Creating Space to Listen: Museums, Participation and Intercultural Dialogue

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Thesis Abstract

This thesis examines the emergence, practice, and social meaning of intercultural dialogue as participatory programming in museums. While intercultural dialogue takes many forms in museums, the thesis focuses on projects that invite participants to create digital content in response to one another on topics related to identity, cultural diversity, and racism. The thesis presents a central case study of a contemporary anti-racist museum project – ‘Talking Difference’ – produced by the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, which facilitated, documented, and presented dialogue between participants. It draws on the personal experience of the author as a previous staff member on Talking Difference, as well as written and visual documentation, interviews with project staff, and analysis of content produced.

Engaging with the field of museum studies, the thesis argues that dialogue projects like Talking Difference have come to prominence as museums adapt their traditional governmental role to contemporary societies where engagement with institutions is characterised by reflexivity and participation. Given this, the thesis argues that participatory programs should challenge the idea that museums can provide neutral forums for dialogue. Instead, dialogic museum practice may be more transformative if museums embrace their role of promoting social justice as third parties in the dialogue they facilitate. This entails not only encouraging participants to produce affecting personal accounts but also facilitating engagement with the complex social and historical contexts within which these accounts emerge. To this end, museums should prioritise listening, and facilitate the negotiation of conflicting perspectives in addition to providing platforms for their co-presentation. In acknowledgement of the field of practices within which such work takes place, the thesis argues that these interventions should be part of a broader suite of efforts to decolonise museum practice.
Declaration

This thesis:

• comprises my original work towards the Doctor of Philosophy;
• makes acknowledgement to all other materials used;
• is below than the maximum word limit at 88,000 words long, exclusive of tables, bibliographies and appendices.

David Henry

29 August 2018
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Introduction

To what extent might the inclusion (and perhaps, perceived validation) of diverse, potentially oppositional opinions serve to undermine the agency of museums in privileging and engendering support for non-prejudiced interpretations of difference?  

This thesis explores the emergence, practice, and social meaning of intercultural dialogue as participatory practice in museums. While museum scholars have used intercultural dialogue to describe a range of two-way relationships in museums – for example, between displays and visitors, institutions and communities, and between visitors themselves – in this thesis I focus specifically on projects that use digital media to facilitate and document dialogue between participants and then present these exchanges to a broader audience. In doing so I interrogate the celebration of dialogic and intercultural practice in critical museum studies and highlight the need for a more precise and complex understanding of the role of museums in public discourse about divisive social issues related to identity, cultural diversity, and racism.  

In the thesis, I examine the content produced by participants in a central case study, the ‘Talking Difference’ project developed by the Immigration Museum in Melbourne. The project consisted of a ‘Portable Studio’, which toured to libraries and community centres across Victoria inviting participants to create video questions and answers in response to one another on issues of identity, cultural diversity, and racism. I was a staff member on the project between 2009 and 2013. The experience of working on the project prompted me to explore the meaning of intercultural dialogue in the museum and drove the development of the central research questions of this thesis. The thesis

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5 In 2005, leading museum scholar Elaine Heumann Gurian questioned the use of ‘buzzwords’ such as ‘community’, ‘forum’ and ‘social responsibility’ arguing that they are too often used ‘imprecisely but fervently’ by museum scholars and professionals alike. Gurian, *Civilizing the Museum*, 74.
seeks to establish how moves towards participatory intercultural dialogue alter the governmental role of museums in contemporary pluralistic societies, and how museums might better facilitate and present informed and engaging dialogue about identity, cultural diversity, and racism.

I argue that participatory intercultural dialogue represents an attempt to redress the excesses of governmental practice in museums by decentering the curatorial voice of the institution, and challenging the exclusionary practices associated with traditional museums. Nevertheless, I also contend that, rather than relinquishing the governmental role of museums to build ‘citizenly competence’, the programs under analysis have adapted this role to contemporary societies where engagement with institutions is characterised by reflexivity and participation. Drawing on an examination of the Talking Difference project, I assert that governmental modes are not necessarily harmful to the pursuit of social justice, and suggest that museums should apply their curatorial expertise to claim a position in dialogue as ‘biased third parties’ advocating for social justice. In pursuit of such a project, the installations under analysis in this thesis make space for

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(relatively) self-determined voices to present contending perspectives and ways of identifying. However, they also demonstrate that museums cannot be neutral and should embrace their role in summarising and drawing parallels between participant contributions. While museums must acknowledge the irreconcilable nature of dialogue, and the limits to their ability to control the production of knowledge, such a project should involve encouraging reasoned exchange, and highlighting affecting, transformative encounters. Further, museums’ efforts to abandon neutrality and embrace their role in dialogue as biased third parties should be coupled with the larger project of decolonising the museum, through ‘higher tier’ self-determinative practices.7

Towards Participation and Dialogue: Critiques of Traditional Museum Practice

The thesis engages with the interdisciplinary field of museum studies, which has developed a wealth of literature to support the study of participatory intercultural dialogue in museums. A selection of key ideas in this field – including critiques of traditional museum practice, the emergence of new museology, digital interventions, participatory practice, and the embrace of dialogue – offers a basis for understanding both the antecedents of Talking Difference, as well as the key arguments of this thesis.

The roots of contemporary practices cannot be divorced from their original social and historical context in the first public museums of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century.8 While collections of historical and cultural objects had previously appeared in private collections in Europe, the first public museums emerged alongside public hospitals, asylums, and prisons as


institutions of modernity at the end of the eighteenth century. In their pedagogical role, museum scholar Tony Bennett has framed these modern institutions as governmental sites intended to wield power. Drawing on Michel Foucault’s notion of governmentality, Bennett argued the modern museum is a site where governments instilled certain values in citizens, including the rational, scientific, and evolutionary logic of nineteenth century Western modernism. The state power displayed here was not ‘alien (to) and coercive’ of the public. Rather, members of the public were encouraged into ‘complicity with power’ by being invited to consider themselves as on the ‘side’ of the institution, and in this way to claim the power of cultural superiority as their own. The investigation of power in the museum has become central to the work of museum scholars. This is especially apparent in the rise to prominence of a critical museum discourse, or ‘new museology’, throughout the late 1980s and 1990s. Along with Bennett, the work of Peter Vergo, Elaine Heumann-Gurian, and Eilean Hooper-Greenhill has been central to this field. Some of

9 Bennett, The Birth of the Museum, 6. Benet distinguishes between museums and carceral institutions designed to sequester publics into separate spaces but highlights the workings of power in each of these contexts. Cristina Kreps offers a perspective that tempers the eurocentrism of this line of argument, acknowledging that methods of exhibiting significant objects have existed in Indigenous cultures around the world for thousands of years. While this perspective is significant, the practices in question in this thesis largely emerge in response to the European tradition of cultural institutions that Bennett identifies. Bennett, The Birth of the Museum, 93; Christina F. Kreps, Liberating Culture: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Museums, Curation, and Heritage Preservation, Museum Meanings (London & New York: Routledge, 2003), 2.

10 Referring to the use of museums in the British Empire, Bennett identifies the governmental representation of an imagined community ‘bound together by an imperial unity of interests and global civic responsibilities deriving from their status as the most advanced and evolved representatives of humanity’. In Bennett’s reading, the layout and design of these experiences encouraged ‘organised walking’ through which information was delivered according to the highly rational categories and hierarchies of contemporary social Darwinism. Tony Bennett, “The Museum and the Citizen”, Memoirs of the Queensland Museum 39, no. 1 (1996): 6; Bennett, The Birth of the Museum, 1; Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power: Interview with Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino”, in Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977, ed. and trans. Colin Gordon (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980), 119.

11 Bennett, The Birth of the Museum, 95.

these writers have drawn similar conclusions to Bennett by grounding their analysis of power in the enduring legacy of the nineteenth-century museum.\textsuperscript{13}

In \textit{Re-Imagining the Museum}, Andrea Witcomb developed an alternative reading of traditional museums, arguing that an over-reliance on state power and modernity as frames for analysis limits the potential for understanding the more complex processes that inform the development of meaning in museums. Rather than acting purely as institutions for ‘civic reform’, she argued, ‘museums have always had to engage in dialogue with their audiences’.\textsuperscript{14} Witcomb identified popular conventions of spectatorship defined not by ‘organised walking’ through neatly classified objects, but by a sense of wonder at multiple cultural forms juxtaposed in ‘irrational’ combinations.\textsuperscript{15} She read into contemporary accounts more complex cultural experiences at these sites than the absorption of a sense of cultural superiority, presenting evidence of a seductive exoticism and even an erotic excitement. ‘It is simply not the case’, she argued, ‘that the meanings produced inside a museum always represent the power of the elite over that of the subjugated groups’.\textsuperscript{16} While visitors have certainly always had a degree of agency over their experience in museums, it is equally apparent that many institutions have recognised a need to challenge previous methods grounded in the didactic and monologic presentation of knowledge. Since at

\textsuperscript{13} In 1992, for example, Mieke Bal undertook a semantic analysis of the American Natural History Museum identifying the process by which racist and gendered readings of artefacts were supported by the lack of critical reflection in the layout and interpretation of displays. She attributed this to the ‘colonialist origin of the museum’ with its commitment to order and rationality to the exclusion of non-hegemonic narratives. Likewise, Eileen Hooper-Greenhill’s influential work has positioned traditional museums as ‘repressive and authoritarian symbols of unchanging solid modernity’. She identifies in traditional museums an inclination towards developing ‘the good society through inculcating a taste for the arts in the working classes, a civilising mission linked to the growth of citizenship’. Mieke Bal, ‘Telling, Showing, Showing Off’, \textit{Critical Inquiry} 18 (Spring 1992), 562; Hooper-Greenhill, \textit{Museums and Education}, 1–13. See also Chris Healy and Andrea Witcomb, ‘Experiments in Culture: An Introduction’ in Chris Healy and Andrea Witcomb (eds) \textit{South Pacific Museums: Experiments in Culture} (Clayton: Monash University ePress, 2006), 01.5.

