital divide

In developing Victorian Collections, the Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria undertook a survey of their members to “ascertain the status of their collections, information systems, technical resources, attitude toward online technologies, and the technical aptitude of their volunteers and staff” (Hawkins & Blake, 2013, p. np). Aligned with the findings associated with Australian Museums On Line and the Collections Australia Network discussed above, this survey revealed that community collecting-organisations confronted significant barriers to digital participation. Overwhelmingly serviced by “older retirees with … limited experience and knowledge of personal computing … Internet, and related technologies” (Hawkins
& Blake, 2013, p. np), many of the surveyed collecting-organisations had “no online presence … some … lacked ready access to broadband … [and] few … had access to modern desktop PCs with current web browsers” (Hawkins et al., 2015, p. np). Respondents also confronted barriers to cultural participation, such as having had limited training in cultural heritage management practices like cataloguing techniques (Hawkins & Blake, 2013).

These findings describe elements of a ‘grey’ digital divide: the gaps in digital access and participation that affect those over 65 years of age. As discussed in Chapter One, digital participation is lower for older Australians than it is for younger (ACMA, 2016; Thomas et al., 2018), and those over 65 are least likely to have digital access at home or via mobile (Borg & Smith, 2016, p. 22). However, a ‘grey’ digital divide can persist even in areas where access is available because, as Mubarak and Nycyk (2017) and Van Dijk (2005, 2006) argue, the ‘grey’ divide is also linked to motivational, material, skills, and usage barriers (see also Helsper & Eynon, 2010). The ‘grey’ digital divide is thus comprised of both non-digital and digital barriers to participation.

Such non-digital and digital barriers were observed at the Lara RSL. Although Bruce Challoner’s election as Sub-Branch president facilitated the introduction of digital platforms and practices, the demographic composition of the Sub-Branch’s public ensured non-digital practices remained significant. As of late-2018, Bruce has stepped down from this leadership position. He currently fills the role of sub-branch curator. Veterans of the Second World War were rarely interested in the digital transformation Bruce was championing, while younger members returned from more recent conflicts were seemingly resistant to non-digital approaches, and it was hoped that using digital platforms would provide opportunities for building...

215
connections. But choosing one public over the other was not an option, and so the RSL did everything twice: “for instance, we have a reduced number of newsletters that go to the old WW2 Vets, as well as a digital version online for those who want to go online and look at it or download it” (B. Challoner, personal communication, June 5, 2017).

This layering of digital and non-digital publics corresponded with layered digital and non-digital practices. Newsletters were printed out and mailed to one public, as well as digitally uploaded to the website for another. Although Sub-Branch members were increasingly opting out of the non-digital newsletter and choosing instead to receive correspondence digitally, these shifts between non-digital and digital practices often resulted in additional work. As Bruce explained, “we’ve gone from probably 100 down to 50, 55, 60 [non-digital copies of the newsletter] maybe at the moment” (B. Challoner, personal communication, June 5, 2017). However, Sub-Branch members would regularly come in, saying: “I haven’t been told anything!”, and you have to say, ‘oh well, hang on a moment, you have, you just haven’t gone to the right place to get it’” (B. Challoner, personal communication, June 5, 2017). In order to deflect some of these questions, visitors to the RSL website were provided with comprehensive information about how to download and view the digital iteration of the monthly newsletter (Figure 28):

- To view, click on the blue button for the month and choose ‘open’ or ‘save’ to your desktop … If it does not open, download any PDF viewer off the internet.
- For example, Adobe Acrobat Reader can be downloaded for free. (Lara RSL, n.d.)

Both non-digital and digital barriers to participation were therefore evident within the Lara RSL. Older members of the RSL’s non-digital public were disconnected due to the presence of non-digital barriers of access, while digital barriers such as lack of digital literacies were evident in the struggles associated with accessing the online newsletter.
As with the development of the Collections Australia Network, in developing Victorian Collections, these barriers to participation were identified. As Cameron explained: “we realised pretty early on that if you get a piece of fancy software and put it out there, expecting people to use it … They just won’t” (C. Auty, personal communication, June 26, 2017). Accordingly, Victorian Collections was “built to be simple to use, and to be accessible to our audience, but also with a training focus built into it” (C. Auty, personal communication, June 26, 2017). Barriers to digital participation were thus identified and platform features intended to ameliorate them developed. In the next section, I describe three of these platform features: (1) the Victorian Collections cataloguing interface, (2) the provision of digital access through a loan service, and (3) the development of training workshops such as the Veterans Heritage Project.

The Victorian Collections cataloguing interface

The Victorian Collections website provides users with two interfaces. The public website, which is intended for consumers and provides access to the entire distributed
collection (Figure 29), and the cataloguing interface for community collecting-organisations (Figure 30). As Hawkins and colleagues (2015) explain, consumers accessing the public Victorian Collections website were provided with a database that facilitated “a search on records belonging to multiple organisations” (p. np). In the following chapter, I demonstrate that this platform feature is particularly significant for understanding the participation of publics conceived of as consumers.

The second interface is intended for community collecting-organisations (Figure 30). As Hawkins and colleagues (2015) explain, the Victorian Collections website was “deliberately designed so as to preserve the independence of individual organisations managing their data within the system” (p. np). As such, cataloguers are required to sign into the cultural platform, and “restricted to viewing only the records belonging to their own organisation” (Hawkins et al., 2015, p. np).
In this section, I discuss how the Victorian Collections cataloguing interface was intended to ameliorate the barriers to participation confronting community collecting-organisations such as the Lara RSL. As Forbes, the Victorian Collections developer, explained:

The idea was, okay, we’ve got a bunch of volunteers. Many of whom have no background in the museum or gallery sector at all … How can we get them to engage with a publicly accessible online collection management platform, when some had never actually turned on a computer before? (F. Hawkins, personal communication, February 22, 2018)

The first step was to develop a web-based cataloguing platform, “rather than using an existing piece of software” (Hawkins et al., 2015, p. np). This was intended to remove “the need for software downloads or purchases” (Hawkins et al., 2015, p. np), and thus to ameliorate non-digital barriers to participation such as access or cost. Simultaneously, features intended to facilitate both digital and cultural participation were embedded within the website: (a) the cataloguing fields themselves; (b) the use of pop-up bubbles; and (c) providing a choice between public or private item records.
The cataloguing fields Victorian Collections requires cataloguers to complete (Figure 31) were drawn from the *Small Museums Cataloguing Manual* (Museums Australia [Victoria], 2009). As Forbes explained, whether enacted on paper or in spreadsheets, “many [community] collecting-organisations in Victoria were [already] using [the *Small Museums Cataloguing Manual*] to guide their [cataloguing] practices” (F. Hawkins, personal communication, February 22, 2018; see also Hawkins et al., 2015). Although these fields have been altered and added to since the first iteration of the platform, the intention was that the practices required to catalogue collection items would “be familiar enough so as not to deter organisations from coming on board” (F. Hawkins, personal communication, February 22, 2018; see also Blake & Hawkins 2013; Hawkins et al, 2015). That is, the cataloguing practices Victorian Collections were intended to

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21 The *Small Museums Cataloguing Manual* was initially developed in 1983 by Arts Victoria’s Museum Resource Service. Intended to provide regional and community museums with information about the importance of documenting their collections, the *Small Museums Cataloguing Manual* provided a cataloguing methodology “that was flexible enough to recognise that no two collections are ever the same” (Museums Australia [Victoria], 2009, p. 8).
be familiar enough to ensure not only that additional barriers to participation were not established, but also that existing barriers (such as nervousness about new requirements) were ameliorated.

Each Victorian Collections’ cataloguing field has a corresponding ‘pop-up bubble’, which clarifies what the field was for, and provides the cataloguer with a prompt for the type of information that should be included. As Forbes explained, the text contained within the pop-up bubbles “like all of the user documentation, was written by the [Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria] members of the team” (F. Hawkins, personal communication, February 22, 2018). As such, the pop-up bubbles described cataloguing practices, and intended to facilitate both digital and cultural participation. For example, the pop-up bubble associated with the keywords field (Figure 32), instructed the cataloguer to provide “a list of ideas and topics this item relates to”. In Appendix F, I detail the descriptive text included in each of the Victorian Collections’ cataloguing fields.

Figure 32: A screen shot taken July 29, 2019 of the Victorian Collections keywords field and associated pop-up bubble. Image provided courtesy of the Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria.
Finally, Victorian Collections allowed cataloguers to choose whether their collection records would be listed publicly or privately. This platform feature was developed to ameliorate concern surrounding the public nature of the catalogued records. Although the default setting was for Victorian Collections catalogue records to be public, cataloguers could choose to list one or all of their collection records privately. If the decision was made to keep the entire collection private, the cultural platform operated as a discrete web-based catalogue management system. Importantly, this feature was flexible. Within public collections, specific items could be listed privately. Similarly, for private collections, should concerns about public access dissipate, the catalogue could be made public, “and thus published on the Victorian Collections site” (Victorian Collections, n.d.-d, p. np).

Such concerns about the public nature of item records on Victorian Collections were evident at the Lara RSL. For example, Elizabeth, the oldest member of the cataloguing public at 81 years of age (discussed further in Chapter Six), was concerned that through cataloguing their collections the RSL was effectively “wrapping them up as a package and giving the address and the location … all the details anybody would need to try and get in and cause a mischief or steal what was there” (E. Goldberg, personal communication, July 10, 2017). As identified by GLAM Peak (2016), although “small [collecting] organisations can see the benefits of digitising their collections, they can be less positive about making them accessible … this can be driven by the desire of many … to maintain ‘security by obscurity’ by not putting collections online” (p. 7; see also Cameron, Marquis, & Webster, 2001). While the choice to maintain public or private catalogue records facilitated the participation of community collecting-organisations through ameliorating their concerns, it is worth noting that facilitating this choice represents a defiance of the dominant cultural policy narrative. Although private collection records could be considered catalogued, they could not be
considered ‘unlocked’ as they were not made accessible. Ultimately, however, in the context of the Lara RSL, these concerns were assuaged, and the entire collection listed publicly.

Having described the Victorian Collections cataloguing interface, and the cataloguing interface’s features that were developed in order to ameliorate the barriers to participation confronting members of a cataloguing public, in the next section, I discuss a second example: the provision of digital access through a loan service.

Providing digital access

When Victorian Collections was founded in 2009, access to digital infrastructure was considered a critical non-digital barrier to the participation of community collecting organisations. In acknowledgement, Victorian Collections developed a loan service for those organisations lacking “ready access to broadband” (Hawkins et al., 2015, p. np; see Strover, 2019, p. 192 for a discussion of the utility of such loan services for facilitating digital inclusion). This loan service provided cataloguing publics with “technical equipment including laptops, digital cameras, scanners, and mobile Internet dongles [a mobile internet connection] for periods of up to six months” (Hawkins & Blake, 2013, p. np). As Cameron, former Victorian Collections manager, explained:

> When the project started, most places didn’t have internet … We bought a bunch of Telstra wireless dongles [mobile internet hotspots] and would give them out to people after a workshop and provide them with free internet so they could do the cataloguing … That was quite important, because that was a real challenge and a real stumbling block. (C. Auty, personal communication, June 26, 2017)

During my fieldwork, however, access as a non-digital barrier to participation was considered by Victorian Collections’ staff to be a decreasing concern. As Cameron continued:

> Now [providing internet access is] not so important, and I think we’ve only got
one organisation still using one of our wireless connections. Everyone else has their own internet, at least at home or on their smart phone or in their club or wherever. So early on that was something we had to do, but not anymore. (C. Auty, personal communication, June 26, 2017)

Victorian Collections staff also reported that the observed improvement in digital access had correlated with an improvement in the digital practices of community collecting-organisations. As Belinda Ensor, former Victorian Collections manager, commented:

There are more baby boomers retiring and moving into these community [organisations] … Their relationship with technology is different: they FaceTime their grandchildren. It’s not as threatening as it is to people who were already retired by the time technology like this became readily available. (B. Ensor, personal communication, June 26, 2017)

Cameron agreed, explaining: “I’ve been on this project for three years … and we’ve noticed a marked change in the digital literacy of older people over that time” (C. Auty, personal communication, June 26, 2017). Likewise, Laura reminded me that:

More people have their own iPads [now]. More people are using social media to connect with family and friends and do family history research … I feel that there has been leaps and bounds in the users of Victorian Collections arguably more than us [in training them]. (L. Miles, personal communication, June 28, 2017)

Despite these observed instances of increased digital access and participation, the loan service Victorian Collections provided remained a necessary precondition for facilitating digital participation at the Lara RSL. Although the RSL theoretically had access to digital infrastructure (in that the town of Lara was connected to major digital services), the Sub-Branch could not justify the financial investment of a permanent connection. As Bruce explained, digital access was thus offered on a needs basis only: “we can’t afford a plan. Now we can switch it on and use it when we need … It’s wasted if we’re on a router system” (B. Challoner, personal communication, June 5, 2017). While access as a non-digital barrier to participation was ameliorated during the Veterans Heritage
Project workshops (discussed below) through the loan service, once the workshops were completed, this non-digital barrier returned. In a follow up interview conducted post-Veterans Heritage Project, Bruce explained: “we had 5GB [of data], but we’ve used that up now. We got a new [SIM] card, but it doesn’t fit in the dongle … I'll have to get another one” (B. Challoner, personal communication, April 4, 2019). In this example is evidence of an additional digital barrier to participation comprised of literacies. Although Bruce was aware that the dongle ran on prepaid credit, it appeared that he was not aware it was possible to recharge the dongle’s credit without purchasing a new SIM card.

Similarly, although Victorian Collections staff reported that the improvement in digital access within community collecting-organisations had correlated with an improvement in the digital practices of community collecting-organisations, this was not entirely the case at the Lara RSL. As I discuss in the following chapter, the Lara RSL’s cataloguing public demonstrated a wide variety of existing digital practices, with two of the six regular members reporting that the Veterans Heritage Project comprised their first engagement with digital platforms and practices. Accordingly, as Bruce explained, the Lara RSL “couldn't have [used Victorian Collections] without them [Victorian Collections staff] … we would not have known where to start” (B. Challoner, personal communication, April 4, 2019). Despite these general improvements in access, and the observed correlating improvement in practices, the training delivered by Victorian Collections remained significant for ameliorating the barriers that confronted the Lara RSL’s cataloguing public. Due to this significance, in the next section I discuss the Victorian Collections training workshops generally, before narrowing to the Veterans Heritage Project specifically. As with the preceding discussions, I demonstrate how identifying and ameliorating barriers to both digital and cultural participation were integral to the development and delivery of these non-digital platforms.
Training workshops

Based on the Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria’s Community Collections Training and Museum Accreditation Program (Hawkins and Blake, 2013, p. np), Victorian Collections’ training workshops were “identified early in the development phase” of the cultural platform as a means for ameliorating the barriers to participation revealed in the user survey described previously (Hawkins et al., 2015, p. np). Victorian Collections training workshops were based on the premise that “face-to-face contact [would provide] … an environment in which to identify barriers … such as lack of ICT skills or resistance to online cataloguing” (Hawkins et al., 2015, p. np). Further, Victorian Collections training workshops were delivered “directly … as many organisations did not have ready access to broadband services and/or devices capable of playing streamed video” (Hawkins & Blake, 2013, p. np). That is, Victorian Collections training workshops were developed both in response to barriers to digital participation, and delivered face-to-face in order to not create additional barriers.

A typical Victorian Collections training workshop covered “collection management strategies and best practices, how to document and photograph a collection item … and how to record this information in Victorian Collections” (Hawkins & Blake, 2013, p. np). Conducted over the course of one day, each session “cater[ed] for 5-15 attendees” (Hawkins, Auty & Ensor, 2015, p. np), with each participant asked to “bring an object with them” (C. Auty, personal communication, June 26, 2017). In the first half of the workshop, Victorian Collections’ staff worked to increase the participant’s “museum literacy” through focussing on collections management: “talking about policy, process, acquisitions, de-accessioning, disposal and that sort of stuff” (B. Ensor, personal communication, April 17, 2018). In this half of the workshop, Victorian Collections staff confronted the barriers to cultural participation that community collecting-
organisations confronted. In the second half, the workshops shifted to a focus on the required digital participation, and “the business of actually cataloguing” (B. Ensor, personal communication, April 17, 2018). Victorian Collections staff thus:

- Run through what the website looks like, and then we get them to … [either] talk through every field before we catalogue, so you follow along but not catalogue anything. Or, cataloguing an item while they all catalogue [the item that they had brought with them] together. Which is ‘okay, let’s do the object registration number. My object registration is this, and then we type it into this field’. (B. Ensor, personal communication, April 17, 2018)

At the beginning of this second half, workshop participants were required to log into Victorian Collections for the first time. Belinda described this as “the worst” part of the workshop:

- People can’t remember their passwords, they’ve changed them, they don’t know their email address … It’s a 15-minute nightmare … It’s hard because you’re pushing [some] people’s technical boundaries to use an iPad. There is part of me that wishes that we just logged them in so that they didn’t have to go through it, but they need to know how to do it. (B. Ensor, personal communication, April 17, 2018)

Although it would have been easier for the Victorian Collections team to log the participants in “so that they didn’t have to go through it”, there was a recognition that in order to facilitate the digital participation that the cultural platform required, “they need[ed] to know how to do it” (B. Ensor, personal communication, April 17, 2018). That is, in order to ameliorate the barriers to participation confronting members of the cataloguing public, Victorian Collections staff had to support them through this chaotic process of logging in.

