# The Online Counter-collector, the Open Source Heritage and the Museums of the Unfinished

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## Abstract

For this roundtable, we propose a debate about public policies of memory preservation based on the specificities of digital media culture. The ephemerality of these kinds of technologies and the intensification of personal and non-professional process of digital documentation bring unprecedented ways of understanding the collections and cultural heritage of our times. We are experiencing not only an overproduction of data, which proliferates in new formats of storage in the networks but also a documentary overdose. Nevertheless, this not performs a cumulative system. Due to the speed with which technologies are discarded in shorter and shorter periods of time, loss, change, and even replacement will be more and more part of our conservation practice. For all these reasons, it seems particularly important to discuss how to deal with the cultural ambivalence of this very moment. In our debate, we will concentrate in three main axes: the online counter-collector, the open-source heritage and the digital museum as the museum of the unfinished.

## Keywords

Memory, Digital Museums, Digital Heritage, Open Source, Digital Art, digital preservation.

## Introduction

The ephemerality of digital images and the intensification of personal and non- professional process of documentation bring unprecedented ways of understanding the collections and cultural heritage in contemporary times. Traditionally conceived as an immaterial heritage, it becomes, increasingly, mediated by collective creations of online collections that indicate another perspective of memory, resulting from the culture of sharing.

We are nowadays experiencing not only an overproduction of data, which proliferates in new formats of storage in the networks, but also a documentary overdose. The total of photos captured in 2015, for example, exceeds the number of all photos ever made on film in history (about 2.5 trillion to 3.5 trillion). It is certainly important to avoid loss, but it is impossible to store everything that is produced. The process of building this collections has also changed in the last years, because the users became active creators and the creation became collective most of the time. A concept of open source heritage can emerge if we realize what kind of content will be considered collection in the next years that come. Otherwise, this new concept of open heritage could be manipulated by different powers to direct behavior and ideologies, which bring this discussion of control to the surface.

The notions of patrimonial preservation of the physical space have been radically changing in this context. While the city and the urban spaces become also museological and digital interface, visual narratives proliferate on the networks. These experiences indicate an emerging institutional review. Although more connected to networks, their power of action seems to be more diluted, transferring it to the visitors and users the autonomy to interfere and construct new images and collections.

The musealization of everyday life, a contemporary phenomenon which is related with our culture's fascination with the past, is also putting the museum as a source of big interest on contemporary times, acting as "repositories of temporality", as Manuel Castells has called. But what happens when museum themselves are "musealized" by the visitors, shattering its established temporality by putting their collection on the noisy realm of Instagram, for instance?

Since art institutions are more and more engaged with social media, it seems necessary to understand which paths could be follow in this new scenario. It is fundamental to evaluate how we live such images that awaken a desire to immerse ourselves in collaborative narratives, where many contribute under the same creative cycle. Different levels of space appropriation arise as these ephemeral heritages reach the physical places around us, as the constant association between

image making and checkin locations demonstrate.

The function of space is changing front of this landscape where the institution is shared by users and visitors, which use the places as triggers for their collections. Then, these collections seem to be opened in their creation process, but also in their existence in the place, where the artworks are linked and exist connected to different narratives and routes. The city and the museum start to establish different relationships, not only on the social media, but on the urban territory, as long as the city become an interface for different artistic projects or digital services (evidencing the disputes between resistance and control), like Google Local Guides, which turn the users routes some kind of curatorial experience of places and public opinions.

In this sense, the establishment of new informational layers on the cartography of the city and the living spaces transforms the way in which we see the images and their meaning as patrimony. It happens especially because these collections do not belong to traditional museums but parallel ones, outside its constitutional power, composing its own scene with open, often mixed dynamics.

## The On-line Counter-collector and the Musealization of the Museum





Figures 1 and 2 Images of the highly-photographed exhibition of Ron Mueck, at Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo: an example of the musealization of the museum

Two different situations emerge from this new scenario. On the one hand, there is the promotion of an unequivocal adherence to practices of open source culture, experiences with open data and collective actions. Personal and informal initiatives proliferate, such as Ubu Web, by the American poet Kenneth Goldsmith, which documents and archives experimental film and contemporary poetry; and Netzspannung, by the artists Monika Fleischmann and Wolfgang Strauss. On the other, the possibilities of appropriation by marketing campaigns - benefited by hashtags often associated with sponsoring brands - grow. Not to mention the recurring scenes of selfies with the works, often with their backs to the objects but "facing the Instagram". Besides that, companies such as Google and Facebook dominate more and more storage spaces on the networks.