\textsuperscript{14} Witcomb, \textit{Re-Imagining the Museum}, 5.

\textsuperscript{15} In this view, the influence of forces such as commerce and popular culture are seen to be as important as processes of governmentality. To illustrate her argument, Witcomb positions the museums of the nineteenth century in relation to the contemporaneous emergence of world fairs and cultural exhibitions. Witcomb, \textit{Re-Imagining the Museum}, 23.

\textsuperscript{16} Witcomb, \textit{Re-Imagining the Museum}, 26.
least the 1970s, museums have developed more critical practices that question the authority of the institution.\textsuperscript{17}

Working in this mode, many cultural institutions have a common ambition to become ‘post museums’: active cultural centres that provide programs, resources and spaces for dialogue and community benefit beyond the traditional role of archiving, displaying, or lending resources and art.\textsuperscript{18} ‘Participation’ has come to prominence as a catchword for many of these practices. Conceived broadly as a means of increasing the number of voices represented in museums and

\textsuperscript{17} While, as Andrea Witcomb has argued, public museums have never maintained monolithic control over meaning-making in their spaces, from the 1970s onwards museums began to more explicitly present knowledge in a way that invited the critical insights of visitors. This was perhaps partly in response to the emergence of critical voices in pedagogy and postcolonial scholarship such as Franz Fanon, Paulo Freire, and Homi Bhabha who each in their own way critiqued the notion of institutional control over the production of knowledge and the representation of culture. In the Australian context, this change in museums is nicely summarised by the injunction – in the \textit{Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National} (commonly known as the Pigott Report) – that any future national museum should invite ‘legitimate doubt and thoughtful discussion’. Since the 1980s this broader project has had mixed success. The \textit{Into the Heart of Africa} exhibition at Royal Ontario Museum (1989-90) offers a controversial flashpoint in this development, where curatorial staff’s use of ‘critically aware’ irony in relation to museum practices of representing Africa provoked accusations of racism. Despite (or perhaps because of) this complexity, invitations for museum visitors to bring a critical awareness to their experience of museums contributed to what Stephen Weil called in 1997 ‘a revolution in progress’ in the relationship between ‘the museum’ and ‘the public’. Witcomb, \textit{Re-Imagining the Museum}; Frantz Fanon, \textit{Black Skin, White Masks} (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991); Paulo Freire, \textit{Pedagogy of the Oppressed}, ed. Donald P. Macedo, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, 30th Anniversary Edition (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012); Homi K. Bhabha, \textit{The Location of Culture}, Routledge Classics (London and New York: Routledge, 2004); Peter Pigott, \textit{Museums in Australia 1975: Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections Including the Report of the Planning Committee on the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia} (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1975); Shelley Butler, \textit{Contested Representations: Revisiting Into the Heart of Africa}, Broadview Ethnographies & Case Studies (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2008); Stephen E. Weil, “The Museum and the Public”, \textit{Museum Management & Curatorship} 16, no. 3 (September 1997): 257–71.

heightening their involvement in the communities they serve, participatory practices can range from simple, in-gallery experiences like comments walls, to long-term exhibition and program development in partnership with communities. The museum practitioner and writer Nina Simon has been an influential voice in this field arguing that participation offers a means of making museums as ‘relevant, useful, and accessible, as a shopping mall or train station’. Leading practitioners have turned to ‘ladders of participation’ developed in the fields of planning and community development as a means of defining and comparing participatory approaches. The work of Sherry Arnstein and later David Wilcox, which places a high priority on community ownership, has been particularly influential. Nina Simon modifies a model from Wilcox to categorise participatory practice along three tiers:

- Contributory: visitors are solicited to provide limited and specific objects, actions, or ideas to an institutionally controlled process, for example from comments cards or a story-sharing kiosk.
- Collaborative: visitors are invited to become active partners in the creation of institutional projects that are originated and ultimately controlled by the organisation.
- Co-creative: community members work together with staff from the beginning to define the project’s goal and to generate the program or exhibit based on community interests and the institution’s collections.

Simon joins others in the field in suggesting that longer term co-creative work in museums offers the greatest transformative potential in support of social justice. Many museums have

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20 Nina Simon, The Participatory Museum, ii. Simon is joined in this aspiration by influential museums scholar Elaine Heumann Gurian, who cites urbanist Jane Jacobs to call for ‘a functional sense of community and civility’ through the creation of shared multi-use space in museums. Gurian, Civilizing the Museum, 100.


incorporated co-creative projects into their work with varying degrees of success. At the same time, contributory and collaborative approaches have become even more widespread.

In this thesis, I focus on projects that incorporate these ‘lower tier’ approaches to participation. For example, Talking Difference is contributory rather than co-creative in that the museum invited participants to create videos using a digital platform devised by museum staff after minimal consultation. While the project lacks the level of community ownership apparent in co-creative approaches, it is exemplary of the fact that contributory approaches have become the norm in contemporary museum practice, particularly with the expansion of digital technologies, which produce a large amount of data in the form of participant responses. Despite this, contributory projects have not received a commensurate degree of scholarly attention in the form of empirical scholarly studies of the content created by participants.

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27 Evaluations undertaken by museum staff have been well documented, notably in Wendy Pollock and Kathleen McLean’s 2007 Visitor Voices in Museum Exhibitions project, which invited practitioners mostly from the United States to reflect on the content produced by participants in contributory participation programs. In addition, Nina Simon has compiled institution-based evaluations of participatory practice from around the world on her blog. These include the many reports documenting the Exploratorium visitor research. While these case studies reflect the growth of the practice, this thesis applies a scholarly approach to position participatory intercultural dialogue within broader discourses regarding the governmental role of the museum in society and the social meaning of the dialogue produced. Andrea Bandelli, “Talking Together: Supporting Citizen Debates”, in Visitor Voices in Museum Exhibitions, ed. Kathleen McLean and Wendy Pollock (Washington, DC: Association of Science-Technology Centers Inc., 2007), 45–48; Wendy Pollock, “Voice of the People”, in Visitor Voices in Museum Exhibitions, ed. Kathleen McLean and Wendy Pollock (Washington, DC: Association of Science-Technology Centers Inc., 2007), 3–7; Nina Simon, “Quick Hit: Five Evaluation Reports on Participatory Projects”, Museum 2.0 (blog), 4 February 2010, accessed 1 September 2018, available at
There is, however, a wealth of literature considering the impact of digital technologies on museum practice more broadly. In 2013, leading British museum scholar Ross Parry suggested that the expansion of the use of digital technologies has brought museums to a ‘post-digital’ period, where digital interactivity has become normative and therefore the ‘new functions’ of platforms and media should receive less attention from scholars than the processes of domination, legitimisation, and signification that continue regardless of whether a museum intervention is digital or non-digital.28 While the notion of ‘postdigitality’ offers to break down the barrier between digital and non-digital worlds, it is important to briefly acknowledge existing research into digital interventions in museums.

Museum practitioners and scholars have been influenced, for example, by the impact of ‘the web’ on the authority of institutions and on the dissemination of content,29 of digitisation on the relationship between visitors and objects,30 of mobile technology on the use of museum spaces,31 and of the possibilities for interaction and the building of ‘sociality’ between participants in web 2.0 environments.32 Early analysis of digital museum installations, such as Ben Gammon’s seminal analysis of visitors to the London Science Museum in 1999, observed participant use


patterns to inform the design of interactive installations.33 Others have taken an approach grounded in visitor studies seeking to ascertain the impact of interactive installations on visitors’ perceptions and attitudes through interviews such as Falk et al.’s 2004 study of Australian museum interactives.34 More recently, as the use of digital content and interactivity has expanded both within and beyond the museum, the methodological landscape for research has expanded to accommodate the many data sets now available.35 Much of this work has been related to online museum activity, especially social media. Australian museum scholar and designer Angelina Russo has been a key voice in this field, conducting research into instances of content creation as well as the institutional discourses and relationships that make it possible.36 Similarly, British museum scholar Jenny Kidd incorporated analysis of digital interfaces including interaction maps and game play logs alongside interviews and other more conventional approaches to understand the opportunities digital technologies made available to users.37

However, few scholarly studies have taken the content produced by participants in digital museum installations as their primary source of data.38 Further, despite the goal of scholarship surrounding these technologies often being phrased in terms of interaction, the nature of dialogue between participants as it is documented and presented in digital installations has been under-researched. To address this gap, this thesis examines the Immigration Museum’s efforts to facilitate and document dialogue between participants in the form of multimedia content. On the basis of this

37 Kidd, Museums in the New Mediascape, 105.
38 A recent exception is the work of Manisha Patel et al., which focused on the data produced by participants using an interactive installation related to a British dictionary to consider how the installation encouraged creativity and sociality. Patel et al., “Playing with Words”. Other scholars have interpreted meaning from participant contributions, but this is generally as a corollary to an interpretation that focuses on the curatorial voice of the museum display. See Message, “Returning to Racism”; Pollock, “Voice of the People”; Simon, The Participatory Museum.
analysis of digital contributions, the thesis seeks to establish how museums might better facilitate and present informed and engaging dialogue about identity, cultural diversity, and racism. In this project, the thesis necessarily draws on critical literature related to dialogue in intercultural studies.