The support that Victorian Collections staff provided during these training workshops was frequently described as practices of ‘hand holding’:

- At the start of the day, you set them [the participants] this big challenge that
looks terrifying – here’s a computer, here’s a digital camera, get into the twenty-first century! And quite often, people will be understandably nervous about it … That’s why we do the face-to-face training. You need to break down that barrier, that fear that the internet is hard to use, and computers are hard to use, and the fear [that collecting organisations often have] of putting [their] things online. You just have to talk them through it, holding their hand. (C. Auty, personal communication, June 26, 2017)

People actually going out and training people, holding their hands and supporting them. (F. Hawkins, personal communication, February 22, 2018)

People have gone out … sat down with them, talked to them about their collections … about Victorian Collections, and held their hands while they’ve had a go. (M. Hallett, personal communication, April 5, 2017)

Similar practices of handholding were enacted via digital platforms and practices, such as through emails. As Brigid Moriarty, the former Victorian Collections Communications and Education Coordinator, described:

When we’ve gone to send out the initial workshop email that says, ‘you’ll be using an iPad, feel free to bring along your own computer’, we’ll get emails [from participants] really doubting their ability. They’ll say, ‘I don’t think I can use one, I’m nervous about coming’. And so, you write back reassuring them, saying, ‘we cater for all levels of digital literacy, and we’ll be with you every step of the way’. And they kind of go, ‘oh, okay then!’ (B. Moriarty, personal communication, April 17, 2018)

In the same way that the Victorian Collections cataloguing interface features described above ([a] the cataloguing fields themselves; [b] the use of pop up bubbles; and [c] providing a choice between public or private item records) were developed in response to observed barriers to participation, so too were these practices of reassurance. As Forbes, Victorian Collections’ developer, explained, this handholding was “perhaps the more
important aspect for attracting users to come on board”, convincing them “it was a good investment of their time” (F. Hawkins, personal communication, May 8, 2019). And, as Hawkins and Blake wrote in 2013, although “Victorian Collections may be an online service, it seems to be what happens offline that energizes it … without this human interface … Victorian Collections would be under-utilised” (p. np). That is, without the non-digital participation that occurred during Victorian Collections workshops, the digital participation the cultural platform required was considered unlikely.

Following participation in a Victorian Collections training workshop, the enacting of such practices of reassurance often shifted between publics. Rather than members of a training public directing practices of reassurance to members of a cataloguing public, cataloguing publics became self-directed and enacted practices of reassurance in relation to other cataloguing publics. The beginnings of such a shift was observed at the Lara RSL. As Bruce explained:

> They [the Lara Heritage Inc] hadn’t done any of this VC stuff … their stuff [collection records] ... it’s all hand-written stuff in the excel spreadsheet. I thought they could benefit from learning what’s possible for getting things online too. So, I invited them to come along so they could get hold of something for the future. And, we can support them in whatever they’d like us to do. (B. Challoner, personal communication, June 5, 2017)

Through inviting members of the Lara Heritage and Historical Inc to participate in the Veterans Heritage Project workshops and pledging to support their ongoing cataloguing efforts, the Sub-Branch initiated a relationship that was not predicated on the involvement of the Victorian Collections’ training public.

Having described a typical Victorian Collections workshop, I now discuss the specific context of the Veterans Heritage Project. Where Victorian Collections workshops were
typically delivered over one day, the Veterans Heritage Project comprised a series of these workshops delivered over one month.

The Veterans Heritage Project

Funded by the Veterans Branch of the Victorian Government, the Veterans Heritage Project was developed to bring “ex-service organisations together with museum professionals in order to help protect, preserve and increase access to Victoria’s war heritage” (Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria, n.d.; Veterans Heritage Project, n.d.; Victorian Government, 2019). In the same way that Victorian Collections was intended to unlock the collections held by community collecting-organisations, the Veterans Heritage Project was intended to preserve “the cultural heritage legacy” held within RSLs which “tell[s] us important stories about everyday Australians’ experiences of war” (Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria, n.d.).

The development of the Veterans Heritage Project can be traced back to around 2015. As Cameron explained:

> About two to three years ago, we noticed that a number of RSLs were starting to come to the [Victorian Collections] workshops because they have historical collections. They [the RSLs] are essentially small museums who don’t think of museums as their main role. They spend most of their time looking after widows and veterans … but they also have a museum focus with their memorabilia. (C. Auty, personal communication, June 26, 2017)

Accordingly, as Laura continued:

> We brought veterans groups together with more traditional historical societies by saying, ‘you have the same issues, and the same collections, you just refer to them differently: object vs memorabilia’. (L. Miles, personal communication, June 28, 2017)
Although aimed at RSLs and delivered through targeted funding from the Victorian Veterans Branch, these initial workshops were based on the typical one-day model described above. However, in an internal review (conducted by members of both the training public and the Veterans Branch), it was identified that the veterans groups the workshops were intended for required greater support. As explained by a Veterans Branch staff member (who chose not to be named), greater in-person support was needed to facilitate the digital participation required. In the language of this research, these veterans groups confronted barriers to participation that required amelioration that went beyond the scope of the existing cultural platform features described above.

Accordingly, the Veterans Heritage Project – based on an application process and delivered via multiple workshops conducted over one month (see Table 11) – was developed and initiated in 2016 with nine ex-service organisations (Veterans Heritage Project, n.d.). In what follows, I restrict my discussion to the Veterans Heritage Project as delivered at the Lara RSL in mid-2017.

The first Veterans Heritage Project workshop involved only Victorian Collections staff and the Sub-Branch leadership. During this session, the Sub-Branch’s collections were reviewed, an overview of the coming month provided, and a strategy for approaching the ‘unlocking’ of the collections developed for the coming month. The typical Victorian Collections workshop described above was thus delivered during the second Veterans Heritage Project session which was the first to include all participants. Each attendee was provided with a cataloguing kit comprising “gloves, measuring tapes, scissors, water-resistant pens, 2B pencils, chinagraph pencils, archival labels, and cotton tying tape” (A. Robertson, personal communication, June 28, 2017) and taken through collections management and cataloguing practices. This training continued over the following sessions, with the workshops increasing in complexity as they progressed.
Finally, workshop participants were trained in additional digital practices such as how to use the Victorian Collections website to “search, update and export records” (A. Robertson, personal communication, June 28, 2017), as well as introduced to cultural heritage practices, based on what Belinda described as “museum literacy”, such as an “introduction to exhibition development” (B. Ensor, personal communication, April 17, 2018).

Table 11 Schedule for the Veterans Heritage Project at the Lara RSL Sub-Branch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 01</td>
<td>Session 01</td>
<td>Introductions / Planning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Session 02</td>
<td>Full-day Victorian Collections cataloguing workshop</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 02</td>
<td>Session 03</td>
<td>Cataloguing / Labelling / Re-housing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Session 04</td>
<td>Cataloguing / Labelling / Re-housing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Session 05</td>
<td>Cataloguing / Labelling / Re-housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 03</td>
<td>Session 06</td>
<td>Cataloguing / Labelling / Re-housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Session 07</td>
<td>Introduction to exhibition development / Cataloguing / Labelling / Re-housing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 04</td>
<td>Session 08</td>
<td>Cataloguing / Labelling / Re-housing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Session 09</td>
<td>Cataloguing / Labelling / Re-housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Session 10</td>
<td>Wrap up / Review Victorian Collections catalogue records / Group discussion and reflection / Feedback and recommendations for the future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participation in the Veterans Heritage Project also provided the Lara RSL with access to a grant worth $5,000 to be spent on goods and services which would contribute to the preservation and unlocking of the Sub-Branch’s cultural collections. The majority of Victorian community collecting-organisations operated on “less than AUD$5,000 per annum” (Hawkins and Blake, 2013; see also Brophy, 2002; Freeman, 1993; Pope, 2009), ensuring financial resourcing comprised an additional non-digital barrier to participation. Through the provision of funding, this non-digital barrier was ameliorated. In the case of the Lara RSL, the bulk of this funding was spent on archival supplies, facilitating the purchase of three secure storage cabinets and archival re-housing items such as acid-free tissue, polyfoam, albums and album sleeves plastic enclosures, and object storage boxes. The funding was also used to purchase platforms intended to overcome the barriers to digital participation that would return once the Victorian Collections staff left, taking with them their equipment. For example, a Flip Pal Scanner was purchased so that Veterans Heritage Project participants could more easily scan collection items, such as postcards sent and received during World War Two.

**Solving the ‘grey’ digital divide?**

The logic underpinning the Victorian Collections’ platform features just discussed – the Victorian Collections’ cataloguing interface, the provision of digital access, training workshops, and the Veterans Heritage Project – accords with the existing literature on possible solutions to the grey digital divide discussed in Chapter One. As Real and colleagues (2014) argue, efforts to impart digital skills can decrease the grey digital divide. For example, the hand holding described above aligns with work by Gietzelt (2001), Millward (2003), and van Deursen and van Dijk (2010) which suggests that the contexts in which digital skills are imparted must be supportive and conducted at the
pace of the participants. And, finally, Segrist (2004), Blaschke, Freddolino, and Mullen (2009) indicate that associating digital practices with the existing skills and interests of participants (that is, in this instance, the cultural heritage held by the Lara RSL) will increase the likelihood of success.

Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project as delivered at the Lara RSL thus provides a productive site for examining not only the intersection of the cultural sector with barriers to digital participation, but also possible solutions to these barriers. However, although the platform features this chapter has detailed ameliorated non-digital barriers (such as access) and digital barriers (such as literacies) to the Lara RSL’s participation, postdigital barriers remained. It is to these remaining barriers that I turn in Chapter Six.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have positioned Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project in relation to the trajectory of preceding Australian efforts to ‘unlock’ distributed cultural collections through digital participation. By describing how the digital and cultural participation of community collecting-organisations (and the barriers restricting this) were understood in relation to these efforts, I have demonstrated that these same understandings informed the development and delivery of Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project.

I then explicitly named these barriers as elements of a grey digital divide, and demonstrated that features intended to ameliorate these barriers were developed and embedded within the cultural platform through describing three such examples: (1) the
Victorian Collections’ website itself (including: [a] the cataloguing fields, [b] the use of pop up bubbles; and [c] facilitating the choice between public or private practices); (2) the provision of digital access through a loan service; and (3) the development of training workshops such as the Veterans Heritage Project. As discussed, the logic underpinning these platform features were aligned with the existing literature on possible solutions to the grey digital divide discussed in Chapter One.

Having contextualised Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project, in Chapter Six I examine the current state of the dominant policy narrative – that, through digital participation, cultural collections will be ‘unlocked’ – at the Lara RSL. Although the platform features detailed in this chapter ameliorated the non-digital and digital barriers confronting the cataloguing public at the Lara RSL, postdigital barriers remained. As I will demonstrate, these had significant implications for the digital participation of publics beyond those community collecting-organisations that used the cultural platform for cataloguing, ensuring that although the Lara RSL’s cultural collections might have been catalogued, they cannot be considered ‘unlocked’.
Chapter Six

“I’ve held a lot of babies, but never an iPad!”: Barriers to digital participation and their influence on access to the cultural collections
In an early interview conducted for this research, former executive officer of the Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria, Laura Miles explained that Victorian Collections interacted with two distinct publics: cataloguers and consumers (personal communication, June 28, 2017). As discussed in the previous chapter, Victorian Collections provided cataloguers with “a free, web-based collections management system … [that] unlock[ed] the potential of digital collection access without the cost” (Victorian Collections, n.d.-a, p. np). In turn, consumers were provided with access to the ‘unlocked’ collections of more than 500 community collecting-organisations and, as of June 21, 2019, a catalogue of over 150,000 individual items (Victorian Collections, n.d.-e). The distinction between the two publics was predicated on the practices they each enacted. Cataloguers ‘unlocked’ cultural collections, while consumers accessed them. Although each public and their practices were distinct, the practices of consumers were determined by those of cataloguers. Consumers could only access the cultural collections once cataloguers had ‘unlocked’ them.

When combined with barriers to digital participation as in the context of the Lara RSL, this interconnectedness between cataloguers and consumers had stark consequences. Although the cultural platform features discussed in Chapter Five (the Victorian Collections’ cataloguing interface, the provision of digital access, and training workshops such as the Veterans Heritage Project) effectively ameliorated the non-digital and digital barriers to participation confronting the Lara RSL’s cataloguing public, a postdigital barrier remained. Cataloguers found it difficult to make the conceptual link between the practice of selecting and affixing keywords to collection items, and the access for consumers that such practices were intended to facilitate. Barriers to participation at the Lara RSL thus influenced not only the ‘unlocking’ of the cultural collections, but their access.
I present this argument in four parts. In the first section, I elaborate on Laura’s point that there were fundamental differences between cataloguers and consumers by articulating the practices they each enacted. In doing so, I demonstrate that although each public was distinct, the dependency of consumers on the practices enacted by cataloguers engendered a relationship between the two. In the second section, I draw on the example of the Veterans Heritage Project at the Lara RSL to identify the points at which non-digital, digital, and postdigital barriers to participation intersected with cataloguing practices. I then turn to the consequence of these barriers by paying attention to the Lara RSL cataloguing public’s enacting and understanding of keywords. Through this, I demonstrate that the barriers to digital participation confronting community collecting-organisations such as the Lara RSL intervened in both the ‘unlocking’ and the accessing of the cultural collections. Although Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project ameliorated some of the barriers to participation confronting community collecting-organisations, doing so constrained the participation of a public comprised of consumers. I thus argue that the cultural platform made a choice between barriers to participation – and thus between which publics participated, and how. In the fourth and final section, I conclude the chapter by discussing the implications of these findings for the dominant cultural policy narrative. How can the collections be considered ‘unlocked’ if they cannot be found?

**Distinct practices, interconnected publics: Cataloguers and consumers**

Although distinguished by the practices they each enacted, Victorian Collections cataloguers and consumers were simultaneously bound together. As discussed in Chapter Two, I follow Potts and Hartley (2014) to understand publics as demes: forms of social
affiliation and identification that coalesce around “culturally made meaningful identities” (p. 41) through the innately human trait of storytelling or narrative building (pp. 71-2).

In the context of Victorian Collections, cataloguing publics formed at the Lara RSL through the documenting (and thus the telling) of the narratives contained within the Sub-Branch’s cultural collections. In turn, a receptive public comprised of consumers formed through the consumption of these same narratives.

Each public shifted between enactive and receptive states. As Jenkins (2006) and Ito (2008) note, receptive publics are not necessarily passive. Cataloguers at the Lara RSL, for example, were both receptive in that they received the Veterans Heritage Project training workshops, and became enactive through the practices required to catalogue their memorabilia. Receptive publics comprised of consumers could become enactive through digital practices such as commenting on collection items, or sharing them to personal Facebook pages. As de Certeau (1984) argues, the consumption and production of cultural objects are often connected. As a cultural platform, Victorian Collections enabled both the production (through practices of cataloguing) and the consumption (through practices of browsing) of the community collecting-sector’s cultural collections.

Although interconnected, in this section I discuss each public and the practices that they enacted separately. I begin with the cataloguers, discussing these generally before narrowing to the specific context of the Lara RSL.

**Cataloguers**

Prior to mid-2014, the Victorian Collections website described individual cataloguers as ‘members’. Since then, they have been termed ‘users’ (Victorian Collections, n.d.-f).
Slightly differently, Laura described individual cataloguers as participants. When asked to
clarify, she emphasised the practices that this public enacted:

I could say stakeholders, but that’s a bit corporate. And we’re talking about a
community project, so [while] stakeholders is correct, it sounds a bit lofty and
distancing. Participants is [the better way to describe] our users. They’re not
people we just give a service to, they’re people we work with to do something
really important, so I think participants is the right word. (L. Miles, personal
communication, June 28, 2017)

Forbes, Victorian Collections’ developer, described the cultural platform’s cataloguing
publics as collectively comprising a “network” (F. Hawkins, personal communication,
February 22, 2018) of “previously isolated” community collecting-organisations
(Hawkins et al., 2015, p. np). This understanding was reiterated within the infrastructure
of the digital platform: the Victorian Collections’ website domain name ended with
“.net.au” rather than “.com”, or another internet domain. When asked why, Forbes
explained:

Back in the early days [of the internet], .com top-level domains [we]re usually
associated with commercial organisations. .net domains [we]re more often
associated with non-profits. We could have used .org but we were running this
as a partnership. .net.au seemed the most appropriate, especially given Victorian
Collections represents a network of Australian organisations. (F. Hawkins,
personal communication, February 22, 2018)

As Laura explained, when Victorian Collections was first established in 2009, “there was
a core number of champions who used [the platform] and they all got to know each
other” (L. Miles, personal communication, June 28, 2017). Such relationships between
cataloguing publics were crucial for creating the “network of Australian organisations”
that Forbes described (F. Hawkins, personal communication, February 22, 2018) and
expanding use of the cultural platform. Laura described this expansion as a process of “piggy backing”:

Say the Victorian Collections team wanted to do a training session in central Victoria. We would contact people who we know as community leaders … the people who know everybody. We’d say, ‘we’d like to come. When’s most useful for you?’ That person would tell us, we’d fix on a date, and that person would then invite other people to join the group. They would be just as important in making it happen as us going there. (L. Miles, personal communication, June 28, 2017)

Non-digital cataloguing publics thus coalesced around the “museum[s] or collecting organisation[s]” that became “the focal points for training get togethers” (L. Miles, personal communication, June 28, 2017). As Ashley Robertson, Victorian Collections current manager, explained, when planning Victorian Collections workshops, “we invite members from all around a particular area, maybe from a historical society … people who won’t necessarily cross paths come together with a common purpose [of cataloguing their collections]” (A. Robertson, personal communication, June 28, 2017). This was true of the Veterans Heritage Project at the Lara RSL. As discussed in the previous chapter, Lara Heritage and Historical Inc [sic] members were regular participants.