As an attempt to avoid this process, a whole counterculture of archival and musealization has been created outside the institutional tradition of memorization practices and policies. Jurgen Vermaire, a Dutch art historian-teacher has been exhibiting images

of artworks taken by him in museums around the world on the Instagram account @lets_talk_about_art, which has already more than 26k followers. The photos are post daily and come along with a descriptive text and a standard identification following museological criteria: artist's name, title of the work, year, technique, dimensions, name of the museum and place of origin. Although the pieces exist in the physical/material sense, this group of images is already a collection by themselves – an archive without museum, as Hal Foster predicted (Foster, 1997).

Edward Sandling, a British art historian and author of the profile @london_mudlark, began to collect historical objects randomly found on the banks of the River Thames in London about a decade ago. By displaying them on Instagram, he takes on the role of a curator of his own collection, transforming a private collection into a gallery of objects that, to his followers, seem to exist only as an image on the digital realm.

Such examples can certainly be classified as practices of 'counter-collecting', a neologism created by Beiguelman and Magalhães (2014) to describe an emergent archive and musealization counterculture, beyond the academic world and outside of the institutional tradition of memorization policies and practices, and often crossed by corporations demands. Cicero Inacio da Silva uses this term to discuss the disappearance of archives on the digital age and how personal records can often be mixed with the official ones in the future. As he describes, "the counter-collecting would be a response to a long and historical process of formalization. It would be a kind of counter-methodology, now guided by the massification of digitization and its complete dismissal of hierarchical methods" (Da Silva, 2014, p. 198).

In the midst of images combined by the hashtagg #van-gogh or #selfportraitwithabandagedear, as an example, we can hardly notice which one was officially photographed and post by the Courtauld Gallery or by a visitor. Both of them will be displayed one aside the other, with no hierarchical separation. Following a prominent idea developed by Victoria Vesna, the hashtag configuration can be read as a database aesthetic example of social media, a visual configuration often generated randomly in a emergent way or by the logic of the algorithm. As a consequence, the hashtag offers a possibility to favor a "peer to peer" relationship, as Christiane Paul points out, and the political and philosophical impact of this configuration is immense

(Paul, 2007). Besides being a possibility of "server liberation", it is also an opening for other discourses in the field of art beyond those already established by institutions.



Figure 3 Images found among the 397,455 available on the hashtag research #tatemodern

To better understand these practices of the online counter-collector, it seems valid to look to them in parallel with a contemporary phenomenon called the musealization of everyday life. As Andreas Huyssen analyses by following the ideas of two German authors (Hermann Lübbe and Odo Marquard), our current fascination with the past was partly originated by the breaking down of the traditions and stable experiences brought by modernity and technological transformations. As such, musealization – and the museums themselves – plays a restorative role in this context of loss of stability, bringing "traditional forms of cultural identity to the destabilized modern subject" (Huyssen, 1994, p. 15).

Similarly, the relation between musealization and new temporal dynamics has also been discussed by the Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells, for whom the museums function nowadays as "repositories of temporality", acting as a kind of organizational system of a chronological time that has been lost in the information era. In his own words: "Museums are repositories of temporality. They constitute an accumulated historical tradition or a projection into the future. They are thus an archive of human time lived or to be lived, an archive of the future. Re-establishing temporalities in a long-term perspective is fundamental to a society in which communication, technological systems and social structures converge to destroy time by suppressing or compressing it, or arbitrarily altering time sequences" (Castells 2001, p. 6).

If the musealization of daily life is pointed as one of the phenomena of the culture of memory, it is interesting to reflect about what happens when the museum also becomes an object of such practice. In other words, by registering the works of art and arranged them in their personal virtual galleries, visitors assume the role of musealization of the museum itself. This process seems to contradict Castells and Lübbe's ideas about these spaces as repositories of traditions and temporalities. In fact, they may even have this function at an earlier stage. But as soon as visitors take over the images of the works to reallocate them in particular galleries of the Instagram, any stability which was previously supposedly present disappears.

In this new virtual configuration, museums seem to assume an aspect of the information age that, according to Castells, they were meant to avoid. With artworks of styles and periods so distinct juxtaposed randomly and visualised without any categorial separation on the Instagram feed, for instance, they also carry a sign of a time and spatiality compressed.

Figure 4 Edward Sandling's London Mudlark profile: a private collection transformed into a public gallery on Instagram.