The Australian cultural critic Ien Ang identifies dialogue across the boundaries of cultural difference as essential to intercultural understanding and the kind of ‘cosmopolitan multiculturalism’ required in contemporary Australia.\(^\text{39}\) Ang sees the project of living with cultural difference as moving beyond the static cultural boundaries imposed by multicultural policy.\(^\text{40}\)

Similarly, British political scientist Bikhu Parekh argues that the interaction between cultures as ‘living systems of meaning’\(^\text{41}\) creates instances of both conflict and agreement between fluid cultural forms,\(^\text{42}\) an argument that itself owes much to the hybridity theory of Homi Bhabha.\(^\text{43}\)

Similar perspectives have been developed across the social sciences using distinct but interrelated terms such as post-multiculturalism, interculturalism and cosmopolitanism, which each carry their own complexities of definition and focus.\(^\text{44}\)

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\(^{41}\) Parekh, ‘Dialogue between Cultures’, 17.

\(^{42}\) See Ang, ‘Passengers on Train Australia’, 229-239.

\(^{43}\) Bhabha calls for an exploration of cultural identity as a ‘project’ evolving at the point of exchange across difference, or at the ‘in-between’. Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 3.

\(^{44}\) As Steven Vertovec has argued, post-multiculturalism is used in public policy to refer to contemporary efforts to respond to critiques of multiculturalism from both the left and the right. This includes balancing a commitment to social equity and inclusion with a perceived need to avoid the threat of social disintegration. See Steven Vertovec, “Towards Post-Multiculturalism? Changing Communities, Conditions and Contexts of Diversity”, International Social Science Journal 61, no. 199 (March 2010): 83–95, doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2451.2010.01749.x. Advocates of multiculturalism such as Will Kymlicka have also used the term as a catch-all to describe the various critiques of multiculturalism emerging in the 1990s and 2000s. See Will Kymlicka, “Multiculturalism: Success, Failure, and the Future” (Washington DC: Migration Policy Institute, 1 February 2012), 6, accessed 26 August 2018 available from http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/TCM-multiculturalism-success-failure. Interculturalism draws the focus of analysis to specific sites of exchange across the boundaries of culture, and has risen to prominence in European discourses surrounding cultural diversity, see Council of Europe, “Living Together as Equals in Dignity: White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue” (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2008), 1. Finally, while cosmopolitanism has long referred to a broadly conceived openness to difference – in the writing of the Greek Cynic Diogenes and Immanuel Kant, for example – in contemporary critical discourses, cosmopolitanism has been applied to draw into question the essentialist and bounded
expended its value as a term to describe complex encounters across cultural difference, particularly in Australia. But given these enduring critiques, and my focus on the study of museums and intercultural dialogue, I use ‘intercultural’ as a working concept to describe the processes of exchange in question in this thesis.45

Over the past twenty years, intercultural practice has risen to prominence in museums dealing with cultural diversity.46 These developments lay the groundwork for the case studies in this thesis. In recent years museums have increasingly made their intention to facilitate dialogue explicit.47 Acting as sites for intercultural encounters, museums often include invitations for participants to take part in creative pursuits, which can include making videos or drawing, or more formal


45 I use this term in the knowledge that it has been criticised by Greg Noble and Paul Tabar for unnecessarily framing cultures as bounded and distinct. However, by building my analysis around efforts to facilitate interpersonal dialogue, I hope to challenge the notion that interculturalism is necessarily constrictive of complex individual identities, which are heterogeneous and in flux. See Greg Noble and Paul Tabar, “On Being Lebanese-Australian: Hybridity, Essentialism and Strategy Among Arabic-Speaking Youth”, in Arab-Australians Today: Citizenship and Belonging, ed. Ghassan Hage (Carlton South, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 128–44.


contributions such as being part of an exhibition development committee. Projects such as ‘Re-Kindling Voices’ (2007) and ‘Collective Conversations’ (2008) at Manchester Museum, digital storytelling at the Museum of the Person in Brazil and the United States, creative social bridging initiatives at Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History, and the 30 projects funded as part in the European Commission’s ‘Museums as Places for Intercultural Dialogue’ program (2007-2009) all represent instances of museums turning to participatory methodologies with the specific intention of facilitating dialogue across cultural boundaries. Writing in 2011, the founder of the Chinese Museum in New York John Kuo Wei Tchen neatly summarised the importance of dialogue to his practice: ‘dialogue-driven [practice] is a work in process where documentation, meaning, and representation are acknowledged to be co-developed with those whom the history is of, for, and about’. 

The invitation to dialogue in museums builds on a corresponding turn towards participation and dialogue in socially-engaged art. Socially-engaged art positions participants as collaborators, often addressing contemporary social issues and drawing work out of formal settings and into public spaces. Building on the radical work of the Situationists in the 1960s, artists and collectives including Helen and Newton Harrison, the Artists Placement Group in the UK, and artists working in the tradition of community art, socially-engaged artists have built on the notion that dialogue between participants in art projects holds a transformative potential. Lucy Lippard and Suzanne Lacy have continued these practices through ‘new genre’ public art engaging large and diverse audiences usually outside the confines of formal institutions. For example, one of Suzanne Lacy’s projects with Chris Johnson *The Roof is on Fire* (1994) consisted of young people from marginalized African American and Latino communities conducting open dialogues in cars parked in a multi-story parking lot on a roof top in in Oakland, California while a silent audience wandered between them. This project was a precursor to the *Question Bridge: Black Males in America* project, which is examined in Chapter Six of this thesis.

Socially-engaged, dialogic art also has a presence in social history and ethnographic museums where in recent years institutions have engaged artists to activate spaces and reinterpret collections through dialogue. In 2015, for example, the National Museum of Singapore hosted *Where the Heart Is*, a dialogic participatory work by Australian artist Asha Bee Abraham. The work consisted of a temporary ‘living room’ space erected in the foyer of the museum in which the artist – herself a migrant to Australia from Singapore – facilitated intimate conversations between strangers dedicated to unpacking ‘personal stories of homes lost and found’. Likewise, since

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56 Calo, “From Theory to Practice”, 65.


2011 the Immigration Museum in Melbourne has presented the video installation Welcome by artist Lynette Wallworth at the entry to its ‘Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours’ exhibition. The work consists of a video projection viewed down a long hallway. The people on the screen – who include people of diverse cultural backgrounds, sexualities, and physical abilities – appear life sized and take turns to make welcoming and then unwelcoming gestures directed towards the audience entering the exhibition. The work generates a silent, mediated form of dialogue between audiences and participants encouraging reflection on experiences of belonging and exclusion in contemporary Australia.\(^59\) These works offer an insight into some of the ways in which artists have engaged with the central processes at play in this thesis.

In presenting these examples from a much broader field of practice, I am conscious that the relationship between dialogic museum practice and the tradition of socially-engaged art invites an analysis grounded in the tradition of art criticism. For example, art critic Grant Kester makes reasoned Habermasean argumentation (discussed further in Chapter One ‘Understanding Dialogue’) central to his analysis of what he calls the ‘dialogic aesthetics’ of works of socially-engaged art. He opposes the dialogic aesthetic to the avant garde on the basis that avant garde art works put a high value on challenging the audience and intentionally making their meaning less accessible as a means of ‘shaking up’ the notion of art as communication. In Kester’s reading, the dialogic aesthetic considers discourse and communication as central characteristics of the artwork. On the other hand, and partly in response to this formulation, the art critic Clare Bishop argues for a more disruptive form of participatory art, that challenges audiences and is not predicated on – nor necessarily interested in – the possibility of reaching some form of synthesis and understanding through participation.\(^60\) The tension between unreasoned – and perhaps disruptive – engagement and reasoned praxis dedicated to building understanding resonates with some of the central issues of dialogic theory I explore in Chapter One. However, given my disciplinary focus is in museum studies, it is processes of engagement and facilitation and institutions’ roles in these processes that form my primary concern, rather than an analysis of aesthetics of the sort a reader may encounter in the work of an art critic.


Museums studies provides a rich literature for understanding dialogic practice. The cultural anthropologist James Clifford provides an influential voice in this field. In 1999, Clifford re-worked Mary Louise Pratt’s notion of ‘contact zones’ to argue that museums can become sites for the exchange and performance of shifting and complex cultural identities rather than simply transmitting static interpretations of culture.\(^\text{61}\) In Clifford’s work – as in that of others across critical museum studies, including Gurian, Ivan Karp, and Hooper-Greenhill – a form of cultural exchange has been envisaged at all levels of the museum.\(^\text{62}\)

There is ample museum scholarship to justify this reading of museums’ role in dialogue as a response to critiques of traditional museum practice. For example, Rhiannon Mason has responded to the critique of museums as governmental spaces, identifying participatory, dialogic practice as a means by which museums can demystify the authority of the traditional institution and supplant the curatorial voice with visitor contributions.\(^\text{63}\) Likewise, Simona Bodo and Christina Kreps have responded to the critique of museums as hierarchical, colonial spaces, framing the process of facilitating participatory dialogue in museums as a means of empowering members of cultural minorities to challenge formerly hierarchical representations of cultural difference through self-representation.\(^\text{64}\) In support of such a claim, Bodo – a museum scholar and one of the coordinators of the European Commission’s MAP for ID program – asks, ‘might intercultural work be

\(^{61}\) Clifford, ‘Museums as Contact Zones’, 439.


\(^{63}\) Rhiannon Mason, “Museums, Galleries and Heritage: Sites of Meaning-Making and Communication,” in Heritage, Museums and Galleries: An Introductory Reader, ed. Gerard Corsane (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 97. This reading can be seen as influenced by the emergence of participatory art over the course of the twentieth century. While participation has long been considered a force for the democratization of art, since the 1950s artists have increasingly turned to participatory practice in support of a radical political agenda. The art historian Claire Bishop has characterised the work of participatory artists ‘as variations on a common theme of opposing imperialist capitalism in favour of generating a collectively produced cultural alternative’. See Claire Bishop, Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship, 1st Edition (Brooklyn, New York: Verso Books, 2012), 103. See also Slavoj Žižek, Violence: Six Sideways Reflections, Big Ideas (London: Profile, 2008), 183.; Carole Gold Calo, ‘From Theory to Practice: Review of the Literature on Dialogic Art’, Public Art Dialogue 2(1), March 2012: 64-78.