Individual cataloguing publics were thus simultaneously located within broader publics (Warner, 2002) comprised of all Victorian Collections’ cataloguers, as well as smaller interest-based publics. As Cameron explained, although the community collecting-organisations that use Victorian Collections:

Aren’t linked physically … they are linked in the sense that if you look at it as a whole, this is the history of Victoria in object form. So Victorian Collections is … one of the first, real attempts to bring that collection together into one place, and the only way that you can do it is digitally. You can’t do this in a physical sense. So that’s the key driver behind this project. It’s a way to bring the state’s
distributed collection into one space where it can exist as the history of Victoria, rather than the history of Beechworth or Melbourne. (C. Auty, personal communication, June 26, 2017)

For Beel, Wallace, Webster and Nguyen (2015), it is this bringing together of multiple collections that ensures digital cultural platforms such as Victorian Collections “alters the place-based assertions surrounding traditional community archives” (p. 203). While non-digital catalogues “exist like ‘silos’ of local knowledge” that require the consumer to be “in-place to add to … or view them”, Victorian Collections changes “the very geography” of such collections (Beel, Wallace, Webster, & Nguyen, 2015, p. 203). Through cataloguing their items on Victorian Collections, the Lara RSL worked towards ‘unlocking’ them and making them accessible, regardless of the consumer’s location.

A cataloguing public at the Lara RSL
The Lara RSL’s cataloguing public was small. Although the Veterans Heritage Project workshops were suitable for up to fifteen participants, and the Lara RSL was drawing from a pool of approximately 120 members, only six Sub-Branch members consistently attended each session. Given that two members chose not to be named within the research, in this section I introduce only four cataloguers: Bruce, Lou, John, and Elizabeth. I also introduce Colin. Although Colin did not participate in the Veterans Heritage Project workshops, when I returned to the RSL for follow up visits, he was an integral member of the cataloguing public.

At the time of my research, Bruce was the Lara RSL Sub-Branch President. Bruce told me the first computer he had owned was “when they first came out, in the late 70s, early 80s” (B. Challoner, personal communication, June 5, 2017). After having served in the
Navy for twenty-years, Bruce trained as a counsellor “in grief and trauma” (B. Challoner, personal communication, June 5, 2017). As part of that work, he needed a computer, “for printing and so forth” (B. Challoner, personal communication, June 5, 2017). As such, Bruce was confident with digital platforms and practices, and was responsible for leading the Sub-Branch’s engagement with Victorian Collections.

Lou was 70-years-old, and an ex-chemistry teacher. Lou had the internet at home, as well as a Facebook account, but he wasn’t keen on it: “I’m a bit wary of Facebook … A lot of people seem to waste their time on there, telling you what they’re eating” (L. Scherpers, personal communication, July 10, 2017). He preferred Skype, email, and texting. Although Lou was relatively comfortable with digital platforms and practices, this comfort remained contingent on familiarity. For example, Lou was embarking on a project to digitise his collection of family photos which were being stored on a complex system of hard drives and back-up hard drives. When I asked whether he had considered using something like Google Drive or Dropbox as an alternative storage option, Lou explained that he did not “dare put anything up in the whatsit, you know, the cloud” (L. Scherpers, personal communication, July 10, 2017). Accordingly, there remained particular digital practices and platforms that were outside Lou’s repertoire. Despite this, Lou proved to be a pivotal member of the Lara RSL’s cataloguing public, often answering questions and providing support for those members who were less confident with digital platforms and practices, such as John.

John was “six-weeks off seventy” (J. Walmsley, personal communication, July 13, 2017) when we first met. Having initially trained as a fitter and turner (a manufacturing role), John eventually became a maintenance fitter and then he “did all the extra schooling for tool making … then [he] got a supervisory job” (J. Walmsley, personal communication,
According to John, the Veterans Heritage Project workshops were the first time he had used a computer. As he explained, he had previously “never needed one”:

John: I was old school. I grew up and there were no computers or nothing in my day, and so I just carried on with that.

Holcombe-James: And so you never needed the computer for work, or anything?

John: Oh, well, I did … But I wasn’t really interested in it, so I would log on and say, ‘hey!’ and get one of the young ones [at work] to come over and I’d say, ‘do this for me!’ … and they’d type away, and when they finished it, I just read it, and if it was alright, I would send it. (J. Walmsley, personal communication, July 13, 2017).

However, as the workshops progressed, and my interviews continued, I discovered that John had a desktop computer at home. When I asked about this, John exclaimed:

I don’t even know … What’s Facebook? I don’t even know. All I know … I’ve never used [a computer]! That’s the first time. Yesterday was the first time … Except for [when I] play games … Or look at my emails… It was the first time! (J. Walmsley, personal communication, July 13, 2017)

John was thus perhaps what Barbara Neves and Fausto Amaro (2012) describe as a “faux-user”: “a person that considers himself or herself a non-user but intermittently uses a technology with assistance of others” (p. np; Neves & Mead, 2017, p. 53).

Although John may have had more digital experience than he had initially let on, he did not appear to consider his existing digital practices as legitimate, suggesting that John confronted a perceived digital barrier to participation, comprised of literacies. Further, in describing the digital practices enacted during the Veterans Heritage Project as “the first time” (J. Walmsley, personal communication, July 13, 2017) he had digitally participated, there was a sense that he considered the digital participation enacted during the Veterans Heritage Project workshops as comparatively ‘real’ or ‘legitimate’ participation, and thus worthy of reporting.
At 81 years old, Elizabeth was the oldest member of the RSL’s cataloguing public. Elizabeth had worked for Semco doing hand embroidery from home while raising her children. When asked about her existing digital practices, Elizabeth told me she had “held lots of babies, but never an iPad!” (E. Goldberg, personal communication, July 10, 2017). Elizabeth continued: “no, darling, no. I use the telephone, or I be here, at the Lara RSL … I like the physical thing. I don’t want that thing [a computer] coming between us, I want the physical thing” (E. Goldberg, personal communication, July 10, 2017). Following the Veterans Heritage Project, when I asked Elizabeth whether she would like to continue using a computer, she told me:

I find now, Indigo, that it’s so hard for me to remember things, that to bring another system, another way of thinking into the brain – into this computer – is really going to stop it dead … So, I feel that to try and re-educate, no, no, I really don’t want to. I don’t need to. (E. Goldberg, personal communication, April 4, 2019)

Finally, when Colin and I met, he had just turned 65, and had belatedly joined the cataloguing public through an existing connection with John. Prior to retiring, Colin had worked in banks, ending up as a computer operator. As Colin described, “that was great, terrific. I was using the bank’s mainframe” (personal communication, October 19, 2017). Despite this existing digital experience, Colin did not use Facebook as it was not “private enough. I did try it and all I got was, ‘I want to be your friend’. Who are you?!” (personal communication, October 19, 2017). Colin did, however, use computers. Indeed, he had “three desktop computers and work[ed] on them consecutively … I can be doing something on one, while the other two are doing something else. I can use three computers at the same time” (personal communication, October 19, 2017).

As discussed in Chapter Two, alongside members of the Lara RSL’s cataloguing public, I also interviewed members who entered the sub-branch building but chose not to
participate in the Veterans Heritage Project, to gain insight into that decision. Two of these members were Gordon and Sandi. For Gordon, the decision not to participate was due to a non-digital barrier to participation. A back injury meant that he “couldn’t sit down and do computers” (personal communication, October 19, 2017). Similarly, for Sandi (personal communication, October 19, 2017), a lack of free time (a non-digital barrier) meant that although she “was going to do [the Veterans Heritage Project]”, she decided that she was “doing so much already, and you’ve got to be careful not to overdo things”. Also influencing Sandi’s decision to not participate was a perceived digital barrier comprised of a lack of literacies: “You’re interviewing me, about computers?! I don’t know anything about computers!” (personal communication, October 19, 2017).

Having introduced the Lara RSL’s cataloguing public, and provided insight into their varied digital practices, in the next section, I turn to the cataloguing practices that they enacted.

**Cataloguing practices**

As detailed in Chapter Five, the cataloguing practices that Victorian Collections required were effectively systematic processes of filling in forms. At the Lara RSL, these practices were enacted within specific temporal and spatial frameworks. For example, the Veterans Heritage Project workshops were held at the RSL Sub-Branch building on Rennie Street between 10am and 3pm, two- to three-days per week for one month. Following the conclusion of the Veterans Heritage Project, the Sub-Branch cataloguing public continued to meet in the same building to collectively enact cataloguing practices each Thursday. This arrangement continues today as I revise this chapter in late May 2019.

Cataloguing practices were preceded by non-digital preparatory practices. Folding tables were brought out from storage, chairs usually kept on the edges of the hall were brought
to the centre. Small bowls were filled with lollies and placed at regular intervals along the tables. Finally, the Sub-Branch’s WI-FI dongle (mobile internet hotspot) was set up and checked for credit, and each of the laptops connected to the internet. Once logged in to Victorian Collections, participants would don a pair of white cotton gloves, and head out to the collection storage room in the middle of the building, chosen for its security and climate-controlled facilities. Having selected an item, cataloguers would carefully carry it back to the tables in the centre of the room. Items were photographed or scanned, given a unique registration number, documented on Victorian Collections and labelled. Once catalogued, items were placed in archival boxes and returned to the storage room (or placed back on mannequins for display in the case of textiles), and their final location recorded.

Although these cataloguing practices were systematic, and thus often bordered on the mundane, the Lara RSL’s cataloguing public was predicated on the documenting (and thus the telling) of the narratives contained within the sub-branch’s cultural collections (Hartley & Potts, 2014, pp. 71-2; Potts & Hartley, 2014, p. 41). On occasion, this shifted the cataloguing practices to the profound. During my fieldwork, this was best illustrated by the example of Elizabeth cataloguing a photo of her late husband, whom she referred to as “our Colin” (E. Goldberg, personal communication, July 13, 2017). As Elizabeth and I worked through Victorian Collections’ cataloguing fields, we reached the ‘historical information’ field. Elizabeth stalled, explaining that there was a disconnect between a real person and a historical item: what she described as a living, breathing person that you had lived with and loved for decades, versus a World War One medal that looked like a ‘proper’ museum artefact (E. Goldberg, personal communication, July 13, 2017). In an effort to generate ‘historical information’, we flicked through Colin’s RSL file. Almost every Sub-Branch member had a corresponding file comprised of hardcopy bundles of stapled together paper. Each file was different. Some were
written by hand, others typed. While some included newspaper clippings, and others incorporated photos, one document common to each was their Lara RSL registration sheet.

In the registration sheet’s second last question, the registrant was asked whether they would like an RSL funeral upon their passing. “Our Colin” (E. Goldberg, personal communication, July 13, 2017) had circled ‘no’, but expanded on this in cursive writing which curled around the corner of the page. While Colin did not want an RSL funeral, he did want his experience with the RSL to be mentioned, and that his military training “had changed his life for somewhat, and for always” (Lara Field Notes, personal communication, 2017). As Elizabeth and I finished cataloguing the photo, and set the item record to public, I asked how it felt to have Colin’s story online, preserved, and accessible. In response, she smiled, and clasped her hands. For Elizabeth, cataloguing Colin’s record represented not only the documenting of her husband’s personal narrative within the broader cultural narrative of the RSL, but also the ‘unlocking’, and thus the making accessible, of this narrative. In this case the mundanity of cataloguing practices were transported to the profound.

Having articulated the practices enacted by Victorian Collections cataloguing publics through drawing on the example of the Lara RSL in mid-2017, in the next section, I describe a public that existed in response to these practices: a public comprised of consumers. Before doing so, however, it is important to note that this research did not engage directly with members of this public. This was due to both my research aims and objectives, and the methodological approach I took to achieve these. I was interested in how barriers to digital participation might influence the unlocking of cultural collections, so I based myself at the Lara RSL while they catalogued their collections.
Although individuals can be involved with multiple publics and “move between them fluidly” (boyd, 2008, p. 18), members of the Lara RSL cataloguing public were rarely also Victorian Collections consumers. Accordingly, in this section, I position myself within a public comprised of consumers and draw on examples from my own browsing practices on the digital platform.

Consumers

Individual consumers were described on the Victorian Collections website as “student[s] … researcher[s] … [and] history enthusiast[s]” (Victorian Collections, n.d.-a, p. np). These descriptors were likewise evident in interviews undertaken for this research. For example, former Victorian Collections manager Belinda described members of this public as “researchers, people doing family histories or school projects” (B. Ensor, personal communication, June 26, 2017). This was reiterated by Cameron (also a former Victorian Collections manager), who identified “historians, genealogists, and researchers from history groups” (C. Auty, personal communication, June 26, 2017). In 2018, Melbourne-based design agency PaperGiant was commissioned by Creative Victoria to examine “how GLAM [galleries, libraries, archives and museum] collections in Victoria are used, including who accesses them” (PaperGiant, 2018, p. np), encompassing those held by the community sector through examining Victorian Collections. Although the full report remains unreleased in mid-2019, a PaperGiant blog post summarising progress so far provides some insight into their findings. According to PaperGiant (2018), consumers of such collections are either “personal or professional, internal (organisation) or external (public), novice or expert, and accessor or contributor”, and access cultural collections to enact practices ranging from research and reference, to collection and preservation (p. np).
As for the size of this public comprised of Victorian Collections consumers, work by Hawkins and colleagues (2015) suggests this public has grown exponentially, “doubling annually in 2014 and 2015” and hosting 20,000 visitor sessions each month (p. np). Belinda described Victorian Collections’ consumers with reference to her understanding of the website’s Google Analytics as being local, Victorian, and “mostly Australian” (B. Ensor, personal communication, June 26, 2017). And, according to Ashley, consumers were finding the cultural platform “through the website of the [collection, such as the Lara RSL] that they [we]re interested in viewing” (A. Robertson, personal communication, June 28, 2017). Slightly contradicting this, in 2017, Victorian Collections’ analytics suggested that the majority of visitors were directed to the website via Trove (24.64%), then from Facebook mobile (17.93%), and Facebook desktop (5.39%). The average consumer viewed 3.57 pages, and spent approximately three minutes on the website per visit.

While consumers could technically use Victorian Collections to browse the collection of a specific cataloguing public (such as the Lara RSL), the practices facilitated by the digital platform actively encouraged engagement with the distributed state collection as a whole. This was evident in how search results were displayed. As Cameron explained:

> The objects are front and centre rather than the organisations … You can search for your family name, or Ned Kelly, or gold mining, or whatever you’re interested in, and all the objects come up as one collection, even though they might come from 25 different places … And, from there, you can click through from any object to the organisation or collection and dig deeper. (C. Auty, personal communication, June 26, 2017)

Through enacting searching practices, consumers were provided with a unified collection comprised of distributed and disparate collection items from multiple community collecting-organisations. Importantly, these relationships were “ephemeral, existing
[only] within the context of that search”, and achieved through “implied relationships through the use of common terminology or identical place/person names” (Hawkins, Aty & Ensor, 2015, p. np). Particularly significant for this research is that “the accuracy of these implied relationships” (Hawkins, Aty & Ensor, 2015, p. np) was dependent on the practices enacted by the cataloguers. That is, the success of these searches was determined by “the accuracy and completeness of records, level of consistency in vocabulary and naming and descriptive style” (Hawkins et al., 2015, p. np) enacted by cataloguers such as those at the Lara RSL. I return to discuss this further in relation to postdigital barriers to participation, below.

Through identifying the two publics that Victorian Collections interacted with – cataloguers and consumers – I have shown that although cataloguing publics worked independently, consumers were provided access to the collective outcome of this work: the ‘unlocked’ cultural collections. As such, consumers were dependent on the practices enacted by cataloguers. In the next section, I draw on the example of the Veterans Heritage Project delivered at the Lara RSL to explicitly identify the points at which barriers to digital participation intersected with cataloguing practices, and the influence that these barriers had on the resulting Victorian Collections catalogue records.

The influence of barriers to digital participation on cataloguing practices

As discussed above, the existing individual digital practices amongst the Lara RSL’s cataloguing public were varied. Although Bruce, Lou, and Colin were relatively digitally confident, John and Elizabeth indicated that the Veterans Heritage Project comprised their first interaction with digital platforms (however misleading this claim might have been in John’s case). Accordingly, although Victorian Collections staff had noticed
barriers to digital participation were decreasing across the community collecting sector (as discussed in Chapter Five), my observations at the Lara RSL indicated otherwise. The varied existing digital participation of individual members of the Lara RSL’s cataloguing public influenced the cataloguing practices that they enacted on Victorian Collections. This influence manifested most obviously in the cataloguing public’s output.

Non-digital and digital barriers to participation: Cataloguing output

Prior to the Veterans Heritage Project, the Lara RSL had catalogued a total of 41 objects on Victorian Collections through participating in single-day workshops (such as those described in the previous chapter) from 2012 onwards (Figure 33). Immediately prior to the first Veterans Heritage Project workshop, 456 collection items were catalogued in a bulk upload by Victorian Collections staff (Figure 34). These items had initially been documented by Bruce in an excel spreadsheet, containing “minimal information and no associated images” (A. Robertson, personal communication, August 24, 2017).

The cataloguing output enacted during the Veterans Heritage Project is illustrated in Figure 35, which details the number of Lara RSL collection items catalogued per day during 2017. As annotated, the first Veterans Heritage Project workshop was held on the 6th of July, and the final on the 27th. Six item records were catalogued during the first Veterans Heritage Project workshop. This conforms with the general structure of an introductory Victorian Collections workshop. As described in the previous chapter, attendees were each instructed to bring along an item, and Victorian Collections staff took them through the practices required to catalogue that item. Over the following eight Veterans Heritage Project workshops, an average of 14.5 items were catalogued per day. The most productive workshop was the final one held on the 27th of July, during
Figure 33: Number of Lara RSL Sub-Branch collection items catalogued in Victorian Collections (2012-2017) per day prior to the Veterans Heritage Project.
Figure 34: Number of Lara RSL Sub-Branch collection items cataloged in Victorian Collections per day since January 2012, showing bulk upload by Victorian Collections staff.
which 30 new item records were catalogued. The least productive workshop was on the 20th of July, during which only 6 new item records were catalogued. Excluding the bulk upload of 456 items, the Lara RSL’s cataloguing public catalogued 122 items during the Veterans Heritage Project.

