Artcasting and ARTIST ROOMS on Tour: Using mobilities-informed methods to support new approaches to arts evaluation

Artcasting was an AHRC-funded interdisciplinary project which took place over 14 months, from May 2015-June 2016. It brought together expertise in digital education and learning, arts evaluation, and design informatics, and was conducted in partnership with ARTIST ROOMS, National Galleries of Scotland and Tate. The project involved the design, development, piloting and analysis of an Artcasting methodology and a digital output in the form of a mobile app. The mobile app invited visitors to select an artwork and create an 'artcast' by choosing and describing a new location and time for the artwork; visitors could then encounter or re-encounter artcasts in those locations at a later date. The Artcasting approach generated and measured links and relationships between objects, places and people – simultaneously creating connections and evaluating the intensity of engagement with artworks and exhibitions.

Project aims and summary of outcomes

1. **design, develop and pilot the Artcasting platform**. The development of the Artcasting concept and mobile app was iterative, collaborative, and brought theoretical and conceptual questions and ideas together with technical experimentation, creative design tactics, and analysis of data generated through project activities including interviews, workshops and in-gallery activities. We were able to complete and make publicly available a working beta version of the app on both iOS and Android platforms, which over the course of the pilot period received 172 downloads and generated 97 artcasts for analysis.
2. **understand how mobilities approaches can enrich arts evaluation**. The process of developing and piloting the Artcasting app took place in the context of detailed exploration of the current climate of evaluation practice in the cultural heritage sector, including interviews with operational, delivery and strategic-level colleagues associated with ARTIST ROOMS. This work revealed an appetite for inventiveness in evaluation in the cultural

sector, along with scepticism about the extent to which change to the status quo is possible. Building on established critiques of evaluation in the cultural sector, we proposed and pursued a conceptual connection between evaluation and mobilities, most directly expressed in the underpinning design considerations for the Artcasting app, but also expressed in the creation of a data dashboard for analysing user-generated artcasts and our collaboration with the artist Mitch Miller to create a 'dialectogram' map of Artcasting. We found that a mobilities-informed evaluation can generatively place individual responses to artworks in the context of larger scale movements of ideas and affects, between and amongst the human beings and materialities of the exhibition context.

3. **influence ARTIST ROOMS evaluation practice.** Engagement with ARTIST ROOMS happened at all stages and levels of the project, including working closely with the National Galleries of Scotland, Tate and the Bowes Museum, interviews with ARTIST ROOMS colleagues, involvement of key colleagues in the project steering group, dissemination workshops with associate galleries, briefings, and a one day seminar. The project took place at a time of significant change for ARTIST ROOMS, and some planned strategic-level input proved not to be achievable during the project period, but we will continue to trace the impact of the project and will aim to contribute further as the programme moves into its next phase of delivery.

4. **generate a new approach to evaluation that can be built upon in the future.** Artcasting as a methodology which triggers spatial and temporal reflection and imagination can generate a wide range of responses which can help galleries understand the ways their visitors engage with art and cultural heritage. We have found the Artcasting concept to be amenable to investigating other kinds of questions (for example, about the nature of the 'monument' as part of a new partnership with the Edinburgh Art Festival) than the ones about evaluation that were the focus of this project. We are planning to explore potential additional uses of Artcasting in follow-on projects.

Main project achievements

- Data was gathered through nine interviews, two workshops with young people, and a five-month piloting period in two ARTIST ROOMS exhibitions, at the National Galleries of Scotland and the Bowes Museum, including six Artcasting workshops and drop in sessions.
- The Artcasting mobile application was developed for Android and iOS platforms.
- A data dashboard, created in partnership with Plymouth University and building on their Qualia platform, was scoped and tested as means of exhibition analysis.
- The project team presented and participated in 17 conferences, workshops, seminars and interactive online discussions, including a high-level presentation on the use of Artcasting to the Director of Creative Industries, Creative Scotland.
- In partnership with the research team, artist Mitch Miller produced an Artcasting 'dialectogram' based on engagement with the Robert Mapplethorpe exhibition at the Bowes Museum.
- Five papers have been written (two published, one in press, two in preparation for submission); and a further three are planned.
- To test the potential future impact of Artcasting, the team established a partnership with the Edinburgh Art Festival, to trial Artcasting in the Festival in August 2016.

Key findings

Two research questions informed the project:
- How does offering visitors a way to align their impressions of the ROOM with specific places help them articulate their engagement with the work?
- How can a mobilities approach which asks visitors to make connections between art and place constitute meaningful evaluation practice?

In responding to these questions, the project team found that:

- Artcasting demonstrates the complexity of holding different understandings of value together, but also the richness of potential outcomes when evaluation and engagement are approached in theoretically imaginative ways – in this case through the lens of mobilities theory. There is a continuing need for new theoretical and applied approaches in this area, and for theoretically informed critiques of evaluation to be part of conversations in academia and in interdisciplinary work in cultural heritage settings.
- Developing a conceptual connection between evaluation and mobilities is generative. The measurement of value in the context of exhibitions tends to focus on individual experience, development, or well-being, grounded in understandings of the human subject interacting with external objects and places. Mobilities theory provides an alternative theoretical framework that shifts the site of analysis away from the psychology of exhibition visitors, or the development of audiences, and towards a richer understanding of the complex relations between the humans, technologies and spaces involved. Artcasting generated an innovative approach through which galleries might engage the public in the capture of both qualitative and quantitative metrics.
- Artcasting invites a rethinking of the ideal of co-production in cultural heritage settings. It is a form of public interpretation of the artwork, and visitors are creating new and varied encounters with art in new places and times – the gallery guest becoming the host of a new exhibition. Ultimately, these types of digital and mobile interventions challenge the stability of relationships of co-production.
- The development and piloting of the Artcasting app and the discussions and debates around it formed a methodological approach consistent with the concept of 'speculative method' (Lury & Wakeford 2012) and 'cultural probe' (Gaver et al. 1999), generative approaches which engage as well as investigate, and which help envision and create futures – in the case of Artcasting, around arts evaluation. Significant insights and understandings of forms of value will continue to be unlocked as the app operates in the public domain and with new users and partnerships.
- Engagement with mobilities theory can have significant consequences for design practice. Engagement with mobilities theory steered the Artcasting app towards a design that emphasised the movement and trajectory of artworks, time as well as space, and the importance of the 're-encounter' beyond the gallery; and challenged more traditional understandings of what is possible and desirable in evaluation.

Some key implications for practice from the project concern:

- the value of asking new questions and taking inventive approaches to research collaborations between academic and cultural heritage organisations;
- the complexity of app development for in-gallery use in terms of access, flexible implementation, and partnerships;
- the need for cultural heritage organisations to reflect on their evaluation agenda; and to consider how evaluation practice can take better account of the value of dialogue;
- how Artcasting offers a new approach to arts based evaluation derived from visitors' imaginative encounters with art, and demonstrates that visitors can engage creatively with exhibitions in ways that provide rich insights for reflection and practice.

The full end-of-project report is available to download from
https://www.artcastingproject.net/project-outline/end-of-project-report/

Research team

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The project steering group consisted of the research team plus:

- Sian Bayne (Chair of Digital Education, University of Edinburgh)
- Christopher Ganley (Digital Content & Design Manager, National Galleries of Scotland)
- George Harris (Exhibition Manager, Bowes)
- Ceri Lewis (ARTIST ROOMS, National Galleries of Scotland and Tate)
- Damien McGlynn (ARTIST ROOMS, National Galleries of Scotland and Tate) (to Nov 2015)
- Emily Pringle (Head of Learning Practice & Research, Tate)
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