This radical transformation brings a lot of questions and issues to be considered in an upcoming future. Will the image of the original artwork be overshadowed one day by these less reliable reproductions until completely transforming the imagery we have of it? Or private collections such as the one by Edward Sandling could be more and more inserted into the public sphere through this image sharing process on Instagram and other social medias? Or, even more drastically, could these counter collections be lost forever if Instagram suddenly comes to an end? Although it is too early to consider all the challenges brought by these counter-instrumental practices, these issues will certainly be more often and changing the way museums and institutions deal with this scenario.

Figure 5 Different images of "Self-Portrait with a Bandaged Ear" by Van Gogh seen along with a different work by another artist

## Open Source Heritage and the City as Museums Interface

The collective production of images changes the way we build our memories. In the last twenty years the world saw a big change in communicate and live. All places around us become more than a physical space, especially because they represent our relationships in the post-virtual condition, in which our virtual check-ins also become physical connections. Front of the huge amount of images produced in the last years, this digital culture of collective creation brings to us the discussion about how open the heritage of the future is to be build in community and to be changed.

Laurajane Smith (2006) point that the heritage is about negotiation – about using the past, and collective or individual memories, to negotiate new ways of being and expressing identity. By this way, we can consider all the memories we have been collection and exhibition online based in the places we went, like or collect in our journeys around the world. She says this process heritage objects, sites, places or institutions like museums become cultural tools or props to facilitate this process – but do not themselves stand in for this process or act. And day after day the function to collect and curate the heritage is more related to digital companies than to cultural institutions. Smith also affirms that the heritage is also a discourse, which not only organizes the way concepts like heritage are understood, but the way we act, the social and technical practices we act out, and the way knowledge is constructed and reproduced.

The present is based in different trend topics of interest on internet, and this access mean what is considered essential to stay online. This behavior of digital society makes important analyze what is the limit of the conservation of memories that build the collection of the future, how these unfolding of what is produced collectively and what is considered a cultural heritage. Emerge a dispute among (1) the collective production of resistence, open source and hacker culture, and (2) an average collective production induced by indirect control of data and surveillance, overall connected to the city area (Google Maps, FourSquare, Facebook check-in, Instagram locations, etc). The innumerous services, which are created to stimulate the rebuild process of the contemporary city, make us think about the manipulated repair of the urban area as cultural recognition of the cartography from the interests and patterns of society. This is the case of Google Local Guides, which is a service to upload photographs, reviews and favorite routes of the users, based on Google Maps and Streetview, gamifying the city through rewards and points. There are 5 levels to be achieved and many awards for the achievements, related to the amount of content uploaded every day. From this service is possible to visualize how deep is this behavior to build an open collection of our lives and routes, based in preferences and routines, where resides the importance of the data we produce everyday and the images collection we curate all the time, creating patterns of behavior of the society. But this new maps in the city can have different shapes beyond the simples service proposed by Google, reaching levels of resistance.
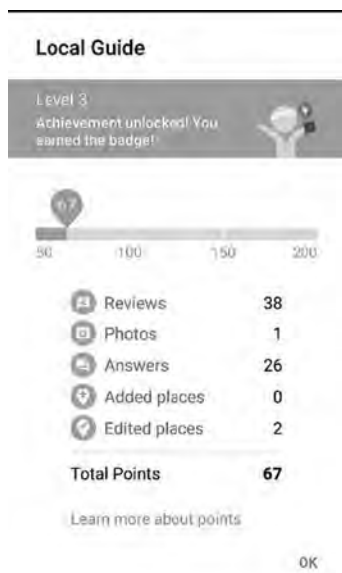
*Figure 6* Google Local Guide - www.google.com/local/guides

Many artistic projects discuss this new direction for collections, and here is clear the resistance process, where users share authorship in another level, where they are not just a data resource or the final product of a service cycle. The challenge is how to preview what kind of heritage we are building with our present collective way of creation, and how track the differences between a real appropriation of the city as museum/artistic interface, or the result of a manipulation cycle.

All of these process to create collections in the city trhough digital experiences, bring the topic of tangible and intangible, and about the materiality of the heritgae. Smith (2006) points all heritage is ultimately intangible and it is fruitful as it challenges the materialist idea of heritage and the ideological baggage that goes with that, and yet also challenges the critiques of heritage that warn against its stultifying backward reactionary glances. She csays the heritage is a cultural and social process; it is the experiences that may happen at sites or during the acting out of certain events; it is a process of remembering and memory making – of mediating cultural and social change, of negotiating and creating and recreating values, meanings, understandings and identity. Above all, heritage is an active.