Examining the number of new item records created does not include the number of item records that were modified by the Lara RSL cataloguing public during this same period. Incorporating these records in my analysis of the digital participation associated with the Veterans Heritage Project is important because modifying collection records here implies improving, or enriching, the collection record through incorporating additional textual information (whether historical or descriptive, for example), or uploading photos. During the Veterans Heritage Project, the cataloguing public modified 34 item records (Figure 36). The most productive day was July 11, during which 12 catalogue records were modified, while the least productive days were July 13, 20, and 27, during which only two catalogue records were modified per day.

Following the conclusion of the Veterans Heritage Project, the Lara RSL cataloguing public agreed to continue their work each Thursday. These weekly instances of additional participation are demonstrated in Figure 37. In 2017, collection items were catalogued during 30 additional sessions. The majority of these occurred on a Thursday as planned, with 11 instances of minimal participation on preceding Wednesdays. Cumulatively, these efforts resulted in 107 additional catalogue items. On average, 3.5 items were catalogued per day. In addition, 49 existing records were modified during 16 cataloguing sessions (an average of three per session). Again excluding the 456 items uploaded by the Victorian Collections team, taking the 122 items catalogued during the Veterans Heritage Project and the 107 items catalogued during the additional
sessions, in 2017 the Lara RSL catalogued a total of 229 items. In the words of the dominant cultural policy narrative this research is concerned with, 229 of the Lara RSLs collections were ‘unlocked’.

Although I suggest that understanding cultural platform-based digital participation requires reframing a typically individualist practice to encompass that of publics, it is through examining the practices of individuals within this public that barriers to digital participation are most clearly made visible. The distribution of cataloguing practices amongst the individual members of the Lara RSL’s cataloguing public is therefore of particular interest to this research. As demonstrated in Figure 38, John was the most prolific cataloguer, responsible for 23.58% of all collection items catalogued during, and beyond, the Veterans Heritage Project. Following John was Lou, who was responsible for cataloguing 20.52% of all items, then Cameron (14.41%) and Elizabeth (9.61%).

Another way of determining the digital practices of individuals within the cataloguing public is through examining the names associated with ‘moved’ items (Figure 39). That is, if a collection item was moved during the cataloguing process (for example, if the item was originally stored on Shelf A, in Box B, but was re-located to Shelf Z, Box Y), Victorian Collections asks cataloguers to record both where the item was moved to, and the name of the person who moved it. Unfortunately, however, this field is not mandatory, and the majority of the Lara RSL’s collection items were either not moved, or the field was not completed. Despite this, examining the items within the Lara RSL catalogue that were marked as moved provides valuable insight into who was typically enacting these practices, and how often they were doing so. Of those collection items moved with a corresponding name, John moved the vast majority (28.38%). The next most prolific ‘mover’ was Lou (13.10%), followed by Colin and Bruce (each moving 6.99%).
Figure 35: Number of Lara RSL Sub Branch collection items catalogued in Victorian Collections per day since beginning Veterans Heritage Project 2017
Figure 36: Number of Lara RSL Sub-Branch collection items modified in Victorian Collections per day since beginning Veterans Heritage Project, 2017.
Figure 37: Number of Lara RSL Sub-Branch collection items catalogued and modified in Victorian Collections, July 01 – December 31, 2017
When analysing this data, I was surprised to find John had been so prolific. As previously discussed, John was comparatively less digitally experienced, and so often had questions about the practices he was enacting. In contrast, Bruce, Colin and Lou each self-identified as digitally confident, but, according to this data, engaged with far fewer collection items. To understand this dynamic, I returned to my field notes. In doing so, I realised it was precisely because John had so many questions that he was able to engage with more items than anyone else. Each time John (or another member of the cataloguing public) had a question, it caused the answerer to pause and engage with both the collection item and the practices the questioner was enacting. During my time in the field, these questions were typically answered by Bruce or Lou (and, on my return following the Veterans Heritage Project, by Colin) precisely because they were more digitally confident. As a consequence, the cataloguing practices they were enacting lapsed. This is an example of the practices of reassurance – described by many as ‘handholding’ – discussed in the previous chapter. In other words, John catalogued more records because Bruce, Lou, or Colin stopped their work to assist him. Similar dynamics were noted by members of the Victorian Collections training public. As Ashley noted, “participants [at the Lara RSL] were eager and capable to help one another if advice or assistance was needed” (A. Robertson, personal communication, August 24, 2017; see also Dezuanni & Allan, 2018).

When I reported this finding to Bruce, he wasn’t surprised. As Bruce explained:

One member has taken two days to do one item, because he was so enthused … If [that member] takes two days to do an item … But, as I say, [they are] enjoying it, and [they] know what to do because [they’ve] been learning … Now we’re putting up to half a dozen items online a day, easily, as a team. (B. Challoner, personal communication, April 4, 2019)
Figure 38: Number of collection items catalogued by individuals within the Lara RSL Sub-Branch cataloguing public, July 01 – December 31, 2017.
Figure 39: Number of collection items moved by individuals within the Lara RSL Sub-Branch cataloguing public, July 01 – December 31, 2017
In this section, I have demonstrated that the cataloguing public at the Lara RSL confronted both individual and collective barriers to digital participation. While cataloguers such as John confronted an individual digital barrier to participation comprised of a lack of prior experience (and thus digital literacies), this resulted in a barrier to the participation of others who paused their own practices to help. Members of the cataloguing public thus confronted non-digital barriers (such as a complete lack of existing digital participation) as well as digital barriers (such as a perception that their existing digital practices were not legitimate as in John’s case, or that particular platforms and practices were beyond their existing digital repertoire, as in Lou’s case). When taken together, these non-digital and digital barriers to participation influenced the Sub-Branch’s cataloguing output. Upon the completion of the Veterans Heritage Project, Victorian Collections staff considered that although 687 collection items had been catalogued (including the bulk upload preceding the Veterans Heritage Project), only 216 had been catalogued to a ‘high standard’, inclusive of images and historical information. Given that the Lara RSL was custodian to over 900 items, the cataloguing output enacted so far ensures it will be a considerable time before the entire collection is ‘unlocked’.

Having demonstrated that non-digital and digital barriers to participation confronted the cataloguing public at the Lara RSL, and shown that these manifested in the cataloguing output, in the following section I identify a postdigital barrier to participation.

“If they search hand grenade, it'll come straight up!”: Keywords as postdigital barriers

As described in the introduction to this chapter, Victorian Collections interacted with two distinct publics: cataloguers and consumers (L. Miles, June 28, 2017). Cataloguers were
provided with a collections management system intended to ‘unlock’ their collections, while consumers were consequently provided access to these ‘unlocked’ collections. As such, the practices of consumers were determined by those of cataloguers. Consumers could only access the cultural collections once cataloguers had ‘unlocked them’. One way that Victorian Collections facilitated this access for consumers was through the selecting and affixing of keywords to collection items. As with commercial cataloguing software, Victorian Collections cataloguers were encouraged to assign keywords to each collection item that would better enable consumers to enact browsing practices. As both Forbes (F. Hawkins, personal communication, February 22, 2018) and Cameron (C. Auty, personal communication, June 26, 2017) described, the addition of keywords was a way to make collection records “more discoverable” for potential consumers. Accordingly, in this platform feature was an intersection between publics: the cataloguing public who held the collection, and consumers searching for that, or similar, items. Keywords were thus intended to support the browsing practices of a public comprised of consumers through facilitating the formation of a platform of ‘like’ collection items.

Although the browsing practices enacted by consumers relied on Victorian Collections’ search function which, as Forbes explained, “concatenate[d] all the [item record] fields that have been made publicly available” (F. Hawkins, personal communication, February 22, 2018), it was through selecting and affixing keywords to collection item records that cataloguers most directly interfaced with this aspect of the cultural platform. As such, it was at this stage during the Veterans Heritage Project when Victorian Collections staff most directly discussed with the Lara RSL the possibility of consumers accessing their collections. Accordingly, understanding how the cataloguing public at the Lara RSL selected and affixed keywords to their collection items, the understanding that this public had about what keywords did, and the influence this had on the accessibility of...
Victorian Collections’ catalogue, is critical for determining to what extent their cultural collections can be considered ‘unlocked’.

Before presenting this data, however, it is necessary to explain that unlike commercial cataloguing software where keywords can be regulated, Victorian Collections provided cataloguers with a free text field. Although cataloguers were pointed towards “the Powerhouse thesaurus [or] … the [Australian] War Memorial has a thesaurus that RSLs could use” (B. Ensor, personal communication, June 26, 2017; A. Robertson, personal communication, June 28, 2017), in practice, Victorian Collections staff told cataloguers to:

Put in any word you can think of that relates to that object. Put in names of people, donors, the town, the club, the history. Anything you know, just put it in. (C. Auty, personal communication, June 26, 2017)

Write World War One [for example] in as many ways as you can. (S. Ewenson, personal communication, March 29, 2018)

As Laura clarified, the decision to allow unregulated keywords had connections to the cultural platform’s relationship with the Small Museums Cataloguing Manual (Museums Australia (Victoria), 2009) as described in the previous chapter. In developing the current edition of the manual, and in basing the Victorian Collections cataloguing fields on this, a deliberate decision was made “not to enforce a controlled taxonomy [such as a restricted list of keywords] … as [this] was viewed as a barrier for cataloguers” (L. Miles, personal communication, June 8, 2019). That is, adherence to a controlled taxonomy was identified as a barrier to participation, and so a free text field was developed and implemented as a cultural platform feature intended to ameliorate this barrier.
As Jennifer Trant (2009) explains, where regulated keywords create taxonomies within which collection item records are uniformly located, user-generated tagging such as that enacted on Victorian Collections results in a “collective vocabulary”, or folksonomy (p. 4; see also Parry, 2007, p. 55). Folksonomies offer an alternative to “hierarchical and universalising” taxonomies (Cairns, 2013, p. 109), and have thus been embraced as part of the developments accompanying new museology (discussed in Chapter One, see, for example, Hooper-Greenhill, 1992). By their very nature, folksonomies are “freely applied, without a consistent vocabulary or enforced semantic rules” (Cairns, 2013, p. 109), resulting in both synonymy and inaccuracy (Trant 2009, p. 7). As Susan Cairns (2013) explains, “folksonomies contain significant lexical ambiguities. Tags lack synonym control, can be polysemic, abbreviated, plural or singular, misspelled, or even simply wrong” (p. 111). As a consequence, folksonomies open the possibility for inconsistency and the obscuring of collection items. Accordingly, although folksonomies enable publics to “provide their own key search words for collection databases” (Russo, Watkins, & Groundwater-Smith, 2009, p. 162; see also Cairns, 2013, p. 109) through leveraging the expertise of invested individuals, in this section I demonstrate that doing so in the context of the Lara RSL had significant consequences for the participation of consumers.

In 2017, the cataloguing public at the Lara RSL used 1,816 distinct keywords against 229 records. As might be assumed, these keywords were typically associated with Australian military history. The five most frequently used keywords were: army (associated with 57 records), WW2 (55 catalogue items), RSL (51), WWII (51), Lara (50), and WW I (48). Of the 1,816 distinct keywords used, 561 or 30.89% appeared only once within the catalogue, against only one collection item. Less than 2% (1.65%, or 30 keywords) were used against more than 10 item records. Examining the 30 keywords associated with
Figure 40: The 30 keywords used against more than 10 collection records within the Lara RSL Sub-Branch Victorian Collections’ catalogue
more than 10 collection items provides additional insight into the practice as enacted by
the Lara RSL (Figure 40). Eight of the 30 keywords shown in Figure 40 were different
ways of referring to either World War One or Two. Similarly, there were two variations
of “Lara RSL”: ‘lara r.s.l.’ and ‘lara r.s.l’ (note the space preceding the ‘l’ in the second
element).

Although this research engaged directly only with the Lara RSL, through enacting
browsing practices and documenting the results, I offer evidence of similarly inconsistent
cataloguing practices on the Victorian Collections catalogue as a whole in Table 12.

Table 12: Demonstrating the influence of keyword inconsistency on Victorian Collections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victorian Collections Keyword search</th>
<th>Number of search results (as of January 10, 2018)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ww1</td>
<td>15,634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WW1</td>
<td>15,634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wwi</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WW ONE</td>
<td>15,651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World War 1</td>
<td>19,733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>world war one</td>
<td>19,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORLD WAR I</td>
<td>11,680</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although the Victorian Collections search function accounted for variations in upper/lower case text (that is, lowercase ww1 returned 15,634 results, as did uppercase WW1), the various iterations were not combined. These inconsistent search results – the outcomes of keyword practices enacted by cataloguers – points to a slipperiness in the enacting of these practices.

Acknowledging that the practice of enacting keywords can be slippery within community collecting-organisations provides a further example of the connections between Victorian Collections and the earlier efforts to document distributed cultural collections through digital participation, as detailed in the previous chapter (see also Parry, 2007, pp. 38-9. In the transition between Australian Museums On Line to the Collections Australia Network, a “significant operational issue” (Dewhurst and Sumption, 2012, p. 129) was highlighted. The inclusion of disparate and distributed collections in the one catalogue also required the inclusion of discipline specific vocabularies so that users could search across multiple collections (Dewhurst and Sumption, 2012, pp. 129-30). This was resolved through using the Dublin Core Metadata Element Set. Although Australian Museums On Line cataloguers were required to complete “a minimum core data set for the description of the objects to allow for the distributed searching” (Kenderdine, 1998, p. 67), they could use whichever keywords they wanted to describe their collection items. However, with the development of the Collections Australia Network, this practice was reversed, and the decision made to “implement [a] controlled vocabulary” (Dewhurst and Sumption, 2012, p. 129). The major challenge that Collections Australia Network faced in this move was “building and implementing a high level, hybrid thesauri capable of being used by the diverse range of institutions across Australia” (Dewhurst and Sumption, 2012, p. 129). As I have just discussed, this decision was reversed again in the
development of Victorian Collections, with consequences for just how ‘unlocked’ the distributed collections can be considered.

For Parry (2007), questions about keywords and search functionality in such digital collections databases can be traced back to the introduction of computing, automation, and standardisation to the museum sector in the mid-1970s (p. 37). While this discussion is beyond the scope of the current research, it is worth noting that even at this early point in the use of digital platforms within the cultural sector, digital participation was aligned with the dominant cultural policy narrative that this research is concerned with. As David Bearman (1995) explains, the “real pay-off” for such standardisation “is for the cultural heritage community as a whole … it promises to make our information collectively useful, enabling us to become players in the emerging communications environment” (p. 281). In the words of the dominant policy narrative, such standardisation promised to ‘unlock’ the cultural collections.

Examining how the Lara RSL cataloguing public understood the keywords they were selecting and affixing (and why) provides further insight into the data just described. Interviews with individual members revealed that members of the Lara RSL cataloguing public had varying levels of understanding as to what the keyword function did. For example, about half way through the month of Veterans Heritage Project workshops, John and I were working together to catalogue a hand grenade. When we got to the keywords field, I suggested that words such as “explosive”, “bomb”, and “weapon” might be useful. John disagreed, exclaiming, “but, if they search ‘hand grenade’, it’ll come straight up!” (J. Walmsley, personal communication, July 13, 2017). When I explained that keywords made item records accessible for publics comprised of consumers (perhaps someone researching ‘weapons used in Vietnam’), John remained unconvinced.
In a separate interaction observed between Bruce and a participant from the Lara Heritage and Historical Inc, keywords were also discussed. As Bruce explained:

Your keywords are really, really important. You can never put enough in. Because, you know how we put in those keywords? Now we can search by them, and that is really ideal.

The Lara Heritage and Historical Inc participant responded:

“Oh! So, keywords are really how different people think”. (Lara RSL Field Notes, personal communication)

In this interaction, Bruce demonstrated an understanding of Victorian Collections’ secondary aim: to facilitate consumer access to the ‘unlocked’ collections.

However, the cataloguing public at the Lara RSL struggled to imagine who might use Victorian Collections to engage with their memorabilia once it was documented. As Lou explained, documenting the sub-branch’s collections on Victorian Collections was important, because he was “afraid it’s going to get lost if people don’t record it” (L. Scherpers, personal communication, July 10, 2017). But when asked to describe the receptive publics who might eventually engage with the collection, Lou conceived of these as being comprised specifically of “children of the RSL members” (L. Scherpers, personal communication, July 10, 2017). John likewise thought local school children would be likely to look at the digital collection: “the children now are really involved with the RSL. You know, Gallipoli, ANZAC Day, it’s everywhere now. They’re all involved in it” (J. Walmsley, personal communication, July 13, 2017). Similarly, Elizabeth felt that her “family would be interested because of [their] time in the service … So, it would be people, I would think, who have a direct connection … such as my family who are oriented to the service” (E. Goldberg, personal communication, July 10, 2017). In these examples, the Lara RSL cataloguing public associated the formation of a public comprised of consumers with pre-existing, non-digital relationships, rather than in relation to broader notions of access.
to cultural collections. This finding aligns with research conducted by Eden Litt & Eszter Hargittai (2016) which found that when posting to social media the vast majority of their cohort (70.2%) imagined an audience that was constituted through “personal ties” (p. 6). But, in the context of Victorian Collections and the dominant policy narrative, the hyper-local specificity of this understanding regarding who might access Lara RSL collection items constrained the cataloguing practices enacted. If cataloguers could not imagine who might be accessing their cultural collections, how could they ‘unlock’ them?