\(^{64}\) Kreps, Liberating Culture, 115; Bodo, ‘Museums as Intercultural Spaces’, 181-192.
conceived … as a bi-directional, dialogical process which is transformative of all parties … and in which all are equal participants?  

Viv Golding’s concept of feminist-hermeneutics offers a means of understanding dialogic museum practice as a tool to challenge racism and sexism. Drawing on the work of Black feminist writers such as Audre Lorde and bell hooks as well as the hermeneutics of Han-Georg Gadamer, Golding argued that by creating spaces for respectful dialogical exchange, museums can not only empower socially excluded people to challenge racism and sexism, but incorporate new knowledge into their practice to address their own institutionalised racism.  

Rather than ‘contact zones’, Golding preferred the notion of ‘museum frontiers’ where the museum provides:

a creative space of respectful dialogical exchange for promoting critical thought, for questioning taken-for-granted ideas in general and for challenging racist and sexist mindsets in particular.

In her recent work, *Museums and Racism*, Australian museum scholar Kylie Message draws on Golding to identify the Immigration Museum not only as a site for dialogue across cultural boundaries, but for the exposure of civic and institutional practices that have supported multiculturalism and resistance to racism in Victoria and Australia. Message identifies the ‘Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours’ exhibition, which was installed as a semi-permanent exhibition at the Immigration Museum in 2011, as a central example of this practice. The exhibition aimed to explore ‘who we are, who others think we are, and what it means to belong and not belong in Australia’.  

For Message, exhibitions like Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours work towards a socially activist anti-racist praxis through which the museum ‘inserts [itself] into community conversations about diversity, inclusivity, prejudice, and racism’.  

In this thesis I maintain a similar conception

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65 Bodo, “Museums as Intercultural Spaces”, 184.  
66 Golding, *Learning at the Museum Frontiers*, 6. As will become apparent throughout this thesis, while I am drawn to the possibility of empathetic and transformative connection through dialogic practice, I think museums are well positioned to provide the recourses necessary for reasoned exchanges grounded in knowledge of social and historical context as much as they are to support more affective, empathetic connection.  
of museums as agents in the dialogue they facilitate, rather than as neutral forums, and advocates for social justice.

While much of the thesis is dedicated to the form of museum displays and the content they produce, the socially activist anti-racist practice for which Message advocates invites examination of the broader context in which these projects – and my examination of these projects – function. While she acknowledges the institutional and governmental framework that supports the Immigration Museums’ anti-racist work (see also Chapter Two of this thesis), in *Museums and Racism*, Message argues that rather than presenting a cosmopolitanism outlook as normative, the Museum applies an anti-racist praxis in opposition to cosy, conservative mainstream.\(^70\) In this way, the Museum functions as an activist institution.\(^71\) It follows that rather than framing racism simply as a set of individual attitudes – an aberration from the cosmopolitan norm – museums like the Immigration Museum are most transformative when they facilitate understanding of the structural and systemic nature of racism in contemporary Australia, and the material impact this has on Australian communities.

There is plentiful empirical data that points to the urgency of such a project. For example, Agnieszka Kosny et al.’s review of empirical literature related to employment for new migrants found that ‘newly arrived immigrants tend to work in less-unionised industries, are more likely to work in involuntary part-time and temporary jobs and are less likely to have employer sponsored benefits such as pension plans and health insurance’. Their study presented interviews with newly arrived migrants in Australia who reported using ‘strategies to deemphasize their culture and race in order to gain entry into Australian workplaces’.\(^72\) Likewise, a recent study by Heather MacDonald et al. demonstrated not only that individual prejudice can limit housing options for ethnic minorities (particularly prejudice against people of Indian and Middle Eastern backgrounds), but that in Sydney ‘agents systematically discourage Anglos (and encourage minorities) to rent dwellings in neighbourhoods characterised by inferior levels of some social


goods: those with higher crime rates and lower employment rates’. In addition, a recent report produced by the Australian Human Rights Commission found that while ‘those who have non-European and Indigenous backgrounds make up an estimated 24 per cent of the Australian population, such backgrounds account for only 5 per cent of senior leaders’ among ASX 200 companies, federal ministers, heads of federal and state government departments, and vice-chancellors of universities. The report suggested that prejudice has a role in this imbalance and that ‘internal organisational power hierarchies often mirror those of the dominant societal culture’. As discussed in Chapter Two ‘Governments, Museums and Intercultural Dialogue’ evidence of the material impact of racist systems has led scholars of racism and anti-racism – including those whose work informed the funding context for Talking Difference – to argue that anti-racist interventions must challenge racism not just at the individual level, but at the organizational, community and societal levels. Working from this understanding, throughout this thesis I argue that one of the central outcomes museums should seek through their anti-racist practice is to expose systemic and structural racism.

Such a project carries a pedagogical intent. The museum scholar and practitioner Cath Styles adopts Paulo Freire’s highly influential critique of the behaviourist pedagogies that were hegemonic in learning institutions in the 1960s. Freire was critical of approaches to learning that position the educator in a dominant position over the learner according to the logic of ‘one person “depositing” ideas in another’. Freire framed this process in terms of cultural invasion and oppression. Instead, he argued for a recognition that learners are active subjects located in a

77 Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 89.
78 Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 154.
social context, who co-create meaning with educators. Styles argues that applying Freirean
dialogic pedagogy in museums offers an opportunity to challenge the ‘paralysing’ authority of the
institution.79 In this way, her work echoes Freire’s notion that learners should ‘meet in cooperation
in order to transform the world’.80 Likewise, museum scholars George Hein, David Monk and
others have positioned dialogic pedagogy as an alternative to the behaviourist pedagogy apparent
in traditional museum displays, where the learner is understood to be an ‘empty vessel’.81 This
thinking is grounded not only in Freire’s transformative dialogic pedagogy but also in John
Dewey’s notion of learning through experience and action, a dialogic process characterised by
‘mutual consultation and convictions reached through persuasion’.82

Mikhail Bakhtin, perhaps the most significant twentieth century theorist of dialogue, has also had
an impact on the scholarship of dialogue in museums. Among other intellectual interventions,
with which I engage in the next chapter, Bakhtin argued that all text and communication is by its
nature dialogical. This is because each utterance forms part of a chain of communication in which

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79 Catherine Styles, “An Other Place: The Australian War Memorial in a Freirean Framework” (PhD,
Australian National University, 2001), 5, accessed 26 August 2018 available from https://openresearch-
repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/48203.

80 Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 167; Styles, “An Other Place”, 5; Catherine Styles, “Dialogic Learning

81 For discussions of Freire and Dewey in relation to museum practice see George Hein, “Museum
Education”, in A Companion to Museum Studies, ed. Sharon MacDonald, Blackwell Companions in
Cultural Studies 12 (Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 345; David F.
Monk, “John Dewey and Adult Learning in Museums”, Adult Learning 24, no. 2 (May 2013): 64,
Practice: A Conversation”, in Letting Go?: Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World, ed. Bill
Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski (Philadelphia, Pa.: Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, 2011), 44–
55; Mason, ‘Museums, galleries and heritage: Sites of meaning-making and communication’, 96. For
discussion of Freire in relation to participatory art see Bishop, Artificial Hells; Calo, “From Theory to
Practice: Review of the Literature on Dialogic Art”. For a discussion of Freire in relation to community-
based intercultural dialogue programs see Michális S. Michael, ‘Developing a Regional Interfaith and
Intercultural Network in Melbourne’s Northern Suburbs’, Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice
Intercultural Network Project: Building an Interfaith and Intercultural Network for Melbourne’s
Northern Suburbs” (Melbourne: Centre for Dialogue, La Trobe University, 2008).George Hein, “Museum
Education”, 347; Monk, “John Dewey and Adult Learning in Museums”; Sandell, Museums, Prejudice and
the Reframing of Difference, 108; Hooper-Greenhill, Museums and Education.

82 John Dewey, Experience and Education, Kappa Delta Pi Lecture Series (New York: Collier, 1963), 34. See
also Olivera Gajić and Jovana Milutinović, “Intercultural Dialogue in Education: Critical Reflection in the
interlocuters borrow conventions of phrasing and style from others, and then reshape these conventions in consideration of a particular audience. Museum scholars have applied Bakhtinian thinking to understand the relationship between displays and visitors, shifts of cultural authority in the age of interactivity, and the role of digital interactivity in creating spaces for dialogical exchange. Some of these ideas were raised at an International Council of Museums conference in Taipei in 2011 entitled ‘The Dialogic Museum and the Visitor Experience’. However, among the theoretical interventions proposed in extant scholarly work there has been scant attention to the nature of the dialogue between participants as it is documented and presented in participatory programs. This thesis addresses this absence.