More than social media networks, we are dealing with dynamics in which open source is more important than the object. The idea of open source firstly appeared when Linus Torvalds started a free computer operating system called Linux (1991). This project represented a new way to create interactive systems, which code are available to be edited for everyone and Torvalds (2007) says that open source is the only right way to do software. But when analysed in the context of art and museums, we can see how closed has been this system in the last centuries, which limits were established by the main institutions, controlling the power of exhibit, communicate and distribute the "noble" artistic experience. Even after the first modern public museums started to appear, their history has always been attached to private collections developed by a minor group of a bourgeoisie society. But now, many tools give the power to small groups manifest their own opinions and artworks (in a high level of viralization and accessibility) in a place, technically, absolutely open to intervention in the digital landscape: the urban place. The city is completely vulnerable to be changed, tagged, reviewed. So te urban system in some way can dialog with the idea of open source heritage, and, as such, the open source can often be seen as a revolution on the way we access artworks and objects of memories in the next decades. The open source heritage has just started to be built by all of us, and probably the museums of future will exhibit the memes of our culture, our tours in the city, the fragments of our routines, because the city is a rhizomatic and malleable interface, with any judgements, which make it open to different types of interventions and appropriations.



Figure 7 Mapas Afetivos - www.mapasafetivos.com.br

The ambivalence perceived between resistance and manipulation, can be discussed from projects which bring the local identity of the city, the affects and

cultural cartography, or expose the gaps in the system using the data to explore the political discussions. Mapas Afetivos is a collaborative projects created by Andre Deak e Felipe Lavignatti, to built a new map of Sao Paulo, based in affection and emotions of its citizens. The site brings testimonials of ordinary citizens, famous or not, and their favorite places in São Paulo and other cities in Brazil and the world. The launch of the site's collaborative area will be in January 2015, during the commemorations of the anniversary of the city of São Paulo.

Created by the same group, the website Arte Fora do Museu it's an award winning project, based on the mapping of works of art that are in the public space of the city. This initiative for the valorization of public art has becoming a transmissible narrative as mobile application, a traveling exhibition, multimedia production and mapping workshops.

The open source heritage we talk about is based in initiatives like the artistic projects we showed and so many other, which review the city as interface of real connections and interests, as tool for artistic deep productions. We are talking about a heritage based in real desires of the citizens and users, and not unconscious wishes implanted somehow. Maybe the next generations won't understand why to create private and closed collections of images, especially front this universe of shared data and information, but the main aspect is built the critic sense about why we are creating this amount of data and what we are going to do with this.



Figure 8 Arte fora do Museu - www.arteforadomuseu.com.br

The surveillance need to be discussed front of so many services to control our steps, routes, behavior and potential choices, because the city need to be the interface of cultural and free expression, and not an interface to map potential consumers and their favorite products. If we share and co-create all content together, is it possible to curate what we will keep for the future? Through this path, the new heritage conditions are created based in a new image, part of many lives, which belong to everyone and to anyone at the same time.

## Museums of the Unfinished

Obsolescence, loss, devices and files not found. This seems to be the more perfect picture of the digital culture and the aesthetics of abandonment that prevail in its realm. Maybe the imminent disappearance that is constantly to be found everywhere all the time justifies the apocalyptic tone that is suggested in the most basic commands for handling digital editing programs, which invite us to 'save' files all the time, and not simply store them.

Networks have no time. A system of permanent urgency prevails over them. The most recent publication is supposedly more relevant than the previous one. Now is what counts. And this 'now' has an increasing intensity. Try to find that very important comment posted by your friend thirty days ago on Facebook, that photo you 'liked' in some remote day of 2012, or that remarkable event in which you shared a video back in 2008. Don't even try it. You won't find them.

It is true that all data can be tracked. Scandals related to electronic surveillance, such as Prism, involving the US government and companies such as Google and Facebook, can confirm this. But this is far from meaning that we have the right to remember whatever we want about ourselves whenever we want. Not that the models existing for the traditional cataloguing and retrieval of data are better, or even that they are the only possible ones. They are historically engendered and are related to forms of power and to the political, social and cultural authorities that define the criteria for conservation, the ways to institutionalize memory locations and to decide what is or what is not left to be told as history. It is not a coincidence that the protagonist of one of the most brilliant short stories by Jorge Luis Borges – The Book of Sand [El Libro de Arena] – chooses precisely the National Library as the place for losing the book that tormented him. Putting it on a random shelf was like hiding a leaf in a forest. It could never be found

again. But this human scale restrained by institutions is now shaken by an overdose of documentary production that is unprecedented in history. If there is any question about this statement, let us make a comparison between the volumes of data stored in the world's largest library collection – The Library of Congress of the United States – and the Internet Archive Wayback Machine, an independent service that archives web pages daily. The Wayback Machine contains 3 petabytes of data (equivalent to approximately 700 thousand fully loaded DVDs and this is only part of the 9 peta-bytes of the Internet Archive as a whole) (Drinehart 2012). If the Library of Congress had its entire collection of books scanned (32 million volumes), there would be 32 terabytes archived, considering 1 megabyte per scanned book (Lesk 2005). The Wayback Machine was created in 1996. The collection of books from the Library of Congress dates from 1815. The Wayback Machine grows at the rate of 100 terabytes per month, which is almost three times the size of the whole book collection of the Library of Congress in bytes accumulated over almost two centuries.