When I discussed my findings with members of the Victorian Collections’ training public, Laura remarked that there was a distinction between enacting keywords for yourself as the custodian of an item “versus [how] the broader public might find that item. Those are two very different perspectives” (L. Miles, personal communication, November 9, 2017). As Belinda continued,

> For non-GLAM [Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums] people, getting your head around how people might want to use your content is quite hard. And then [you have to get] your head around … the idea that someone might be looking for a whole range of weapons, or just material that relates to wherever the grenade was found. (B. Ensor, personal communication, April 17, 2018)

Upon thinking further, Laura suggested that keywords might thus require two different practices, oriented towards two different publics:

> Back in the day with Victorian Collections, in the early days, we would often have the person who was comfortable doing the typing, next to the person who knew the most about that significant item. Because there were two different skills there. And perhaps, maybe, keywords goes along a similar vein. You have one person who knows all about the object, and another person who can say, well how would the public look for that object? (L. Miles, personal communication, November 9, 2017).
The fragmented understandings of what keywords were intended to do, who might use them and what they might use them for that this section has demonstrated indicate the presence of a postdigital barrier to participation: the assumption that the practice of enacting keywords, and the utility of doing so, was normative. However, this research shows that this was not the case. Lara RSL members found it difficult to make the conceptual link between the practice of selecting and affixing keywords, and the access for consumers that such practices were intended to facilitate. In identifying such conceptual difficulties as a postdigital barrier to participation, I draw on recent work by Michael Dezuanni and Cherie Allan (2018). Describing the challenges faced in fostering digital literacies within a social living lab (an informal learning setting) in a regional Australian community, Dezuanni and Allan (2018) suggest that one of “the most significant challenge[s] … was developing … broader conceptual understandings … about genres of digital participation” (p. 199). As van Deursen, Helsper, and Eynon (2016) suggest, “both basic skills necessary to use the internet and skills required to comprehend and use online content should be accounted for” (p. 805). In the context of the Lara RSL, keywords comprised a postdigital barrier to participation: based on the assumption that the “skills required to comprehend and use” (van Deursen et al., 2016, p. 805) keywords was available to the cataloguers. As I discuss in the following section, this assumption had stark consequences for the participation of consumers.

A choice between barriers: Cataloguers over consumers

As demonstrated in Chapter Five, Victorian Collections was developed in response to the barriers to participation that confronted community collecting-organisations. This was achieved through the development of platform features such as the Victorian Collections’ cataloguing interface, the provision of digital access, and workshops like the
Veterans Heritage Project. The same was true of keywords. The ability for members of the cataloguing public to use any term they deemed relevant was considered “one of the reasons that [Victorian Collections] works, because people can use it in a way that they want to, and for their skill level as well” (C. Auty, personal communication, June 26, 2017). While this logic and the resultant platforms and practices were intended to support the participation of cataloguing publics, it had consequences for the digital participation of a possible public comprised of consumers. The cultural platform’s capacity to provide consumer access was varied, because “Victorian Collections is only as strong as the data that people put into it” (C. Auty, personal communication, June 26, 2017). As Belinda explained: “We accept [the cataloguing] as it comes. The curatorial onus is on them … So, as a consequence, nothing is uniform” (B. Ensor, personal communication, June 26, 2017). And, as Cameron stated:

If people put spelling mistakes, if people put wrong information, that’s up to them … So, it’s one of the great strengths of the catalogue is that people can use it the way they want to use it, but it’s also one of the great weaknesses is that our data are sometimes comprised if people put a spelling mistake in or WWI or First World War. That won’t link together. (C. Auty, personal communication, June 26, 2017)

The choice between having “imperfect records [rather] than no records” was made because “the imposition of a taxonomy would have been a disincentive for the volunteers” (L. Miles, personal communication, June 8, 2019). In this way, the flexibility of keyword practices was tied to the overarching intention of the cultural platform: to enable the digital participation of cataloguing publics that were likely to confront barriers such as the grey digital divide. In doing so, however, a choice between barriers, and thus between publics, was made. Barriers to the digital participation of a public comprised of cataloguers were ameliorated, but in doing so, barriers to the participation of consumers remained.
In Chapter Five, I demonstrated that Victorian Collections was developed and delivered by publics based at two platforms: the Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria and Museums Victoria. Each platform was oriented towards a particular public: while the developing public was oriented towards both cataloguers and consumers, the training public was firmly focussed on the cataloguers. As Belinda, a member of the training public, mused: “our users have always been the cataloguers, and the public website [that consumers engage with] is … almost a happy accident that it also exists” (B. Ensor, personal communication, June 26, 2017). Similarly, when asked to describe the Victorian Collections consumers, Simone, another member of the training public, said: “I actually don’t think I’ve thought about [them] that much … I guess it’s for … collectors” (S. Ewenson, personal communication, March 29, 2018). After pausing for thought, Belinda reconsidered:

I mean, that’s not quite true. But … because we work so closely with [the cataloguing public] we feel so connected and invested in their work that the [consuming] public … really doesn’t get very much attention. (B. Ensor, personal communication, June 26, 2017)

This division in focus was in large part due to limited funding. As Laura explained:

Discoverability and search are two really huge problems for projects like this. Our technology partners at Museums Victoria have done a superb job in doing the best they can within this framework. But without, say, moderators or editors, full time, plural, it’s a really hard one. (L. Miles, personal communication, June 28, 2017)

Rather than lack of interest in members of the consuming public, the cultural platform’s primary engagement with cataloguing publics was the result of a “hard financial decision” (L. Miles, personal communication, June 8, 2019). The cultural platform was not resourced sufficiently to facilitate engagement with both.
I do not want to suggest that my analysis of the issues associated with keyword practices detailed here was news to the Victorian Collections publics training and developing publics. Indeed, as Ashley explained during a follow up interview, “In terms of being able to search … we are very aware that the search facility needs work” (A. Robertson, personal communication, March 29, 2018). Indeed, such issues relating to search and accessibility have plagued efforts to document the distributed cultural collections since the time of the Australian Museum Integrated Services, Australian Museums On Line and the Collections Australia Network. Nor do I wish to discount the practices enacted by members of the cataloguing public. Indeed, “it is estimated that the data saved into Victorian Collections represents a total volunteer input of over 60,000 hours” (Hawkins et al., 2015, p. np). Accordingly, for Belinda, that community collecting-organisations such as the Lara RSL were participating at all was enough:

Getting these organisations to do something, and not making them feel like they’re doing a bad job; nurturing and supporting them to [catalogue their collections] at whatever capacity they can, is really important. Because, those things [such as keywords] can be fixed up later … Even if they’re not found in a wider search, the fact that someone has documented the provenance of something for the first time and it’s going to stay there, that it can’t get lost, is huge … If they do enough of a job of getting the collection digitised there is more chance that they will be relevant and have successors who will be younger, and most likely be more educated, and will say ‘oh, this is full of typos, let’s make these consistent’. But if that first generation can do the bare bones, I think that’s alright. (B. Ensor, personal communication, June 26, 2017)

That the cataloguing work undertaken so far was the initial round of many was likewise acknowledged within the Lara RSL. As Bruce explained,

The only thing [future members of the cataloguing public] will have to do is just do research and to continue updating the individual items. Because we haven’t had time … We’re trying to just put in the bare minimum details, and then we’ll take the time [to complete the records] afterwards. (Challoner, personal communication, April 4, 2019; see also Parry, 2007, pp. 37-8)
But it is also important to acknowledge that these practices – however important and initial – influenced the practices of a public comprised of consumers. As discussed in Chapter One, using digital platforms within the cultural sector has consequences (Parry, 2007, p. 10). Although the digital and non-digital platforms and practices associated with Victorian Collections ameliorated some of the barriers to digital participation that confronted the cataloguing publics, these same platforms and practices simultaneously created barriers for others. While the Small Museums Cataloguing Manual suggests that “the objective of cataloguing is not to document every object in the collection”, it is the objective to create “a useful resource for knowing, accessing, and managing the collection” (Museums Australia [Victoria], 2009, p. 44). By enabling cataloguers to leverage their internal knowledge via free text keywords, Victorian Collections encouraged the development of folksonomies. But this had the consequence of obscuring search terms, and ultimately undermined the cultural platform’s purpose. The inconsistent use of keywords demonstrated in this chapter – evidence of a postdigital barrier to participation – meant that, in the context of the Lara RSL, a resource for knowing and accessing the collection was not entirely realised. Non-digital, digital, and postdigital barriers to digital participation ensured that although the Lara RSL’s collections might have been catalogued, they could not be considered unlocked. The status of the dominant policy narrative was thus determined by the context of digital participation: access to the cultural collections was restricted because the cataloguing public faced barriers to their digital participation.

**Conclusion**

Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project at the Lara RSL provides an example of what it means for the Australian cultural sector to privilege a public made
up of those who experience low digital inclusion. Through paying attention to the practices enacted by cataloguers at the Lara RSL, I demonstrated that barriers to digital participation intervened at two critical points: both the ‘unlocking’ and the accessing of the cultural collections. While non-digital and digital barriers to participation meant that the Lara RSL’s cataloguing output was relatively slow, ensuring that it would be quite some time before the entire collection was catalogued and thus ‘unlocked’, postdigital barriers restricted access for consumers. By assuming that the practice and intended outcome for keywords was normative, the cultural collections were obscured, rather than ‘unlocked’. As such, this field site raises questions about the efficacy of digital participation within community collecting-organisations: the collections cannot be considered unlocked if they cannot be found.

Although outside the scope of this research, my field work gestures towards other possible avenues for understanding the value of programs such as the Veterans Heritage Project in a way that goes beyond merely whether or not the collection items were ‘unlocked’. Through ameliorating the non-digital and digital barriers to participation that confronted those at the Lara RSL, the Veterans Heritage Project became an informal learning setting in which individuals such as Elizabeth and John who reported they had never used digital platforms, and were thus “at risk of nonparticipation” (Dezuanni & Allan, 2018, p. 191), were engaged and developed digital skills that they otherwise may not have. As John exclaimed on a return visit, he had recently figured out “online shopping” and bought “two Stetson hats! One for going out, and one for every day” (Lara RSL Field Notes, personal communication). In this sense, the Veterans Heritage Project might be more usefully understood as a social living lab, or an informal learning setting, where digital participation was facilitated (Dezuanni & Allan, 2018; Hughes et al, 2018).
Despite such positive interpersonal outcomes, the empirical data presented in this chapter shows that privileging a public made up of those who experience low digital inclusion had stark consequences for the accessibility of this field site’s response to the dominant cultural policy narrative. Although the Lara RSL’s collections were catalogued, they cannot be considered ‘unlocked’.
Conclusion:

The consequences of choosing between barriers to participation
This research took two very different field sites – Desert Mob 2017, an annual remote Indigenous art festival, and Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project, a web-based cataloguing system for community collecting-organisations and a series of workshops intended to assist in this – and examined their intersection with barriers to digital participation. Using digital and non-digital ethnographic methods, this research contributes to our understanding of barriers to digital participation within the Australian cultural sector, the sector’s responses to these barriers, and the implications that these barriers and responses have for the dominant cultural policy narrative. The research demonstrates that a policy narrative that hinges so heavily on the notion of digitally mediating distance and ‘unlocking’ cultural collections is in and of itself inadequate if it does not take into account the lived dynamics of digital participation.

The research emerged from the observation that there was dissonance between the dominant Australian cultural policy narrative and the lived dynamics of digital participation. Permeating each of Australia’s two cultural policies (McShane, 2016, p. 131; Throsby, 2006, p. 12), Creative Nation (Department of Communications and the Arts, 1994) and Creative Australia (Australian Government, 2013), this narrative posits that through digital participation the cultural sector will mediate distance and ‘unlock’ cultural collections. However, as McShane (2011) argues, “universalist assumptions of … [digital] access and … use are not supported by empirical research” (p. 392), and digital participation remains profoundly uneven. Logically, then, there must be points at which the cultural sector interfaces with people or places that are particularly likely to experience barriers to digital participation and these narratives come unstuck. How can the cultural sector mediate distance and ‘unlock’ cultural collections if there are barriers to the digital participation that would enable this?
The research thus aimed:

To examine whether, and if so, how, barriers to digital participation influence the Australian cultural sector’s response to dominant cultural policy narratives.

Working from established research that identifies persistent digital inequity, the research achieved this aim through addressing the following objectives:

1. To provide a detailed, dual-field site account of how spatial and demographic dynamics influence the Australian cultural sector’s digital participation;
2. To determine the influence of barriers to digital participation derived from spatial and demographic dynamics on the Australian cultural sector’s success in improving access and inclusion for its publics.

Each field site was chosen for its relationship to the dominant cultural policy narrative, as well as dynamics of digital participation that existing literature suggested were likely to be difficult. Through engaging with remote Indigenous art centres, Desert Mob 2017 intersected with the geographic digital divide as well as Indigenous/non-Indigenous digital inequity. In turn, through working with community collecting-organisations that are overwhelmingly serviced by elderly volunteers (Hawkins et al., 2015), Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project interacted with the ‘grey’ digital divide: the gaps in access and participation that affect those over 65 years of age and ensure that digital participation is lower for older Australians than it is for younger.

Through applying a media ecologies framework (comprised of platforms, practices, and publics) paired with a typology of three barriers to participation (non-digital, digital, and postdigital) to each field site, this research demonstrates that responses to the dominant policy narrative were (1) confronted by multifaceted digital inequity; (2)
enacted by publics rather than by individuals; and (3) shaped by choices between barriers to participation, and thus between which publics participated, and how.

As explained in Chapter Two, acknowledging the differences between my two field sites drove both my research design and presentation of the data: I sought to avoid comparison, and so discussed each site separately. To conclude the research, however, I bring Desert Mob 2017 and Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project together to summarise the findings articulated across the previous four chapters. This discussion is structured in three parts. In the first section, I demonstrate how I have provided evidence of two distinct responses to barriers to digital participation: in one field site barriers to digital participation were deemed irrelevant, while in the other, possible solutions were enacted. Desert Mob 2017 digital participation was intended to mediate distance as a barrier to the cultural participation of consumers. Given that exhibited artists appeared within this digital participation rather than enacting it, this external focus on consumers meant that the barriers confronting artists were irrelevant. In contrast, although the non-digital and digital barriers to participation confronting Victorian Collections cataloguers at the Lara RSL were ameliorated, postdigital barriers remained, effectively restricting the participation of consumers.

In the second section, I articulate the research’s three primary findings. Firstly, I found digital participation in each field site was confronted by multifaceted digital inequity, informed not only by type of barrier (whether non-digital, digital, or postdigital), but also by the media ecologies component that the barrier intersected with (whether a platform, practice, or public). Secondly, I found digital participation was enacted by publics, rather than by individuals. To account for this, the research reframed a typically individualist practice to encompass the digital participation of publics. Finally, I found
digital participation, in both field sites was shaped by choices between barriers to participation and thus between which publics participated and how, demonstrating the exclusionary influence of digital inequity on the cultural sector’s success in improving access and inclusion for its publics.

In the third section, I discuss the implications and limitations of these findings. While it has long been acknowledged that the cultural sector chooses between publics – as Gillard argued in 2000, some “are deliberately ignored, others prized. Certainly, some … are more visible than others” (p. 126) – how these choices extend into the digital has been under-scrutinised. Through providing a detailed account of two field sites where distinct choices were made between barriers to participation, and thus between which publics participated and how, this research provides insight into barriers to digital participation within the Australian cultural sector, the sector’s responses to these barriers, and the implications that these barriers and responses have for the dominant cultural policy narrative.

**Two responses to barriers to digital participation**

This research provides a detailed account of two different responses to barriers to digital participation within the Australian cultural sector. In the context of Desert Mob 2017, the barriers to digital participation that confronted participating artists were deemed irrelevant because the digital participation was intended for consumers, rather than creators. Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project took a very different approach, demonstrating what it means to privilege a public made up of those who experience low digital inclusion. Possible solutions to the non-digital and digital barriers to participation that confronted the cataloguing public at the Lara RSL (such
as the Veterans Heritage Project) were enacted to the detriment of consumers. In this section, I outline these divergent responses.

**Mediating distance: consumers over creators**

Desert Mob is an annual art festival held in Alice Springs at the Araluen Cultural Precinct and delivered in partnership with Desart, the peak agency for remote central Australian Aboriginal art centres. Desert Mob 2017 was comprised of an exhibition of 256 artworks (Desart, 2018, p. 38) by Aboriginal artists from 28 art centres, a symposium (Desert Mob Symposium), and an art fair (Desert Mob Marketplace) that brought together thousands of artworks from 30 art centres.

In Chapter Three, I placed existing literature and alongside empirical data to demonstrate that Desert Mob mediated distance as a barrier to cultural participation (such as viewing and purchasing the exhibited art) through the convergence of remote dwelling creators (the exhibited Indigenous artists) and consumers (the publics that attended the exhibition). Through re-purposing data initially collected by the Araluen Cultural Precinct and Desart, I made the non-digital publics that coalesced around Desert Mob visible, confirming that these consumers were distant from both the remote art centres that participated, as well as Alice Springs, where Desert Mob 2017 was held.

Although each Desert Mob 2017 participating art centre was owned and governed by the Aboriginal community in which they were located, each was managed by a non-Indigenous person. As I demonstrated in Chapter Four, this intercultural dynamic in the centres’ management extended into the digital participation deployed in relation to Desert Mob 2017. Through detailing this digital participation, I identified three publics: (1) those enacting
the digital practices (comprised predominantly of non-Indigenous art centre managers and Araluen’s Exhibition Officer), (2) those depicted within the digital practices (81.42% featured either participating artists or their artwork), and (3) those imagined as receiving them (distant consumers). I argued that digital participation in relation to Desert Mob 2017 was thus an extension of existing non-digital practices. In the same way that Desert Mob non-digitally mediated distance through the convergence of creators and consumers, digital participation was likewise intended to mediate the distance between creators and consumers.

In doing so, however, a choice was made between barriers to participation, and thus between which publics participated and how. Although distance comprised a barrier to the participation of both artists and consumers, it was resolved for only one public. While facilitating the digital participation of consumers was aligned with the dominant policy narrative – through digital participation, distance was mediated – the digital inequity confronting participating artists was perceived as irrelevant because the enacted digital participation was not intended for these artists. This choice between barriers and thus between publics had implications for inclusivity, raising questions about the relationship between “face and voice” (Kidd, 2011b, p. 68) in the context of who tells digital cultural narratives, how these narratives are told, and who these narratives are told to.