It would be inaccurate to suggest that contemporary scholarship on museum practice has reached consensus on the idea that participatory intercultural dialogue offers a means by which museums can readily absolve themselves of formerly questionable practices. As new museology has risen to prominence, and participation and intercultural dialogue has been enthusiastically embraced in museum and government rhetoric (if not always in practice), a number of scholars have turned a more critical eye on new museological practice. For example, Australian museum scholar Ben

87 The term ‘post-museum’ describes institutions that take a self-reflexive approach to interpretation as a means of responding to some of the critical discourses emergent over the latter-half of the twentieth century. See Richard Sandell, Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference, 9; Hooper-Greenhill, Museums and Education, 1. As an example of a perspective critical of the ‘post-museum’, Bernadette Lynch identifies a gap between the participatory language used by staff in UK participatory museum programs, and the lived experience of participants. Lynch, Whose cake is it anyway?, 5.
Dibley has drawn into question the idea that the contemporary museum can be ‘redeemed of its legacy of racism, classism, and sexism’. 88 Dibley focusses his critique on the work of Clifford and Bennett to argue that an adequate reading of Foucault would call for citizens to refuse museums’ reformatory programs, including their recent advocacy for critical, participatory, and dialogic practice. 89 There are parallels here with the work of Slavoj Žižek and others, who argued that the turn towards reflexivity, consultation, and participation across civil society cannot fulfil its own emancipatory agenda while working within the structural constraints of neoliberal global capitalism. 90

While the radicalism of this line of argument carries an electric appeal, I am more persuaded by critiques of new museology that seek means for museums to become incrementally more democratic and more participatory despite their legacies and structural constraints. For example, Bernadette Lynch has drawn into question the effectiveness of museums’ efforts to overcome the power differential between community participants and museums through participation. In an assessment of ten museums in the United Kingdom applying participatory approaches to exhibition development, Lynch delivered some of the strongest criticism of participatory museum practices yet published. She argued that despite museums’ claims to the contrary, community-members rarely developed the intended sense of ownership or increased empowerment through participation in the programs. 91 In work reflecting on their own practice as staff at Manchester Museum, Lynch and Samuel Alberti argued that ‘legacies of prejudice’ have an enduring and unintended impact on the application of participatory and dialogic practice, and contemporary museums should build relationships with community members based on ‘radical trust’ and shared authority. 92 Likewise, Richard Sandell is critical of the ‘sometimes abstract’ demand for museums to become ‘sites of

90 In 2008, Žižek wrote ‘the threat today is not passivity, but pseudo-activity, the urge to ‘be active’, to ‘participate’, to mask the nothingness of what goes on. People intervene all the time, ‘do something’; academics participate in meaningless debates, and so on. The truly difficult thing is to step back, to withdraw. Those in power often prefer even a ‘critical’ participation, a dialogue, to silence – just to engage us in ‘dialogue’, to make sure our ominous passivity is broken’. Žižek, Violence: Six Sideways Reflections, 183.
social dialogue’. He advocates, instead, for scholarly examination of the ‘nature of interpretive processes that emerge out of the audience-exhibition encounter’. These perspectives, which caution against the more emancipatory claims made by museums in their application of dialogic and participatory practice, can be seen as evidence of Bennett’s argument that the call for reform in the museum is ‘insatiable’ because of museums’ commitment to affording ‘public rights’ and ‘representational adequacy’.

This thesis builds on this critical approach to participation and dialogic practice. Like Lynch and Sandell, I see potential for such critique to contribute to the creation of more inclusive, challenging, and constructive practices in museums. Partly in response to Sandell’s argument that the idea of dialogue is too often deployed in the abstract, in this thesis I examine the emergence, practice, and social meaning of participatory intercultural dialogue as it occurs in specific museum projects. Where Golding’s feminist-hermeneutics and Bodo’s spaces of intercultural dialogue, for example, offer a basis for understanding dialogue between socially excluded groups, objects, and the institution of the museum, this thesis offers an original contribution to museum scholarship by examining the nature of dialogues between participants themselves as they are documented and presented by museums. In this examination the thesis balances a commitment to democratic participation with an acknowledgement of the potentially irresolvable nature of difference in dialogue, and advocates for the enduring role of museums as facilitators, guided by principles of social justice.

An Approach to Analysing Dialogue: Case Studies and Methodology

The case study presented in the central chapters of this thesis is the Talking Difference program initiated by the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, a campus of Museum Victoria. The Immigration Museum is a social museum dedicated to ‘exploring the significance of the migration experience and the resulting cultural diversity in Australia’. Founded in 1998, the Immigration Museum maintains four permanent galleries documenting the history of migration to Victoria, a community exhibition space for co-created exhibitions often developed in partnership with migrant communities, the semi-permanent Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours exhibition which the museum suggests documents ‘who we
Difference was first funded in 2009 by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) primarily to ‘celebrate cultural diversity and facilitate dialogue about race-based discrimination’. The project consisted of an annual fellowship for an emerging artist, a series of schools-based workshops, and a touring ‘Portable Studio’ installation, which invited users to create questions and answers about racism and cultural diversity in the form of video, audio, drawing, and text. Taking a variety of formats over the years, the installation toured to libraries, schools and community centres across Victoria for two to three-week residencies from 2011 and continues to tour today. Participants created questions in facilitated workshops, for example ‘describe yourself, who are you?’, and ‘are you happy and proud about your colour, do you wish you could change your skin colour?’ After each workshop, the Studio was made available for members of the public to create responses. My focus is on the digital content participants created in the Portable Studio community tours and residencies at the Immigration Museum between 2011 and 2016. This content included 1,225 responses, comprised of 70 audio contributions, 125 drawing contributions, 629 videos, and 401 written responses.


98 Given this focus, I refer to the project throughout the thesis in the past tense.

99 In addition, in 2013 a separate installation was built specifically to tour to schools. Given the different nature of participation in a school environment, and the existence of plentiful school-based analyses of museum interventions, I decided to exclude this data from my analysis. All content was made available for the purposes of this research through an agreement with Museum Victoria.
men and boys (who identified as Black) asking and responding to questions generally, but not exclusively, related to identity and race. The resultant videos were presented as a touring five channel video installation, in which the artists sequenced questions and answers in such a way as to create a seamless experience for non-participating museum visitors. The installation consisted of three-hours of video content viewed in situ at the Exploratorium in San Francisco, analysis of transcripts, and digital content published online. While this project was similar to Talking Difference in some ways, it emerged in a starkly different context and provides instructive examples of alternative approaches to the framing, implementation and presentation of participatory intercultural dialogue in museums.

The thesis applies a qualitative methodology to the analysis of these projects paying particular attention to the digital content produced in each. The thesis emerges at a time when empirical approaches to visitor studies have risen to prominence in museum scholarship. Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological analysis of museum visitors in the 1960s, and John Falk and Lyn Dierkling’s later contribution to visitor studies The Museum Experience, have fed into many contemporary studies. Contemporary scholars apply qualitative and quantitative methods inherited from psychology, educational scholarship, and other social sciences to gauge the ‘impact’ of museums on participants, their knowledge, and attitudes. From the 1990s onwards, a preference within scholarship and institutions for ‘rigorous’ and ‘transferrable’ data and an emphasis on outcomes accompanied the emergence of ‘evidence-based policy making’ in which governments became increasingly likely to support policy interventions that could be shown to have such empirically measurable ‘impacts’. Recent short- and medium-term studies of visitor attitudes, such as those undertaken by Deakin University researchers at Melbourne’s Immigration Museum as part of an Australian Research Council funded project called ‘Countering Racism and Promoting Diversity

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through Museums’ (2012–2014), offer an instructive example of scholars working within such a framework to draw out insights related to the fluidity of attitudes to cultural identity and racism among museum visitors. These scholars identified that while museum experiences have an impact on participant attitudes to race and identity they function as one small part of a process through which participants encounter and produce discourses related to identity, cultural diversity and racism.\textsuperscript{103} While such research into the impact museums have on visitors is vital, the rise of participant-generated media projects creates other opportunities for analysis inviting focus on the means by which museums encourage visitors to encounter one another.\textsuperscript{104}

Neither Talking Difference or Question Bridge was initiated as a research project. Rather, they were established to document encounters across social and/or cultural boundaries, thereby producing texts for a broader audience. With this in mind, rather than pursuing the more ethnographic project of documenting the ‘perspectives’ of participants or the ‘impact’ of the project on audiences, in my analysis I aimed to assess the quality of the mechanisms the projects provided to facilitate dialogue, the rationale by which they were guided, and the nature of the dialogic encounters they documented between participants. I took an interdisciplinary approach to this project.

Given the high volume of data produced in Talking Difference a quantitative text-based analysis applying methods of coding and analysis inherited from the social sciences may have generated insights regarding the frequency with which themes and modes of dialogue emerged in specific contexts. For example, museum studies scholars Melissa Johnson and Keon Pettiway applied a coding framework consisting of multilayered variables (including, form, content and thematic


\textsuperscript{104} Indeed, in one of the publications emerging from this research project, researcher Philip Schorch suggested that Talking Difference ‘might offer an avenue to engage virtually across cultural and linguistic boundaries, which is a significant gap in the museum literature and requires further research’. Schorch, “Experiencing Differences and Negotiating Prejudices at the Immigration Museum Melbourne”, 60.
relationship with extant literature) to their analysis of museum digital content.\(^{105}\) This approach positioned the researchers to compare the representation of race online across a broad range of museum institutions. Likewise, in their study British scholars of information management David Gerrard, Martin Sykora and Thomas Jackson applied methods from computational research such as natural language processing to discern ‘subjective states, such as sentiments, emotions, opinions and experiences expressed within text’ in participant generated social media content in museums.\(^ {106}\) This mode of analysis allowed the researchers to draw conclusions related to affective underpinning of brief twitter exchanges.