In an anthological essay – "The Historiographical Operation" – Michel de Certeau wrote a concise History of Historiography and summarised what this operation consists of in a few lines: "In history, everything begins with the act of separating, gathering and turning certain objects that were otherwise distributed into 'documents'. However, this separation is always done after the work of the archivist, who is responsible for the selection and organisation of documents that will be kept at the expense of those that will be discarded" (de Certeau 1982).

But, given the media avalanche we produce every day on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other similar social networks, how do we choose what will be stored? And what if they were simply deleted by a system error or a discontinuation of the product? How to deal with so much unstable and fragmented information produced by us and about us? Is all this information really relevant? And what can we do when it suddenly becomes unavailable? Could museums be a solution in a context like this or should we remember Adorno, who wrote a long time ago: "Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association. [...] They testify to the neutralization of culture" (Adorno, 1988: 173).

Nevertheless, all that we cannot keep is on the probable horizon of permanent loss. And this includes personal memories, private and professional information, relevant data, a lot of futility for sure, and culture, art, and uncountable (perhaps fundamental?) unfinished works. Of course it is important to prevent loss, but it is impossible to store everything that is produced nowadays.

Until practically the end of the last century, according to Michel Melot, one of the world's leading authorities on archival and library science, budget constraints "in their wisdom" prevented institutions from literally overflowing. In an article suggestively entitled "Des archives considérées comme une substance hallucinogène" (Melot 1986), he pondered what would happen if every citizen became a collector and a curator and we could keep absolutely everything in the name of future historians. We would arrive at a paradox, he concludes: "History finally produced solely for historians and also blocked by them, like the surgeon who immobilises his patient in order to operate on him" (Melot 1986: 16). After all, as we learned in another short story by Borges ("Funes the Memorious" [Funes El Memorioso]) thinking is generalising, not only archive ("Funes the Memorious" [Funes El Memorioso]) thinking is generalising, not only archiving and adding yet more and more data.

Just as important as paying attention to the instability of the cultural system we are living in, and understanding how it demands new preservation methods, is realizing that these are only provisional and palliative solutions. Due to the continuous speed with which technologies are discarded in shorter and shorter periods of time, the solutions provided for the time being are bound to create the same problems we seek to resolve. The transposition and adaptation of works to new equipment or their reprogramming does not result in definitive solutions. On the contrary, these procedures indicate the need for continuous updating, which, at some point, may also produce a quite distinct result from the work created by the artist in a given historical context. From now on, loss, change and even replacement will be more and more part of our conservation practice.

Following a similar term coined by Arjun Appadurai's about the five scapes of the global exchange of informa-tion, we can say that we are facing nowadays a noisy 'da-tascape', which goes far beyond our screens. Its signals and inputs/outputs are everywhere, and they amount too much more than just some reading or coding mistakes. In this sense, we could say that, instead of celebrating

a progressively more stable future, by preserving fragments ofthe past, museums of digital art should be the museums of the unfinished, the unrepaired, and the unretrieved. By doing this, they will allow us to deal with the social and emotional perception of loss without counting on an imminent process of disappearance.

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Nathalia Lavigne is a PhD student at Architecture and Urbanism College, University of São Paulo, researching virtual collections of on Instagram and the circulation of artworks as images on this platform. Holding a Master's degree in Cultural and Critical Studies from Birkbeck, University of London (2014) and a degree in Journalism from PUC-RJ (2004), she is currently an art critic, researcher and curator, after a ten-year career as a journalist in vehicles such as O Estado de S. Paulo and Folha de São Paulo. As a researcher, she took part of the the "Observatório do Sul" project, a platform for discussions promoted in 2015 by Sesc São Paulo, the Goethe-Institut and the Associação Cultural Videobrasil, which brought together professionals from different fields to discuss the Global South in the field of culture. Among the exhibitions she curated are Image-movement (2016) and (Im)material present (2017), at Zipper Galeria. She is also a member of the research project Aesthetics of Memory of the 21st Century, coordinated by Giselle Beiguelman.