‘Unlocking’ cultural collections: Cataloguers over consumers

In Chapter Five, I positioned Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project in the context of preceding efforts by the Australian cultural sector to digitally catalogue – and thus ‘unlock’ – distributed cultural collections. I demonstrated that barriers to participation confronting community collecting-organisations have long been recognised and efforts made to resolve these. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with
individuals involved in these preceding efforts as well as the development of Victorian Collections, I demonstrated that the recognition of these barriers to participation fundamentally informed the development of Victorian Collections, with specific platforms and practices (such as the Veterans Heritage Project) developed as solutions.

In Chapter Six, I attended to the two publics that formed around Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project – cataloguers and consumers – by examining the practices enacted by each. Although each public was distinct, their practices were intertwined. Consumers could only access the ‘unlocked’ cultural collections once they had been catalogued. To determine the extent to which this ‘unlocking’ was achieved at the Lara RSL, I examined the intersection between cataloguers and consumers through the example of keywords. Lara RSL participants encountered difficulty in making the conceptual leap between cataloguing for yourself, as opposed to cataloguing for an ill-defined public of consumers. While this platform feature was intended to facilitate the participation of cataloguing publics, their inconsistent application constructed barriers for consumers that inhibited access.

Although the platforms and practices developed by, and deployed in relation to, Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project ameliorated the non-digital and digital barriers that confronted cataloguers (such as access and capacities), postdigital barriers remained and constrained the participation of consumers. As argued in Chapter Six, this meant that the dominant policy narrative was only partially fulfilled, raising questions about the efficacy of digital participation within community collecting-organisations: the collections cannot be considered unlocked if they cannot be found. Given that in February 2019 the Western Australian government awarded the Australian Museums and Galleries Association Western Australia a grant to roll out a training program intended
to facilitate the digital ‘unlocking’ of community collecting-organisation’s collections (Government of Western Australia, 2019), these findings are particularly timely.

While barriers to digital participation ensured that the efficacy of the practices enacted in this field site were questionable, it is important to note that the Veterans Heritage Project was highly successful as an informal learning setting in which the grey digital divide was negotiated. Although beyond the scope of this research, individuals such as Elizabeth and John who had previously never used digital platforms, and were thus “at risk of nonparticipation” (Dezuanni & Allan, 2018, p. 191), were engaged and developed digital skills that they otherwise might not have.

In summary, through providing a detailed account of two very different field sites, this research provides novel insights into barriers to digital participation within the Australian cultural sector, the sector’s responses to these barriers, and the implications that these barriers and responses have for the dominant cultural policy narrative.

**Three primary findings**

I found that responses to dominant cultural policy narratives in each field site were (1) confronted by multifaceted digital inequity; (2) enacted by publics rather than by individuals; and (3) shaped by choices between barriers to participation and thus between which publics participated, and how. In outlining these findings, I address my research aim – to examine whether, and if so, how, barriers to digital participation influence the Australian cultural sector’s response to the dominant cultural policy narrative – and objectives:

1. To provide a detailed, dual-field site account of how spatial and demographic dynamics influence the Australian cultural sector’s digital participation;
2. To determine the influence of barriers to digital participation derived from spatial and demographic dynamics on the Australian cultural sector’s success in improving access and inclusion for its publics.

Finding one: Multifaceted digital inequity

Digital participation in each field site was confronted by multifaceted digital inequity: informed not only by the type of barrier (whether non-digital, digital, or postdigital), but also by the media ecologies component that the barrier intersected with (whether a platform, practice, or public).

As discussed in Chapter One and Two, this research used digital participation literature as a conceptual tool to examine digital inequity within and in relation to the Australian cultural sector. As Hughes and colleagues (2018) explain, digital participation is dependent on not only access (the first-level digital divide), but also the skills (the second-level digital divide) and “digital literacy (or literacies) to enable the effective use of a range of media and platforms in a contemporary digitally mediated society” (p. 185). Digital participation literature was thus useful for understanding the interrelated dynamics of Australian digital inequity. Based on this understanding, I developed a typology of three barriers to digital participation: non-digital, digital, and postdigital. Non-digital barriers were understood in relation to access, while digital barriers were comprised of the practices and literacies required once access was achieved. In turn, postdigital barriers were defined by drawing on Ross Parry’s (2013) work, conceived of as barriers that were derived from the assumption that digital participation was both possible and normative. Coupling this typology with my media ecologies framework of digital and non-digital platforms, practices, and publics made visible the points at which digital participation, and therefore the points at which the dominant cultural policy narrative, came unstuck.
Desert Mob 2017

In Chapter Four, I demonstrated that digital participation for art centres was complex, influenced not only by infrastructural but interpersonal dimensions. While Art Centre 3’s (ACM3, personal communication, September 9, 2017) internet access was disrupted by infrastructural dimensions such as blackouts, Art Centre 13’s manager did not “really care” (ACM3, personal communication, September 9, 2017) about digital participation – an interpersonal dimension. When seen through my conceptual frameworks, these influences comprised both non-digital and digital barriers to participation that interfaced with platforms (infrastructure), practices (download limitations), and publics (art centre managers).

Given that Araluen (and therefore Desert Mob 2017) tended to reshare existing content to Instagram, rather than create their own the digital practices that were enacted (or not enacted) by art centres mattered. Desert Mob digital participation was dependent on that of the participating art centres, and thus based on a postdigital assumption that such digital participation was both possible and enacted uniformly. My research demonstrated that this assumption was false. Of the 28 Desert Mob 2017 exhibiting art centres, 23 had Instagram. Amongst these, use varied widely. Accordingly, as Araluen’s Exhibition Officer, Tim, explained, although “you could share a great post from [some art centres] everyday”, because this was not possible for all art centres, Tim chose “to actually do nothing” (T. Chatwin, personal communication, August, 11, 2017). A postdigital barrier thus intervened at the point between the practices enacted by Tim on Instagram as well as those practices enacted by art centre managers.

There was little evidence of artists having public ‘professional’ Instagram accounts within the corpus of digital participation associated with Desert Mob 2017. Only
0.28% (or 7) of the Desert Mob 2017 associated Instagram posts were tagged with accounts associated with the depicted artist. This suggested that artists either did not have Instagram accounts or that any such accounts were not intended for public consumption. While the likely barriers confronting artists resulting in this lack of observable digital participation were non-digital and digital (requiring both digital access and literacies), these resulted in an additional postdigital barrier. If digital practices – such as an artist signing up and establishing an Instagram account – were not enacted, neither could art centre managers enact digital practices of visibility (such as tagging public artist-led Instagram accounts). As such, a postdigital barrier intervened and disrupted the articulations between the publics (artists and art centre managers), the platform (Instagram), and the practices of visibility that art centre managers did (or, as in this case, did not) enact.

Digital inequity in the context of Desert Mob 2017 was thus multifaceted: comprised of non-digital, digital, and postdigital barriers that intersected with, and disrupted the articulations between, each of the media ecologies components. Non-digital barriers influenced the use of platforms, while digital barriers restricted the practices enacted. Simultaneously, postdigital barriers prohibited Araluen’s re-sharing practices, and underpinned the disparity between the digital visibility of a public comprised of artists and their digital participation.

**Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project**

In the context of Victorian Collections, specific platforms and practices (such as the Veterans Heritage Project) were developed and used as possible solutions to the barriers to participation that confronted community collecting-organisations such as the Lara
RSL. While interviews with Victorian Collections staff indicated a belief that non-digital barriers to participation such as access were decreasing, my research did not support this. Indeed, as argued in Chapter Six, non-digital, digital, and postdigital barriers remained prevalent. Even despite efforts to ameliorate barriers to digital participation, digital inequity remained multifaceted.

Although the Lara RSL sub-branch theoretically had access to digital infrastructure (in that the town was connected to major digital services), in practice, digital access was provided on a needs basis through a Telstra pre-paid Wi-Fi dongle (a mobile internet hotspot). While the RSL could have purchased an internet plan that would have allowed digital access at all times, they turned the internet on and off as required, due to the non-digital barrier of a limited budget. Although resolved during the Veterans Heritage Project workshop through Victorian Collections staff providing access, once workshops were completed, this non-digital barrier returned.

Members of the Lara RSL cataloguing public simultaneously confronted a digital barrier comprised of a lack of existing digital practices. This manifested in the pace of cataloguing output during Veterans Heritage Project workshops, with only roughly 20% Sub-Branch’s collection catalogued by the end of 2017. Although the cataloguing output appeared to have improved when I returned in 2019 to report back on the research – the cataloguing public had expanded to ten, and individuals such as John had considerably developed their digital practices – digital barriers to participation remained prohibitive. For example, Elizabeth (the oldest member of the cataloguing public) had entirely abandoned the digital practices associated with cataloguing. Instead she enacted each of the non-digital practices that Victorian Collections required: collecting, measuring, and putting each collection item away once it had been catalogued by someone else.
Although the intervention of the Veterans Heritage Project ameliorated these barriers for some members of the cataloguing public, they remained for others.

Finally, the extent to which the catalogued collections were made accessible to a public comprised of browsers was hindered by a postdigital barrier to participation. Selecting and affixing keywords to collection items facilitated their ‘unlocking’ through making them “more searchable” (C. Auty, personal communication, June 26, 2017; F. Hawkins, personal communication, February 22, 2018), and therefore more accessible for consumers. Keywords thus interfaced with both cataloguers and consumers: where cataloguers selected and affixed keywords to collection records, consumers’ searches were enhanced by them. This platform feature was developed with the barriers to participation that members of the cataloguing public confronted in mind. A deliberate decision was made “not to enforce a controlled taxonomy … as [this] was viewed as a barrier for cataloguers” (L. Miles, personal communication, June 8, 2019). Accordingly, rather than a defined list, keywords were implemented via a free text field. The platform feature was thus underpinned by a postdigital assumption that cataloguers both understood what keywords were, as well as the function that they played in facilitating access for consumers. But this was not the case, at least at the Lara RSL, and the resulting inconsistent application disrupted the digital participation of consumers. This postdigital barrier to participation meant that the cultural collections were obscured, rather than unlocked.

Digital inequity in the context of Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project was multifaceted. Non-digital, digital, and postdigital barriers intersected with and disrupted the articulations between each of the Victorian Collections media ecologies components. Non-digital barriers ensured that access remained problematic,
while digital barriers informed the practices that were enacted, as well as the relative size of the public enacting them. Finally, postdigital barriers influenced the efficacy of cataloguing practices, and restricted the participation of consumers. Digital participation in the context of the Victorian Collections was thus not simply defined by non-digital, digital, or postdigital barriers, nor digital and non-digital platforms, practices, and publics. Rather, it was defined by the interrelationships between each.

**Finding two: Enacted by publics rather than individuals**

Digital participation in each field site was enacted by publics, rather than by individuals. As discussed in Chapter One, digital participation literature (understood here as being inclusive of first- and second-level digital divide studies, as well as digital inclusion and literacy research) has tended to engage with the experiences of individuals within marginalised social groups, and neglected that of publics (Helsper, 2017, p. 223). This research therefore contributes to the field of digital participation literature through providing an expansion of the current conceptual terrain, moving beyond a focus on individuals to include publics.

Desert Mob 2017 digital participation was more than individual, requiring multiple members of multiple publics. Artists painted paintings that were photographed by art centre managers and then emailed to Tim, Araluen’s Exhibitions Officer, and posted to the Desert Mob Instagram account by Lisa-Marie, Araluen’s Marketing and Communications Officer. Similarly, in the context of Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project at the Lara RSL, Elizabeth chose the collection items from the storage room that would then be catalogued by John, who would clarify processes and questions with Bruce. In turn, Bruce would contact Victorian Collections staff
with questions that he couldn’t answer. Although constituent practices were enacted by individuals, this research advocates for an understanding of digital participation that takes into account the multiple members of multiple publics that were involved. That is, this research advocates for an understanding of digital participation that encompasses publics.

Through coupling my media ecologies framework of platforms, practices, and publics with an understanding of non-digital, digital, and postdigital barriers, this research provides a mechanism to account for the digital participation of publics. By expanding the current conceptual terrain of digital participation literature, this finding contributes to scholarly literature. Simultaneously, this finding contributes to the cultural sector through providing insight into the practices that digital participation in these contexts requires. This finding demonstrates that digital participation in the cultural sector cannot simply be achieved through hiring, for example, a Media and Communications Officer with the necessary skills, but rather that digital skills require embedding within and across each of the publics involved.

Furthermore, although the context of this research is decidedly Australian, through understanding the digital participation enacted by publics as a communicative practice with the potential for facilitating inclusive and accessible outcomes, this research contributes to an emerging body of work being undertaken in the United Kingdom (for example, Nesta & Arts Council England, 2017; New Media Consortium, 2015, 2016; Parry et al., 2018). Led by Ross Parry, this research suggests that “rather than a universal set of [digital] skills requirements”, the cultural sector must develop digital skills that are “purposeful”, and that acknowledge the “social role” of the sector (Malde & Kennedy, 2018, p. 34). According to Parry, a purposeful digital skills set is predicated on questions of ‘why’ use digital, rather than ‘how’ to use digital (Malde & Kennedy, 2018, p. 34). Asking ‘why’
rather than ‘how’, Parry suggests, “means understanding the values and consequences [of digital participation] … how digital can exclude and divide, as much as it can include and connect” (Malde & Kennedy, 2018, p. 34). When seen in relation to the research findings presented here, such an approach to digital participation is consistent with my third finding: that responses to dominant cultural policy narratives in each field site involved a choice between barriers to participation and thus between which publics participated, and how. Although digital participation might mediate distance and ‘unlock’ cultural collections for those that are digitally included, those confronting barriers remain disconnected.

Finding three: Choices between barriers and thus between publics

Although Desert Mob 2017’s digital participation mediated the distance between creators and consumers, and was thus aligned with the dominant policy narrative, doing so was shaped by a choice between barriers. Distance comprised a barrier to both the cultural participation of consumers as well as the digital participation of artists. In choosing to use digital participation to mediate distance as a barrier to consumers, distance as a barrier to the digital participation of artists remained. Accordingly, although digital participation “brought art centres closer to their clients” (Healy, 2006, p. 256) it did not do so for the artists themselves. Digital participation in this context thus had implications for inclusivity, influencing who digitally participated, and who articulated digital cultural narratives.

Likewise, although non-digital barriers such as access and digital barriers such as capacities were ameliorated in relation to Victorian Collections and the Veterans Heritage Project, this too was shaped by a choice between barriers. In resolving the
barriers to digital participation that confronted cataloguers, postdigital barriers remained and ensured that the participation of a public comprised of consumers was restricted. Digital participation in this context thus had implications for accessibility, and meant that the dominant policy narrative – that digital participation will unlock cultural collections – was only partially fulfilled.

**Implications**

In this section, I articulate the implications of these findings. As noted above, although it has long been acknowledged that the cultural sector makes choices between publics, exactly how these choices play out in digital contexts has been under-scrutinised. Having demonstrated that responses to dominant cultural policy narratives in each field site were (1) confronted by multifaceted digital inequity; (2) enacted by publics rather than by individuals; and (3) shaped by choices between barriers to participation, and thus between which publics participated and how, this research shows that these choices between publics extend into the digital. In doing so, I contribute to our understanding of barriers to digital participation within the Australian cultural sector, the sector’s responses to these barriers, and the implications that these barriers and responses have for the dominant Australian cultural policy narrative.

As discussed in Chapter One, the introduction of digital platforms and practices “restructure[d], contextualise[d] and personalise[d]” (Stuedahl & Lowe, 2013, p. 304) the cultural sector. Resulting in a distributed museum that extended “beyond the walls and grounds of its physical location” (Stuedahl & Lowe, 2013, p. 304) through encompassing multiple “digital destinations” or platforms (Proctor, n.d., p. np), digital participation in this context was accompanied by optimism. For digital museum scholars
and practitioners such as Nancy Proctor (n.d.), the cultural sector’s shift into the digital offered the possibility for “communities of interest [to form] around objects and exhibits” (p. n.p). The use of digital platforms such as Instagram enhanced such opportunities (Colquhoun & Galani, 2013) by providing what Stuedahl and Lowe (2013) describe as the potential for “foster[ing] social connectivity and re-encounter experiences beyond the museum walls” (p. 305).

That these possibilities might not be equally experienced by all people and in all places has been acknowledged within museum studies. Indeed, concerns that the use of digital platforms would not democratise the cultural sector, but would instead ensure it remained the preserve of the wealthy elite, were articulated as early as the mid-1990s (Cubitt, 1998; Gere, 1997). More recently, these concerns have been reiterated by Parry (2007), who reminds us that the “implications … of choosing to communicate and work with digital media in the museum” (p. 12) require ongoing focus. In response, studies by Dean, Donnellan, and Pratt (2010) have demonstrated that those publics engaging with cultural institutions digitally are often also those most likely to non-digitally visit in the first place. And Mihelj and colleagues (2019) argue that digital participation has

Not only greatly increased the volume, accessibility and diversity of cultural content but also created new opportunities for cultural distinction, segmentation and, hence, inequality … digital media are likely to exacerbate rather than ameliorate existing inequalities in access to culture. (Mihelj, Leguina, & Downey, 2019, p. 1466)

But these concerns have been focussed on the digital participation of publics that surround the cultural sector comprised of consumers, rather than of those within the cultural sector. While an emerging body of research in the United Kingdom is grappling with these questions (for example, Nesta & Arts Council England, 2017; New Media
Consortium, 2015, 2016; Parry et al., 2018), as noted by Megan Cardamone and Ruth Rentschler (2008), there has been a lack of sustained focus on this topic in the Australian context.