While quantitative approaches apply a rigorous and replicable model of analysis to digital content, as qualitative social scientists Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln have argued, the imposition of apparently ‘objective’ quantitative frameworks can obscure the more complex processes in play in the interpretation of cultural expression.\(^ {107}\) In the analysis of digital content I sought a means of coding content that made my unique speaking position as a former staff member, and thereby an interested third party, central. I found the model of sensitising questions proposed by social psychologists Alex Gillespie and Flora Cornish useful.\(^ {108}\) Gillespie and Cornish outline six questions which can guide researchers to create a more complete picture of what is communicated in a dialogue, and its significance.\(^ {109}\) They emphasise that meaning in dialogue is contextual, temporal and relational, and that there may be many contending meanings at play. Because of this, the application of a single mechanical method cannot be relied upon to reflect the depth of

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\(^{109}\) These questions are: what is the context?, what is the speaker doing?, who is being addressed?, who is doing the talking?, what future is constituted?, and what are the responses? Gillespie and Cornish, “Sensitizing Questions”, 447.
what occurs between participants. Instead, by applying sensitising questions Gillespie and Cornish:

extend the notion of method to include the process of interpretation, in which the researcher (as a skilled language user and an appropriator of theory) becomes a ‘human instrument’, a vehicle for making the leap to novel insights.\textsuperscript{110}

This approach is not guided by positivist notions of universal transferability, but rather takes a constructivist approach to its case studies.\textsuperscript{111} In this respect, rather than analyzing the content as one might a quantitative survey – with the intention of gauging the impact of the project on participants – I examined the data produced as a set of texts akin to an archive. To serve this method I took notes against each piece of content under examination using simple keyword coding more as a means of locating content than as a quantitative measure of frequency. The keywords I identified included references to themes (for example ‘multiculturalism’, ‘racism’, ‘identity’) and references to the form responses took (for example ‘ironic/humourous’, ‘storytelling’, ‘solution oriented’). My approach to working through this content and deciding on keywords was informed by grounded theory to the extent that, as Kathy Charmas has suggested, my data collection and analysis informed one another through an iterative process of working back and forth between empirical data and theoretical material.\textsuperscript{112} This method allowed for my research to follow the divergent themes characteristic of complex interpersonal encounters as they emerged in digital content and program observation and to respond to these in reference to extant scholarly literature.

Informed by Denzin and Lincoln’s assertion that ‘each practice makes the world visible in a different way’, I complemented this with textual analysis of museum documents, including project outlines, funding applications, publicity and other documentation, and existing evaluations.\textsuperscript{113} I

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\textsuperscript{110} Gillespie and Cornish, 449.
\textsuperscript{113} Denzin and Lincoln, “The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research”, 1–44. See also Angela Eckhoff, “Transformative Partnerships: Designing School-Based Visual Arts Outreach Programmes”,
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also positioned the case studies in relation to the historical emergence of more participatory and intercultural museum projects through an analysis of secondary material. This approach provided context and informed my analysis. As much museum material is produced with the aim of promoting programs to funders and the general public, I took a critical approach to analysing these sources, reading into documents the potential influence of marketing imperatives and instrumental discourses relating to the enactment of social policy through the arts. Drawing together these methods, I analysed the boundaries institutions set, the provocations produced, and the means by which content was selected for dissemination.

Finally, I observed workshops and interviewed artists and staff. Interviews were semi-structured and designed to invite subjects to respond to ideas beyond the projects’ central frames of reference. As was the case with my analysis of museum documents, I acknowledged the potential for interviews, especially with staff, to demonstrate a degree of inaccuracy and bias. Following Linda Shopes, I do not consider interviews to be documents ‘to be mined for facts, but texts, to be interpreted’, a means of developing an impression of subjects’ understanding of events. Following Tobin and Begley, I employed multiple methods not necessarily as a means of ‘confirming existing data, but as a means of enlarging the landscape of … inquiry, offering a deeper and more comprehensive picture’.

Clearly, as a former staff member working on the project, the delivery of this research has necessitated a degree of personal reflexivity. I cannot produce an ‘objective’ assessment of Talking Difference and have found it valuable to consider both the limitations and the


Museum scholars have begun to trace the impact of instrumental approaches to arts participation, particularly in the United Kingdom where arts policy under New Labour in the 1990s came to be led by educational and social welfare imperatives. This is a focus of Chapter Two: Governments, Museums and Intercultural Dialogue. See Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, Museums and Education: Purpose, Pedagogy, Performance, 16.


Tobin and Begley, “Methodological Rigour within a Qualitative Framework”, 393.
opportunities of maintaining a personal relationship with the central project under analysis. The psychologist Kim Etherington provides useful advice in this endeavour suggesting that researchers work reflexively by considering how their personal history has led to their interest in their topic, their presuppositions about knowledge in their field, their position in relation to that knowledge, and the ways in which their gender, social class, ethnicity, and cultural background influence their positioning in relation to their topic and informants.¹¹⁸

I have played two roles in relation to Talking Difference and each influences my interest in, and presuppositions about, this thesis. Firstly, in my role as Senior Programs Officer at the Immigration Museum from 2009 and 2013 I worked with a small team to write the initial project plan and contractor briefs for Talking Difference and deliver the project for its first two years. At that stage, I had recently submitted an honours thesis on the topic of culturally diverse community participation in public commemoration, which provided the conceptual frame for the ideas I proposed. Following community cultural development researchers Arlene Goldbard and Gay Hawkins I wanted to create a project that would represent the voices of previously underrepresented people.¹¹⁹ Following postcolonial cultural critics like Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha I wanted to facilitate complex and critical exchanges between people, who felt comfortable to articulate diverse cultural identifications.¹²⁰ Following heritage theorists like Paul Carter I wanted to use multimedia to create these connections in new and interesting ways.¹²¹ Spending many hours meeting with other staff, driving alone to install the Portable Studio in outer suburban Melbourne and regional Victoria, running workshops and reviewing content, I developed a sense that the project had not facilitated as much critical nuance or depth in its responses as I had hoped.

On resigning from the Immigration Museum in 2013 I took on a role as a doctoral researcher, which created an opportunity to consider these limitations in more detail, and from a different


perspective. This research has afforded the opportunity to broaden the landscape of my enquiry to consider the emergence, practice, and social meaning of intercultural dialogue as participatory practice in museums more generally. There is no way in either of these roles – as a staff member or as a researcher – to make my work immune to the criticism that my speaking position is shaped by intersecting privileges assigned on the basis of my being White, male, heterosexual, middle class, and a (former) museum staff member. Writing from this position, I risk reinforcing a history of museum practice and scholarship that speaks about, rather than with, ‘subordinated’ people and supports the structures of domination I seek to critique. My speaking position as an ‘insider’ of sorts also risks reinforcing the blindness to structural critique that scholars such as Ben Dibley have identified in the liberal, cosmopolitan outlook that is now arguably hegemonic in contemporary museum discourse.

Rather than presenting this research as immune to this critique, I have aimed to reflexively consider the limitations of my practice and draw on this experience to outline how museums might better position themselves to advocate for social justice, address museums’ legacies of racism and colonial violence, and deliver work that functions as effective structural critique. While my main source of data is participant responses, I maintain throughout this thesis a commitment to structural criticism and social justice, which holds museums themselves as the ultimate subject of critique, rather than the testimony and contributions of the projects’ many participants. In this task I am guided by Kylie Message’s notion that ‘writing is itself an inherently political activity’ and have pursued an agenda in opposition to racism and in support of social justice in writing this thesis.

The methodology may be imperfect and incomplete, but it positions the thesis to contribute an original perspective to museum studies discourse by developing a conceptual basis for understanding the role of the museum in participatory intercultural dialogue in museum studies.

Addressing the Gaps in Existing Research: Contribution and Argument

122 Here I am borrowing the language of Homi Bhabha, who in turn was expounding the ideas of Franz Fanon by arguing that in the process of decolonisation ‘subordinated peoples’ must assert ‘their indigenous cultural traditions and retrieve their repressed histories’. Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 13.
The thesis balances the dual imperatives of advocating for social justice on the one hand and inviting open-ended dialogue on the other. It takes as its starting point Richard Sandell’s notion that museums must advocate for progressive positions on social justice and prejudice in cognisance that participants will maintain contending perspectives. However, where Sandell generally focuses on the dialectic between exhibitions and audiences, this thesis focuses on the opportunities museums create to document encounters between visitors who have divergent perspectives and opinions. In *Museums, Prejudice, and the Reframing of Difference* Sandell asks:

> to what extent might the inclusion (and perhaps, perceived validation) of diverse, potentially oppositional opinions serve to undermine the agency of museums in privileging and engendering support for non-prejudiced interpretations of difference?\(^{126}\)

This thesis offers a response to this question by presenting, in its analysis of Talking Difference, the consequences of museums relinquishing some of their agency over the presentation of dialogue. In this way, the thesis addresses a tension between two key ideas in museum studies. The first is that museums should decentre the voice of the curator (and thereby the institution) and invite many voices into dialogue with one another in the museum, inviting and highlighting contending perspectives. The second is that museums should advocate for social justice, promote acceptance of cultural difference, and reduce discrimination. While these two roles may sit well with one another in some instances, they are not analogous. If museums were to step away entirely and allow all voices to speak with equal importance from the same platform, there would be no guarantee that the resulting dialogue would increase the acceptance of cultural difference or reduce racism. On the other hand, if the museum were to take complete control of the framing of the debate, the democratic potential of participation in museums is lessened. On the basis of empirical case studies, and by contributing theoretical insights informed by museum studies, intercultural studies and dialogic theory, the thesis addresses this tension.

I argue that each stage of the participatory process requires museums to think differently about the role of the institution and the role of participants. This includes project planning and design, creation of content, curation and dissemination. I suggest that museums should invite participants to present a range of contending perspectives but should apply their curatorial expertise in selecting

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and presenting this content for presentation with the intention of inviting a broader audience to understand the differences between these perspectives. In this latter role, the museum should play the part of a ‘biased third party’ acting with the intention of advocating for social justice, supporting respect for cultural difference, and challenging racism. Further, I argue that this can only serve as an emancipatory approach if it is conducted as part of broader efforts to decolonise museum practice, which has implications for staffing, organisational structures, and the execution of high-tier, co-creative participatory practice, which have not been the focus of this thesis. By drawing together empirical analysis and theoretical insights from museums studies and intercultural studies, then, this thesis offers a means of balancing museums’ commitment to social justice with a commitment to open dialogue through participation.

Making the Case: Thesis Outline

Chapter One, ‘Understanding Dialogue’, provides a conceptual underpinning to the thesis by offering a critical review of relevant understandings of the idea of ‘dialogue’. The chapter surveys the appeal to reason in dialogue at the heart of Jürgen Habermas’ notion of ‘communicative action’, and the more irreconcilable and unreasoned dialogism evident in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Emmanuel Levinas. On this basis, the chapter highlights the potential for what dialogue could achieve in museum projects like Talking Difference. Chapter Two, ‘Governments, Museums, and Intercultural Dialogue’, locates Talking Difference in historical context. It presents a narrative for the emergence of participatory dialogic work in the arts sector, particularly in museums. This narrative highlights the emergence of instrumental arts funding and evidence that governments have increasingly encouraged dialogue as a mechanism to achieve behavioural change and social cohesion. In its final section, the chapter brings this narrative up to date by examining the alignment of interests between the Immigration Museum and the Victorian Health Promotion

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Foundation (VicHealth), as demonstrated in the ‘Arts About Us’ program that funded Talking Difference.

The Talking Difference case study provides the empirical basis for the central three chapters of the thesis. Chapter Three, ‘The Talking Difference Portable Studio’, describes in detail the mechanisms the Immigration Museum put in place to foster intercultural dialogue through Talking Difference, including analysis of museum documents to determine how the project was conceived and what museum staff hoped it would achieve. Chapter Four, ‘Identity in Talking Difference’, focuses on ways in which the Portable Studio workshops and digital content encouraged participants to express a diverse range of identities. This analysis is divided into moments where participants foregrounded fixed notions of ethno-cultural collective identity, and moments where participants’ identifications disrupted these notions by foregrounding personal dispositions, processes of change, and other forms of identification. Chapter Five, ‘Dialogue in Talking Difference’, builds on this by interrogating the extent to which Talking Difference brought these diverse participants into dialogue with one another on key issues related to cultural diversity and racism. Presenting participant observation from Talking Difference workshops as well as empirical analysis of content produced in the Portable Studio, the chapter identifies missed opportunities through which Talking Difference could have better fostered both rational deliberation and affective, narrative-based interpersonal dialogue.

Chapter Six, ‘Question Bridge, Intra-cultural Dialogue, Coherency and Curation’, offers an opportunity to view the arguments emergent from the analysis of Talking Difference from a different perspective. The chapter presents a case study of the ‘Question Bridge: Black Males in America’ project which toured to a range of museums in the United States. While it emerges in a different context and is crucially a work of art rather than a museum engagement project, Question Bridge had much else in common with Talking Difference: it invited participants to record questions and answers in response to one another on issues of race and identity, which were incorporated into a video-based touring installation. However, by focusing within a specific demographic and paying close attention to the selection and presentation of content, the project presented a more nuanced, complex and self-determinative representation of intercultural dialogue than Talking Difference.
Over the course of these chapters, while the case studies selected are unique to their contexts and participant groups, the thesis offers a broader conceptual basis for understanding the emergence, practice, and social meaning of intercultural dialogue as participatory practice in museums. The thesis identifies the responsibility museums hold to advocate for social justice as parties in the dialogues they facilitate, rather than neutral platforms. As part of this analysis, the thesis offers a means of understanding how this responsibility may better be executed, and outlines some of its consequences for museums’ governmental role in contemporary pluralistic societies.
Chapter 1: Understanding Dialogue

Introduction

The idea of sitting in dialogue to face conflict with reasonable consideration and compromise rather than domination is foundational to liberal democratic understandings of conflict resolution.¹ For this reason, the appetite for dialogue in government institutions, including museums, is strong.

In a 2017 submission to the Australian Government’s *Strengthening Australia’s Multiculturalism* inquiry, the Victorian Government argued that ‘open and safe discussion about diversity is a vital aspect of a strong democracy and an important way of building understanding of diversity’.² Likewise, the Australian Government’s 2017 *Multicultural Statement* suggested that ‘regular inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue is critical to reduce the possibility of tensions within communities and to strengthen cohesion and harmony’.³ In the museum sector, 2017 saw the launch of Multicultural Museums Victoria, a partnership between Melbourne’s Chinese Museum, Co.As.It Italian Historical Society & Museo Italiano, the Hellenic Museum, the Islamic Museum of Australia and the Jewish Museum of Australia. According to the institutions involved, the Multicultural Museums Victoria concept ‘embodies diversity, facilitates dialogue and encourages knowledge and understanding of all cultures’.⁴ But what specifically does it mean to engage in dialogue, and what could such a practice achieve in museums?

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This chapter examines the idea of dialogue to provide a conceptual underpinning for the thesis. Expounding on the work of key theorists, the chapter outlines three conceptions of dialogue, which each offer a means of understanding the planning and implementation of Talking Difference and the content subsequently produced. The first is the reasoned argumentation often associated with Jürgen Habermas’ theory of communicative action, which appeals to the mutually agreed application of rational arguments by participants. By contrast, the second relies on openness to unreasoned encounters with otherness, where dwelling with difference through dialogue is held to be important but the result of such a dialogue is unpredictable. However, dialogue in Talking Difference does not occur in a closed off space for two people alone. These dialogues are documented by the museum through its Portable Studio and presented publicly creating a text which consists of multiple voices speaking in concert, and sometimes in conflict. For this reason, the third conception of dialogue I apply in this chapter an analysis of dialogue in text via Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogics. This approach is particularly congruent with the methodological approach of the thesis, which consists primarily on a textual analysis of the content produced in the Portable Studio.

Where later chapters of this thesis present empirical analysis of how these disparate conceptions of dialogue played out in Talking Difference, in this chapter I draw them together to outline a robust understanding of what dialogue in museum projects like Talking Difference could achieve. I argue that dialogue could equip participants to engage with potentially incommensurate values and to face potentially irresolvable disagreement. Participants could be encouraged to present credible arguments grounded in an understanding of their social and historical context. However, just as importantly, these dialogues could benefit from the sharing of anecdotes and personal experiences characterised by affect, humour, and levity. As we shall see across the thesis, for dialogue programs to play these many roles, host institutions must consider not only the ways dialogue is facilitated, but also how it is presented to a broader audience.

**Dialogue as a rational exchange**
Dialogic theory offers a means of beginning this discussion, so far underutilised in museum studies. Dialogic theory is a title retrospectively applied to the work of a number of twentieth century philosophers who placed notions of dialogue at the centre of their work, including Mikhail Bakhtin, Emmanuelle Levinas and Jürgen Habermas. Jürgen Habermas’ criteria for the successful application of dialogue as a means of achieving ‘reconciliation through the public use of reason’ provide a valuable starting point for understanding a thread within dialogic theory committed to reasoned exchange. Dialogue should occur, Habermas argued:

under the pragmatic presuppositions of an inclusive and noncoercive rational discourse among free and equal participants, (in which) everyone is required to take the perspective of everyone else, and thus project herself into the understandings of self and world of all others; from this interlocking of perspectives there emerges an ideally extended we-perspective from which all can test in common whether they wish to make a controversial norm the basis of their shared practice.

Habermas was inspired by the transformation of the public sphere in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when salons and periodicals emerged as sites for public discourse outside the control of the state. As the philosopher Michael Gardiner has suggested, Habermas was taken with the project of applying the tools of rational dialogue in these discursive spaces to reveal ‘the general social interest, as opposed to a class or sectional one’. Habermas acknowledged that such a vision

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5 As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, museum studies scholars have variously applied notions of dialogue in reference to pedagogical approaches, the dialogue between institutions and communities, and between visitors and objects from a constructivist framework. However, there has been limited attention given to the various competing processes at play when museums document and present ‘dialogue’ as the primary objective of their programs. See Catherine Styles, “Dialogic Learning in Museum Space”, *Ethos* 19, no. 3 (2011): 12; George Hein, “Museum Education”, in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon MacDonald, Blackwell Companions in Cultural Studies 12 (Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2006); Andrea Witcomb, *Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum*, Museum Meanings (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); Vivien Golding, *Learning at the Museum Frontiers: Identity, Race, and Power* (Farnham, Surrey, England and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2009).

6 For a summary from a much broader field, see Michael Gardiner, “Alterity and Ethics: A Dialogical Perspective”, *Theory, Culture and Society* 13, no. 2 (May 1, 1996): 121–43.


was never fully realised, hindered as it was by the rapid concentration of the capitalist economy. However, throughout his career he has maintained an aspirational vision of a democratic public sphere constituted by rational dialogue.¹⁰

As is the case for many dialogic theories, Habermas’ view of dialogue is entwined with his understanding of the self. Habermas developed Husserl’s concept of the lifeworld to describe the interplay between internal and external factors in the development of perspectives.¹¹ In Habermas’ reading, there are three versions of the lifeworld: the external objective lifeworld, which is grounded in empirical, pragmatic truths; the external social lifeworld, which is grounded in social norms and conventions; and the internal lifeworld, which is grounded in ‘intentions, thoughts, emotions, and wishes’.¹² On the basis of this, and considering contemporary social and ideological pluralism, Habermas problematised the concept of a ‘universally valid view of the world’.¹³ Instead he outlined certain conditions by which ‘the moral point of view (is) embodied in an intersubjective practice of argumentation’.¹⁴ Through such a process, the uncoercing ‘force of the better argument’ should, by Habermas’ reading, lead to mutually agreed understanding.¹⁵

¹³ Habermas, “Reconciliation through the Public Use of Reason”, 117.
¹⁴ Habermas, “Reconciliation through the Public Use of Reason”, 117.
¹⁵ This mutually agreed understanding should not be conflated with universal understanding, which Habermas did not countenance. Walseth and Schei, “Effecting change through dialogue”, 85. Instead, Habermas’ argument here has much in common with David Bohm’s assertion that an open, respectful dialogue has no winners or losers; ‘no one has a monopoly on truth or wisdom’. In Bohm’s reading, the process of dialogue allows for common meaning to emerge in contexts where the nature of thinking itself has become incoherent and participants are guided by their assumptions. Such individual assumptions can be shaped by collective thought – for example shared religious or cultural beliefs – but in Bohm’s view, the nature of collective thought can evolve through contact with alternative modes of thinking in the process of respectful dialogue. In this view, dialogue provides a means by which the assumptions at the base of societal conflicts can be exposed and challenged. While both Habermas and Bohm caution against planning dialogue to achieve specific outcomes, both envision dialogue as leading to increased interpersonal understanding. Bohm and Nichol, On Dialogue, 7.
As much as possible, such a dialogue would be depersonalised so that, in the words of social theorist Michael Warner, anyone could submit an ‘opinion to the impersonal test of public debate without personal hazard’. In this view, depersonalization would contribute to a climate for ideal speech in the informal public sphere resulting in openness to difference and the application of ethics ‘unclouded’ by the strategic intent of the individuals involved. Habermas acknowledged that it is not always possible to maintain such an ideal context for speech. He also acknowledged that such a process cannot and should not lead to the embrace of a single universalising truth. Rather, he presented ideal procedures for the enactment of an always imperfect, deliberative public sphere.