Through providing a detailed account of two very different field sites, this research demonstrates that while the optimistic possibilities for digital participation described above were leveraged, and the dominant policy narrative worked towards, doing so involved choices between barriers to participation, and thus between which publics participated and how. The intersection of barriers to digital participation therefore influenced responses to the dominant cultural policy narrative. Although Desert Mob 2017 digital participation enabled the mediation of distance, this had consequences for the inclusivity of such mediation. While distance was mediated as a barrier to the cultural participation of consumers, distance remained a barrier to the digital participation of artists. Likewise, although digital participation enabled the Lara RSL to catalogue their collections, postdigital barriers ensured there were consequences for their accessibility. Through ameliorating the barriers to digital participation that confronted cataloguers, the participation of consumers was constrained.

Limitations and directions for future research

As with all research, this study has specific limitations. In this section, I identify these limitations, and articulate a number of directions for future research.

Although examining the digital participation of remote art centres in relation to Desert Mob 2017, my research did not directly engage with remote Indigenous artists. As noted in Chapter Two and reiterated in Chapters Three and Four, I found artists were
disinclined to speak to practices that they did not enact. Direct engagement with these artists would thus meaningfully build on the scholarship presented here. Of particular interest would be the division between personal and professional artist-based digital participation, such as artists having public and/or private Instagram accounts. Research in this vein might ask: how, and with who, do remote Indigenous artists digitally participate? Likewise, programs such as the Desart Arts Workers Photography Prize has been intended to develop the digital practices of Indigenous arts workers since its first iteration in 2011. Research into whether and how these skills are (or could be) translated into art centre-based digital participation would be of significant interest.

Similarly, although this research offers a rich study of the digital participation enacted by the Lara RSL, multiple RSLs have engaged with the Veterans Heritage Project since its development, and many hundreds of community collecting-organisations across the state continue to use Victorian Collections. Research incorporating each of the Veterans Heritage Project participating RSLs would provide valuable insight into barriers to digital participation, as well as possibilities for collaboration and skills development, across the cohort. Further, as argued in Chapter Six, Lara RSL participants encountered difficulty in making the conceptual leap between cataloguing for yourself and cataloguing for an ill-defined public of consumers. This research could thus be meaningfully built on by working with cataloguers to tease out how they understand these external publics.

Although this research examined two aspects of the cultural sector that existing literature suggested were likely to experience barriers to digital participation, I do not want to suggest that digital participation that occurs elsewhere is entirely even. Barriers to digital participation remain persistent across all facets of society. Focussing on known barriers to digital participation as this research has is a way of pulling these experiences
Conclusion

By demonstrating that responses to dominant cultural policy narratives in each field site were (1) confronted by multifaceted digital inequity, (2) enacted by publics, rather than individuals, and (3) shaped by choices between barriers to participation, and thus between which publics participated and how, this research presents a challenge to the dominant Australian cultural policy narrative: to what extent can – or should – cultural policy account for the dynamics of digital participation? In asserting that through digital participation distance will be mediated and collections ‘unlocked’, Creative Nation (Department of Communications and the Arts, 1994) and Creative Australia (Australian Government, 2013) establish the context to which the cultural sector responds. By disregarding the extensive body of digital participation literature, these policies articulate a postdigital (Parry, 2013) cultural sector that ensures barriers to digital participation remain, responses to these barriers are divergent and have exclusionary outcomes, with stark consequences for the Australian cultural sector’s inclusivity and accessibility.
References


Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia and the Pacific. (2002). *A study into the key needs of collecting institutions in the heritage sector* (Final Report 1 May 2002). Melbourne, Australia: Deakin University.


Mauthner, M. S. (2012). Accounting for our part of the entangled webs we weave: Ethical and moral issues in digital data sharing. In T. Miller, M. Birch, M. Mauthner, J. Jessop (Eds.), *Ethics in qualitative research* (pp. 157–175). London, United Kingdom: SAGE.


Rennie, E., Yunkaporta, T., & Holcombe-James, I. (2018a). Cyber safety in remote Aboriginal Communities. Melbourne, Australia: Digital Ethnography Research Centre, RMIT University. DOI: 10.4225/50/5afcbbe7c4833


Appendix A:

Evidence of ethics approval and amendments
From: Astrid Nordmann
Sent: Tuesday, 13 September 2016 1:34 PM
To: Ellie Rennie
Cc: RES Ethics; Indigo Holcombe James; Anthony McCosker
Subject: SHR Project 2016/217 - Ethics clearance

To: A/Prof. Ellie Rennie, SISR

Dear Ellie,

**SHR Project 2016/217 – The social (media) life of a remote Australian art and media institution**
A/Prof. Ellie Rennie, Ms Indigo Holcombe James (Student), Dr Anthony McCosker – SISR
Approved duration: 14-09-2016 to 31-12-2020 [adjusted]

I refer to the ethical review of the above project protocol by Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC). Your response to the review, as emailed on 08 September 2016 with further amendments received today, accords with the Committee review.

I am pleased to advise that, as submitted to date, the project may proceed in line with standard ongoing ethics clearance conditions outlined below.

- All human research activity undertaken under Swinburne auspices must conform to Swinburne and external regulatory standards, including the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and with respect to secure data use, retention and disposal.

- The named Swinburne Chief Investigator/Supervisor remains responsible for any personnel appointed to or associated with the project being made aware of ethics clearance conditions, including research and consent procedures or instruments approved. Any change in chief investigator/supervisor requires timely notification and SUHREC endorsement.

- The above project has been approved as submitted for ethical review by or on behalf of SUHREC. Amendments to approved procedures or instruments ordinarily require prior ethical appraisal/clearance. SUHREC must be notified immediately or as soon as possible thereafter of (a) any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants and any redress measures; (b) proposed changes in protocols; and (c) unforeseen events which might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

- At a minimum, an annual report on the progress of the project is required as well as at the conclusion (or abandonment) of the project. Information on project monitoring and variations/additions, self-audits and progress reports can be found on the Research Ethics Internet pages.

- A duly authorised external or internal audit of the project may be undertaken at any time.

Please contact the Research Ethics Office if you have any queries about on-going ethics clearance, citing the Swinburne project number. A copy of this email should be retained as part of project record-keeping.

Best wishes for the project.
Yours sincerely,

Astrid Nordmann
Secretary, SUHREC
Notice of Approval

Date: 19 April 2016

Project number: 20764 (SUHREC: 2016/217)

Project title: The social media life of a remote Australian art and media institution

Risk classification: More than low risk

Chief investigator: A/Professor Ellie Rennie

Approval period: From: 19 April 2017
To: 31 December 2020

The following documents have been reviewed and approved:

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<tbody>
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<td>Final</td>
<td>2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appendix A (PLS)</td>
<td></td>
<td>April 2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appendix B (Consent form)</td>
<td></td>
<td>April 2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appendix D (Sample questions for interviews)</td>
<td></td>
<td>April 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above application has been approved by the RMIT University HREC as it meets the requirements of the National statement on ethical conduct in human research (NH&MRC, 2007).

Terms of approval:

1. **Responsibilities of chief investigator**
   It is the responsibility of the above chief investigator to ensure that all other investigators and staff on a project are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure that the project is conducted as approved by HREC. Approval is valid only whilst the chief investigator holds a position at RMIT University.

2. **Amendments**
   Approval must be sought from HREC to amend any aspect of a project. To apply for an amendment use the request for amendment form, which is available on the HREC website and submitted to the HREC secretary. Amendments must not be implemented without first gaining approval from HREC.

3. **Adverse events**
   You should notify the HREC immediately (within 24 hours) of any serious or unanticipated adverse effects of the research on participants, and unforeseen events that might affect the ethical acceptability of the project.

4. **Annual reports**
   Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an annual report. Annual reports must be submitted by the anniversary of approval (19 April 2017) of the project for each full year of the project. If the project is of less than 12 months duration then a final report only is required.

5. **Final report**
   A final report must be provided within six months of the end of the project. HREC must be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.

6. **Monitoring**
   Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by the HREC at any time.

7. **Retention and storage of data**
   The investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data according to the requirements of the Australian code for the responsible conduct of research (section 2) and relevant RMIT policies.

8. **Special conditions of approval**
   Nil.

In any future correspondence please quote the project number and project title above.
Notice of Approval of Amendment

Date: 29 May 2017

Project number: 20764

Project title: The social (media) lives of regional Australian cultural institutions

Risk classification: More than low risk

Investigator: A/Prof Ellie Rennie

Expiry: 31 December 2020

The request to amend the above project was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee on 17 May 2017.

The following amendments are therefore approved:

1. Amending the title of the project, from The social (media) life of a remote Australian art and media institution to The social (media) lives of regional Australian cultural institutions, to be in alignment with the re-design.

2. Extending the existing methods to:
   a. Victoria: Museums Australia (Victoria), with a specific focus on their work on the Veterans Heritage Project (VHP), part of the Victorian Collections program.
   b. Northern Territory: To incorporate Desart and their constituent remote Central Australian art and media centres (approximately 30).

3. Amending the existing methods:
   a. Digital methods: expanding the use of publically facing social media data to enable secondary analysis of internal data such as Facebook, Insights and Google Analytics.
   b. Interview themes (Appendix D): re-developed to align with the new focus of the project.
   c. Data gathered during semi-structured interviews.
   d. Recruitment materials for background participants (participant observation).
   e. Observation tools for background participants (participant observation).

The following documents have been approved:

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<tr>
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<td>5/5/2017</td>
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<td>20764 Appendix A &amp; B (PICF)</td>
<td>5/5/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20764 Appendix D (Structured and semi-structured interview protocol)</td>
<td>5/5/2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please retain this notice for future reference.

Regards

Prof Stephen Bird
Chairperson
RMIT HREC

cc: Dr Peter Burke, HREC secretary
    Indigo Holcombe-James, Co-investigator
Notice of Approval of Amendment

Date: 16 May 2018
Project number: 20764
Project title: Cultural platforms and barriers to digital participation: platforms, practices and publics
Risk classification: More than low risk
Investigator: A/Prof Ellie Rennie
Expiry: 31 December 2020

The request to amend the above project was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee on 16 May 2018.

The following amendments are therefore approved:
1. Amending the title of the project, from The social (media) lives of regional Australian cultural institutions to Cultural platforms and barriers to digital participation: platforms, practices and publics, to be in alignment with the re-design.
2. Alteration of digital data collection method from Trisma to manual workaround.
3. Addition of Dr Ian McShane as a co-investigator.

The following documents have been approved:

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<td>2/5/2018</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Please retain this notice for future reference.

Regards

Prof Stephen Bird
Chairperson
RMIT HREC

cc: Dr Peter Burke, HREC secretary
    Ms Indigo Holcombe-James, Co-investigator
    Dr Ian McShane, Co-investigator.
Notice of Approval

Date: 12 August 2019

Project number: 20764 (SUHREC: 2016/217)

Project title: Barriers to digital participation within the Australian cultural sector: Mediating distance, unlocking collections.

Risk classification: More than low risk

Chief investigator: A/Prof Ellie Rennie

Approval period: From: 19 April 2017 To: 31 December 2020

The following documents have been reviewed and approved:

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<td>April 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above application has been approved by the RMIT University HREC as it meets the requirements of the National statement on ethical conduct in human research (NH&MRC, 2007).

Terms of approval:
1. **Responsibilities of chief investigator**
   It is the responsibility of the above chief investigator to ensure that all other investigators and staff on a project are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure that the project is conducted as approved by HREC. Approval is valid only whilst the chief investigator holds a position at RMIT University.

2. **Amendments**
   Approval must be sought from HREC to amend any aspect of a project. To apply for an amendment use the request for amendment form, which is available on the HREC website and submitted to the HREC secretary. Amendments must not be implemented without first gaining approval from HREC.

3. **Adverse events**
   You should notify the HREC immediately (within 24 hours) of any serious or unanticipated adverse effects of the research on participants, and unforeseen events that might affect the ethical acceptability of the project.

4. **Annual reports**
   Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an annual report. Annual reports must be submitted by the anniversary of approval (20 March 2019) of the project for each full year of the project. If the project is of less than 12 months duration then a final report only is required.

5. **Final report**
   A final report must be provided within six months of the end of the project. HREC must be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.

6. **Monitoring**
   Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by the HREC at any time.

7. **Retention and storage of data**
   The investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data according to the requirements of the Australian code for the responsible conduct of research (section 2) and relevant RMIT policies.
8. Special conditions of approval

Nil.

In addition to these requirements, for research that involves Indigenous participants, researchers are reminded about the NH&MRC ‘Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities’ guidelines that should inform all steps in the research process including the conception, design, conduct, reporting and dissemination of findings regarding research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities:


In any future correspondence please quote the project number and project title above.

Prof Stephen Bird
Chairperson
RMIT HREC

cc: Dr Peter Burke, HREC secretary
    Ms Indigo Holcombe Jones, Research Student
Hi Indigo,

“I, Dr Mark Crees, Senior Director, Araluen Cultural Precinct, have reviewed those parts of Indigo Holcombe-James' thesis relating to the Araluen Cultural Precinct and approve those elements of the thesis reviewed.”

Kind regards,

Mark
Dr Mark Crees

Interim Director, Project Implementation Team, National Aboriginal Art Gallery
Senior Director, Araluen Cultural Precinct
Department of Tourism, Sport and Culture, Northern Territory Government

PO Box 3521, Alice Springs NT 0871

w... https://creativeeconomy.nt.gov.au/about-arts-trail/national-aboriginal-art-gallery
w... www.araluenartscentre.nt.gov.au

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Our Values: Commitment to Service | Ethical Practice | Respect | Accountability | Impartiality | Diversity

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Philip Watkins <ceo@desart.com.au>
Tue 23/04/2019 12:06
To: Indigo Holcombe-James <indigo.holcombe-james@rmit.edu.au>

Good morning Indigo

I was great to have you here in Alice Springs for the Desart Art Centre Conference and thank you again for presenting outcomes of your research project.

I confirm that Desart approves the paper you have provided as a draft for comment.

If you require anything further regarding the research please let me know.

Best wishes,

Philip Watkins
Chief Executive Officer
Phone: (08) 8953 4736
Office Address: 11/54 Reg Harris Lane, Todd Mall, Alice Springs
Postal Address: PO Box 9219, Alice Springs NT 0871
www.desart.com.au

Indigo Holcombe-James
0407 459 783 |
@indigo_h_j
PhD Candidate @ RMIT, School of Media and Communication
18 June 2019

To whom it may concern,

This letter is to confirm that the doctoral thesis of Indigo Holcombe-James has been read and approved for publication by the Program Manager, Victorian Collections, regarding all references to the Victorian Collections training program (including the Veterans Heritage Project) and online platform.

Kind regards,

Signed on behalf of Dr Ashley Robertson, Program Manager, Victorian Collections

Lauren McAlary
Acting Program Manager, Victorian Collections

AMaGA Victoria respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work, the Boon Wurrung and Woi Wurrung peoples and honour their Ancestors, Elders and next generations of community and pays respect to the Elders of all the Nations of Victoria, past, present and emerging.
Indigo,
sorry for not getting back sooner.
The draft is okay to me. Lots of footnotes and references. I always remembered in my study
days to present lots of research and footnotes. Baffle them with science. Not sure how
applicable it is today in your case. Is it still what the 'system' sees as someone doing good
research?
My only comment is not to lose sight of the old way of doing things.
In the navy I taught morse code to pilots. The young guns thought this old school
communication was outdated and not used anymore. I would ask them a simple question.
You are in your aircraft about to land on an aircraft carrier when the enemy electronically jam
all your communications. How do you tell the ship your low on fuel and you need priority
landing. Remember all electronic modes of communications are jammed. The young gun
would sit there with the look of a stunned mullet and couldn't answer. That is why, I would
say, you need to learn morse code. Just in case modern technology lets you down.
To bring this into your thesis. Old school communication will work in the outback where
modern electronic communications are not available. Grey haired nomads will visit a
museum in an outback town and verbally pass on at the next stop whether it was good or
bad. The next time you are in an outback town and see a few more cars than usual out the
front of a museum, it will not be due to electronic communication but good old word of
mouth. And worth a visit. Just as a side, it applies to good/bad pubs with good/bad food
depending on the number of cars out the front, or around the back.

Hope to see you down the track and you won't snub us because of 'Dr' in front of your name.
The billy is always on at our place!
Pax
Bruce
Appendix B:

Plain language statement
Plain Language Statement

Cultural platforms and barriers to digital participation: platforms, practices, and publics

Project title:

Cultural platforms and barriers to digital participation: platforms, practices, and publics

Research team
Researcher: Indigo Holcombe-James
School of Media and Communications
RMIT
Ph: 0407 459 783

Supervisor: Associate Professor Ellie Rennie
School of Media and Communications
RMIT

About the project:
The project is looking at how regional Australian cultural institutions use social media, how this use can support the aims of community organisations, and whether internet access is adequate for what is wanted or needed.

The project involves the researcher (Indigo Holcombe James) volunteering for [Museums Australia (Victoria) and the Araluen Cultural Precinct].

She will be based in the institutions for around 1 month each, and will work with [Museums Australia (Victoria) and the Araluen Cultural Precinct], helping with writing and research.

During this time, Indigo will talk to staff, people who are involved with the institutions, and community residents about the internet and social media.

Understanding this will help work towards answers around how or whether social media platforms can create and support the formation of social groups around cultural institutions and what this might mean.

Project and researcher interests:
This project will form Indigo’s PhD thesis.

The project has full support from the Museums Australia (Victoria) and the Araluen Cultural Precinct. These institutions are providing in-kind support, but Indigo is not being paid by the Centre.

The might be used by cultural institutions to improve their social media use. They might also use the report to help other institutions to use social media more effectively.

Your rights and interests: what will you be asked to do?
Indigo will be observing the institutions at various times. She may ask to sit in on meetings, or on events at the institutions. Indigo will take notes about her observations. She might also take photos of the institution to help her remember what happened. These will be deleted at the end of each day.

Observations are anonymous, so your name won’t be used in anything Indigo writes.

Your participation in the research is completely voluntary. You do not have to take part if you do not wish to. Your decision to take part or not will have no influence over your current role, or any future role at the institution.

Indigo may ask if you would like to be interviewed. If you agree, Indigo will ask you questions about your experiences with social media, what you use it for, and whether it is helpful or not. You are able to end the interview at any time.

Plain Language Statement: V3 20170427
Are there any risks to me participating?
We do not think that there are any risks associated with your participation in the research.

Under Northern Territory law, any information about criminal and illegal activities and situations must be reported, especially if it concerns harm to young people under-18 years of age.

The researcher will ask people to think carefully about what they are saying, in case it has personal or legal consequences for them, other people, communities or organisations.

If, however, any questions Indigo ask makes you feel sad, or uncomfortable, you will be able to stop the interview at any time.

Withdrawal from Participation:
You can stop the interview at any time, and if you decide that you do not want to be in the report after you have been interviewed, you can withdraw at any time.

Indigo will sit down with you a few days after your interview, and give you a summary of what was talked about. You can change or ask Indigo to get rid of any of your answers for two weeks after this point.

Indigo will provide you with her contact details should you wish to withdraw from the research (prior to publication of results).

Research output:
Interviews will be used to write a report on how social media is used, how it can support community organisations, and whether internet access in regional Australia is adequate for what communities want/need. This will become Indigo’s PhD.

The information will also help government and businesses like Telstra understand what is needed.

Indigo will also use the information to write articles and presentations. Anything that includes Museums Australia (Victoria) and the Araluen Cultural Precinct will be sent back to them.

Privacy and Confidentiality:
People’s names will not be used in the research unless permission is given to use them.

If it’s alright with you, Indigo will use a recorder and/or an iPad for the interviews. She will keep the interview files safe so that other people cannot listen to them or read them.

If you give permission, Indigo might use your information in future research about similar topics. If you do not give permission, she will destroy the files after 5 years so that your words are not used by anyone else.

Further information about the project:
If you would like further information about the project, including notification of publications arising from the research, please do not hesitate to contact:

Indigo Holcombe James
PhD candidate

Associate Professor Ellie Rennie
PhD Supervisor

Should you have any concerns or questions about this research project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers listed in this document, you may contact:

Human Research Ethics Committee: RMIT University
HREC Secretary: Peter Burke
03 9925 2251

Research Ethics Co-Ordinator: Research Integrity Governance and Systems
RMIT University
GPO Box 2476
Melbourne VIC 3001
Appendix C:

Consent form
Form for people who want to help with research

(Consent form)

Project Title:
Cultural platforms and barriers to digital participation: platforms, practices, and publics

Principal Investigator(s):   Associate Professor Ellie Rennie, RMIT
Dr Ian McShane, RMIT
Dr Anthony McCosker, Swinburne University of Technology
Indigo Holcombe-James, PhD Candidate, RMIT

About the project:
The project is looking at how regional Australian cultural institutions are using social media, how this use can support their aims, and whether internet access is adequate for what these institutions want and/or need.

The project will involve the researcher (Indigo Holcombe-James) volunteering for Araluen Cultural Precinct and Museums Australia (Victoria). She will volunteer with each institution for around 1 month each, and will work with them to help with writing and research. During this time, Indigo will talk to staff, people involved with the institutions, and community residents about the internet and social media.

About the interviews:
Interviews will ask people about how they use the internet and what it means to them. Interviews will also ask what they would like to use the internet for in the future.

As part of this research, Indigo will work with, and interview, staff at Araluen Cultural Precinct and Museums Australia (Victoria). Following this, it is hoped that the institutions will assist Indigo in opening interviews out to the broader community. These interviews could be one-on-one, or in groups if people would prefer that.
Indigo will use results from the interviews to write a report on how social media is used, how it can support cultural institutions, and whether internet access in regional Australia is adequate for what these institutions want and/or need. This will end up being Indigo’s PhD thesis. This information will help government and businesses like Telstra understand what is needed. Indigo will also use the interview results in articles and presentations.

Any publications that include Araluen Cultural Precinct and/or Museums Australia (Victoria) will be sent back to them for their records.

Types of questions you will be asked:
- Do you use the internet?
- What do you use social media for?
- Do other people you know use social media?
- What do they use it for?
- Does the internet always work where you live? Why or why not?
- What do you do when the internet doesn’t work?

Privacy and confidentiality:
People’s names will not be used in the research unless permission is given to use them.

Under Northern Territory law, any information about criminal and illegal activities and situations must be reported, especially if it concerns harm to young people under-18 years of age. The researcher will ask people to think carefully about what they are saying, in case it has personal or legal consequences for them, other people, communities or organisations.

If it’s alright with you, Indigo will use a recorder and/or an iPad for the interviews. We will keep the interview files safe so that other people cannot listen to them or read them. Everything will be locked up so that no one else can use your words.

If you give permission, Indigo might use your information in future research about similar topics. If you do not give permission, she will destroy the files after 5 years so that your words are not used by anyone else.

Questions or concerns:
Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns. You can contact the researcher directly on: Indigo Holcombe James [redacted]
Please circle Yes or No:

By answering ‘Yes’, you indicate that you:

1. Understand what we are doing because it has been explained to you
2. Understand that you do not have to take part and can stop at any time.
3. Understand that we will not use your name unless you want us to and we will make sure you are ok with what we write.

I agree to talk to the researcher

The researcher can record my voice

If I show the researcher an example of how I use social media, I give permission for this example to be used in the research.

The researcher can come back or call me and ask me more questions another day

I would like a copy of the interview summary

I would like a copy of the report when it is ready

I work for the institution (or other stakeholder) and have permission from (or I am) the manager and can speak on behalf of the organisation

I have chosen to let the researcher use my name and professional role in the research.

If I answer no, I understand that the researcher will use a pretend name (a pseudonym) instead of using my real name and professional role.

If I answer yes, I understand that the researcher will use my name and professional role in the research.

I understand that if I want to, I can have parts of my interview ‘off the record’. This means that any information I say will not be linked to my name.

The researcher can use my information in future research projects.

Signed

.........................................................................................................................................................................................................................

Print name

.........................................................................................................................................................................................................................

Email address (for summary of interview and copy of report when it is ready)

.........................................................................................................................................................................................................................
Phone number (for the researcher to contact you on in the future with further questions)

Date

Should you have any concerns or questions about this research project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers listed in this document, then you may contact:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reviewing HREC name</th>
<th>RMIT University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HREC Secretary</td>
<td>Peter Burke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mailing address</td>
<td>Research Ethics Co-ordinator Research Integrity Governance and Systems RMIT University GPO Box 2476 MELBOURNE VIC 3001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D:

Guiding questions for semi-structured interviews
Prior to use, the following sample questions were piloted with each research partner and relevant stakeholders to ensure cultural protocols were respected, as well as enabling direct participation in the research design for research partners.

Semi-structured interview themes were designed to gather data from participants derived from three participant groups:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Group</th>
<th>Inclusion Criteria</th>
<th>Anticipated Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1.** People who are within the institution itself | People who run it  
People who work there  
Internal stakeholders | Answers to questions around internal use |
| **2.** People who are directly connected to the institution | Araluen: artists  
VHP: RSL members | Answers to questions around the intersection of their engagement with the institution and social media |
| **3.** People outside the institution but within the cultural sector | External stakeholders | Answers to questions around validity of findings and broader experience of the sector |
Interview protocol:

Participants were each provided with a copy of Appendix B: Plain Language Statement and Appendix C: Consent form.

Participants were alerted to give particular consideration to options for anonymity and other forms of de-identification available to them.

In acknowledgement of the Northern Territory contexts of 50% of the fieldwork for this research, participants in this context were alerted to the following:

- The potential for any information that might be exposed during the interview might have unexpected personal or legal implications for themselves, certain individuals, organisations or communities
- Legal obligations for reporting of criminal or illegal activities, especially in relation to potential or actual harm or exploitation of persons aged 18 years.
### Group 01: People within the institution itself

Inclusion criteria: management, staff, internal stakeholders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platforms</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How are you connected to the institution?</td>
<td>Who are you? What do you do? When did you come into contact with the institution? How did that contact occur? Was it physically or digitally? Do you maintain a connection with the institution? How do you do this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What comprises the site of the institution?</td>
<td>Is it the physical site? Where do you imagine it begins? Where does it end? Does social media extend this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What infrastructure surrounds the site institution?</td>
<td>What do you understand as infrastructure? If you think of it in terms of the internet, or telecommunications, what is the institution underpinned by?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What access do you have to this infrastructure in your role at the institution?</td>
<td>Do you use the internet or social media? What do you use it for? What kind of device do you use for these things?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What does the institution use the internet or social media for?</td>
<td>Which platforms? Why those ones? Has the internet or social media changed your job, or how do you do your job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important is the internet and social media to your role at the institution?</td>
<td>Is it central or periphery? Why? Has this changed over time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it ever difficult to use the internet or social media at the Institution?</td>
<td>What happens? What do you do in those instances?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Group 01: People *within the institution itself*
Inclusion criteria: management, staff, internal stakeholders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publics</th>
<th>Who do you see as the Institution’s audience?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Are there multiple audiences? Do they overlap? Where are they based? Do you know who they are? How do you talk to them? Does it work? Are there different methods for different audiences?</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publics</th>
<th>Is the institution focused on the audiences that are geographically close, or the dispersed, distant ones?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Do both types of audience use social media to connect with the institution? Do you use social media to connect with each type of audience? Why? Which social media platforms do they use?</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publics</th>
<th>Does the audience talk to each other?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Are there observable connections between them? How do these connections occur?</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table continued on previous page.
### GROUP 2: People who are directly connected to the institution

Inclusion criteria: Araluen Cultural Precinct – artists, Australian Museums and Galleries Association Victoria – RSL members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platforms</th>
<th>Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How are you connected to the institution?</td>
<td>How did you come into contact with the institution?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are you? What do you do? When did you come into contact with the institution? How did that contact occur? Was it physically or digitally? Do you maintain a connection with the institution? How do you do this?</td>
<td>How did you find out about them? How did you originally contact them? Do you email them? Do you call them? Would you google them? Has social media changed how you engage with the institution?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What comprises the site of the institution?</td>
<td>How do you use the internet and social media?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it the physical site? Where do you imagine it begins? Where does it end? Does social media extend this?</td>
<td>Do you use it to research? To talk? How do you engage with the institution? Do you engage with the institution online?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you use social media or the internet when you’re physically at the institution? What do you use it for? What platforms do you use? Why do you use it at the institution?</td>
<td>Do you have access to the same internet/social media platforms when you leave the institution?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have internet access at home? Is access easy, affordable, constant? What happens when it’s difficult? How often do you use the internet? Who taught you how to use it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table continued on following page.
| **Publics** | Is there a community of people who are directly connected to the institution in the same way that you are?  
*How does this community work? How do you communicate?  
What keeps you together? Is it the cultural content?* |
|---|---|
| | Is there a community of people who surround the institution?  
*Is this your audience? Do you communicate with them?* |
| **GROUP 3: People who are outside the institution but within the cultural sector** |
| Inclusion criteria: external stakeholders identified in collaboration with the Institution |

| Platforms |
| How are you connected to the institution?  
*Who are you? What do you do? When did you come into contact with the institution? How did that contact occur? Was it physically or digitally? Do you maintain a connection with the institution? How do you do this?* |

| Practices |
| How are cultural institutions using social media and the internet?  
*What are the primary aims behind use? Are you talking to specific audiences or anyone interested? Are you trying to grow audiences (broad), or increase engagement (depth)? Where do you see use going in the future?* |

| How is social media used during entry, engagement and exit with the physical space?  
*Are cultural institutions using digital technology to connect with audiences while they're in the institution, or after they leave, or both?* |

| How are these practices driven by infrastructures and contexts?  
*Is there a difference between metropolitan and regional use? What drives this difference?* |

| Publics |
| Are cultural institutions using social media to create groups of people, or publics, around the institution?  
*Are these audiences? Has participatory social media changed the way these are engaged with, and how these interact internally? Do people talk back to the institutions? Do people talk to each other?* |
Appendix E:

Trajectory of artworks sold during desert mob from 2010-2016
Figure 41: Trajectory of art work sold at Desert Mob 2010
Figure 42: Trajectory of art work sold at Desert Mob 2011
Figure 43: Trajectory of art work sold at Desert Mob 2012
Figure 44: Trajectory of art work sold at Desert Mob 2013
Figure 45: Trajectory of art work sold at Desert Mob 2014

- Gray nodes: Desert Mob 2014
- Blue nodes: Location of purchase
- Pink nodes: Location of creation
Figure 46: Trajectory of art work sold at Desert Mob 2015
Figure 47: Trajectory of art work sold at Desert Mob 2016

- Desert Mob 2016
- Location of purchase
- Location of creation
Appendix F:

*Victorian Collections’ cataloguing fields with descriptive text as of May 22, 2019*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Cataloguing field</strong></th>
<th><strong>Descriptive pop-up bubble text</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please note: This table does not list all Victorian Collections’ cataloguing fields. Rather, only those with a descriptive pop-up bubble are listed here.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field hierarchy 1: Field hierarchy 2: Field hierarchy 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification: Registration number</td>
<td>A unique and permanent number given to each collection item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification: Object name</td>
<td>A one or two word description of the item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification: Title</td>
<td>Only complete this for books with a formal title (books, photographs, works of art, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification: Other numbers: Caption</td>
<td>A few words that defines the associated number (i.e. ISBN, legacy registration number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description: Physical description</td>
<td>A detailed description of the item including shape, colour, materials and prominent features.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description: Inscriptions and markings</td>
<td>Serial numbers, signatures, engravings, dedications in books, manufacturing details or personal markings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description: Size</td>
<td>Maximum dimensions of the item in height or length, width and depth (metric).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table continued on following page.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description: Materials</th>
<th>List of all materials this object is composed of (i.e. brass, glass, wood).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture: Date made</td>
<td>Eg. 04/07/1829 (Day/Month/Year) or “Early 19th Century”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture: Place made: Street</td>
<td>Avoid abbreviating words such as Street, Road or Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture: Place made: Town</td>
<td>Avoid abbreviating town names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture: Place made: Region</td>
<td>Area of land recognised as a specific unit (e.g. Goulburn Valley, Greater Shepparton, Yorta Yorta Nation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture: Place made: State</td>
<td>Avoid abbreviating state names.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture: Place made: Country</td>
<td>Avoid abbreviating country names.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture: Place made: Comments</td>
<td>Any miscellaneous information about the item’s manufacture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context: Historical information</td>
<td>Tell the story of the item. Link it to historical events and people if known.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context: Keywords</td>
<td>A list of ideas and topics this item relates to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context: Statement of significance</td>
<td>In one paragraph state what is significant, the type of significance it holds, and why it is significant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquisition details: Date acquired</td>
<td>When the item was acquired; eg. 04/07/1829 (Day/Month/year) or “Circa 1985”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table continued on following page.
| **Acquisition details: Acquired from:** Name | The name of the person or organisation that the item was acquired from |
| **Acquisition details: Acquired from:** Email | e.g. hu.zhang@hotmail.com |
| **Acquisition details: Acquired from:** Phone | Use brackets for area codes eg. (03) 5999 1234 |
| **Acquisition details: Acquired from:** Street | Avoid abbreviating words such as Street, Road or Court |
| **Acquisition details: Acquired from:** Town | Avoid abbreviating town names |
| **Acquisition details: Acquired from:** Region | Area of land recognised as a specific unit (eg. Goulburn Valley, Greater Shepparton, Yorta Yorta Nation) |
| **Acquisition details:** Acknowledgement: Date of acknowledgement | Date that the source was contacted; eg. 04/07/1829 (Day/Month/Year) or “Circa 1985” |
| **Acquisition details:** Acknowledgement: Comments | Miscellaneous information about acquisition |
| **Storage: Regular location** | The location where the item is most usually kept (whether on display or in storage) |
| **Storage: Current location** | This current location of item. Update this field whenever the item is moved. |
| **Storage: Date moved** | The date that the item was moved; eg. 04/07/1997, “February 2009” or simply “2003” |

Table continued on following page.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Storage: Time moved</th>
<th>The time that the item was last moved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Storage: Moved by</td>
<td>The person who moved the item at the date/time shown above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storage: Notes</td>
<td>Notes/comments relating to the object location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights: Copyright research</td>
<td>All information relating to copyright research for this item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights: Copyright known</td>
<td>Whether the copyright owner is known or unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights: Copyright category</td>
<td>The type of copyright, according to the Australian Copyright Council Guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights: Copyright expiry</td>
<td>The date when copyright is due to expire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights: Copyright holder: Email</td>
<td>Eg. <a href="mailto:Hu.zhang@hotmail.com">Hu.zhang@hotmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights: Copyright holder: Phone</td>
<td>Use brackets for area code (03) 5999 1234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights: Copyright holder: Street</td>
<td>Avoid abbreviating words such as Street, Road or Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights: Copyright holder: Town</td>
<td>Avoid abbreviating town names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights: Copyright holder: Region</td>
<td>Area of land recognised as a specific unit (eg. Goulburn Valley, Greater Shepparton, Yorta Yorta Nation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights: Copyright holder: State</td>
<td>Avoid abbreviating state names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights: Copyright holder: Country</td>
<td>Avoid abbreviating country names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights: Copyright holder: Postcode</td>
<td>Eg. 3632</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table continued on following page.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rights: Copyright holder: Permissions</th>
<th>Permissions and conditions for reproduction, publication, display etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rights: Copyright holder: Attribution requirements</td>
<td>Any acknowledgements to groups or individuals etc. required as a condition for reproduction, publication, display etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplementary file: Supplementary file location</td>
<td>The location of the supplementary file</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About this record: Record access</td>
<td>Public or private</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>