Habermas’ sense of procedural rationality is based on four ‘validity claims’ against which participants in a dialogue should attempt to justify their statements. These include: appropriateness (or comprehensibility), truth, rightness, and sincerity. While Habermas is resistant to the notion of a universally applicable definition of these validity claims, he avoids a decent into relativism by tasking participants in the dialogue with the responsibility to agree on the criteria by which each of these validity claims can be assessed. By Habermas’ reading: comprehensibility should be assessed against the norms of the language being spoken; truth in reference to a mutually agreed interpretation of the empirically observable (the ‘objective lifeworld’); rightness against the normative values of a specific social context (the ‘external social lifeworld’); and sincerity against

19 As the Norwegian public health scholars Liv Tveit Walseth and Edvin Schei have argued, in such a procedural application of rationality ‘there are no guarantees that a decision is correct, but the procedure, the line of action in the conversation, can be characterised as right or wrong’. Walseth and Schei, “Effecting Change through Dialogue”, 86.
the subjective lifeworlds of the participants.\textsuperscript{21} As a result of articulating and deliberating upon each of these validity claims, participants should be positioned to recognise that in the specific context of the deliberation, some arguments are better reasoned and thereby more valid than others. This creates the possibility for participants to reach consensus.\textsuperscript{22} Habermas recognised that reaching consensus through such a process was unlikely but held that a reasoned dialogue relies on the possibility of consensus, regardless of how unlikely it is to eventuate.\textsuperscript{23}

This is where the role of institutions like museums becomes complicated. Where Habermasean deliberation relies on participants to call one another to order in the execution of a process of reasoning, when a museum becomes involved elements of this role have traditionally fallen to the institution through program design and the framing of dialogue. This is particularly the case for validity claims concerning truth and rightness, in relation to which many museums have traditionally privileged claims to truth founded on empirical scholarship and – more recently – claims to rightness founded on liberal, pluralist social norms.\textsuperscript{24} At the same time, as discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, dialogic practice has been framed as a means by which museums invite participants to challenge the previously unimpeachable authority of the institution, and the incumbent domination of truth and value claims embedded in imperialistic and colonial practices of collecting and display.\textsuperscript{25} Such a notion sits uncomfortably with the idea that the institution


\textsuperscript{22} McGuire, “Speech Acts, Communicative Competence and the Paradox of Authority”, 40.


should encourage specific conditions by which participants consider the claims made in dialogue to be valid.

The museum scholar Richard Sandell argues that such a process can be executed without necessarily (re)imposing the dominating practices associated with traditional museum practice. He suggests that:

museums can enable and facilitate conversations about difference, providing a forum (and one with unique qualities) in which disputes, arising from the conflicting values held by different communities, can be addressed and explored. They can inform and (re)frame the character and substance of these conversations by offering resources – material and conceptual – which privilege concepts of social justice, which nurture respect for difference and challenge prejudice and discrimination, opening up opportunities for mutual understanding and respect.26

His perspective is founded on the notion that museums cannot and should not act as ‘neutral forums’ and should be driven by an aspiration to build support for social justice, particularly through their responsibility to ‘promote cross-cultural understanding, to tackle prejudice and intolerance and to foster respect for difference’.27

One means by which museums could take such a position in participatory intercultural dialogue is by encouraging norms for participants to refer to when judging the validity of arguments. For example, museums could provide historical interpretation as part of their facilitation, which could encourage a notion of truth and validity associated with empiricism and scholarship. Likewise, in their selection and summary of museum dialogues, museums could highlight contributions in which participants support their assertions with their own accurate historical interpretation. The same methods could be applied to encourage the inclusion of empirical evidence from social researchers such as data related to inequitable employment outcomes for migrants and refugees, or rates of immigration.28 However, it would be disingenuous to claim that by encouraging these

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26 Sandell, Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference, 26.
28 See for example recent work by Australian social work researchers Nigar G. Khawaja and Aparna Hebbani on the impact of country of origin and duration of settlement for refugee employment outcomes, or the ‘State of the Nation’ report released by the Refugee Council of Australia, which outlines current statistics related to immigration detention and refugee resettlement, and identifies the challenges faced by asylum seekers and refugees in Australia including the mental health impacts of temporary protection, and the dangers of dividing families. Recent research undertaken by the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre
norms the museum was a neutral player committed purely to nurturing rational and reasoned dialogue. The museum would be taking a position as a biased party, privileging a specific set of validity claims in the hope that the dialogue would produce specific outcomes. By attempting to influence the way participants in a dialogue assess validity claims, museums would shift markedly away from the deliberative intention of Habermasean ideal speech.

Is it possible, then, for museums to privilege notions of social justice without dominating the dialogues they facilitate and closing off conflicting perspectives? Just as museums have always been sites of tension and negotiation rather the expression of monolithic power, their role in shaping the validity claims emergent in museum dialogue will always be incomplete.29 This is particularly the case in the context of the user-generated multimedia projects under examination in the thesis. In these projects, participants are afforded a degree of autonomy over the content they produce, and that content is consumed in a range of contexts unbounded by a coherent model of deliberation in which the social norms underpinning validity claims can be mutually agreed by participants. In participatory practice, then, the museum’s efforts to frame dialogue around truth claims related to empiricism, or claims to rightness grounded in liberal social norms, may only be one part of the process by which participants create and interpret meaning. While rationality and

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29 This argument has much in common with Andrea Witcomb’s suggestion that the expression of power in the museum has never been monolithic because visitors maintain their own agency through, for example, maintaining their own cultures of spectatorship. Witcomb, Re-Imagining the Museum, 17.
validity claims offer an impression of what we could be listening for in museum dialogues, we need to compliment this approach with other conceptual tools for understanding dialogue. We must be responsive to those elements of dialogue that emerge from the irrational and unknowable.\textsuperscript{30}

\textbf{Unreasoned encounter with the Other}

Emmanuelle Levinas and Mikhail Bakhtin have both offered a means of understanding these more irrational and unpredictable characteristics of dialogue. Levinas suggested that instead of an ordered process characterised by rationality, face-to-face dialogue with ‘the Other’ offers a moment of encountering something essentially unpredictable and unknowable.\textsuperscript{31} On this basis Levinas was critical of the suggestion that dialogue can ‘stop violence by bringing the interlocutors to reason’ arguing that this ‘would only be possible in a Spinozistic universe of pure love of truth and intelligibility’.\textsuperscript{32} Instead, he suggested the groundwork for ‘ethical peace’ lies in openness to insoluble problems through a dialogue with ‘the inassimilable other, the irreducible other’.\textsuperscript{33} While such a dialogue would be ‘capable of degenerating into hatred’, Levinas argued that this openness to the unknowable also represents ‘a chance for what we must – perhaps with prudence – call love’.\textsuperscript{34} This form of dialogue would be deeply personal. In Levinasian dialogue the self and the Other are co-constituted, or – put another way – we come to know ourselves through dialogue and

\textsuperscript{30} Here I am conscious of the work of Australian cultural critics Fiona Cameron and Ann Deslandes arguing that museums must be committed to brokering complexity, rather than relying on formal deliberative process. Cameron and Deslandes focus on the role of science museums in debates about climate change arguing that rather than producing ‘science statements to reform behaviour’, museums working with climate change should encourage among complex dialogues amateur participants akin to ‘systems of open peer review and complex reflexivity, facilitating creative dispositions in the future-present’. While Cameron and Deslandes’ research with visitors to science museums revealed resistance to the prospect of the museum ‘taking sides’, as I argue throughout this thesis, I think museums have a responsibility to take sides as advocates for social justice and in opposition to discrimination in the dialogues they facilitate. Fiona Cameron and Ann Deslandes, “Museums and Science Centres as Sites for Deliberative Democracy on Climate Change”, Museum & Society 9, no. 2 (2015): 136–53.

\textsuperscript{31} Emmanuel Levinas, Of God Who Comes to Mind, trans. Bettina Bergo, Meridian, Crossing Aesthetics (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 141.

\textsuperscript{32} Levinas, Of God Who Comes to Mind, 141.


\textsuperscript{34} Levinas, Of God Who Comes to Mind, 147.
exchange in social contexts. Face-to-face exchanges offer moments of ‘exposure without defence’ and this exposure allows for the possibility of peace. This line of thinking appears to support the instrumental notion that dialogue builds empathy, a notion that has been tested by a broad range of empirical scholars. However, Levinas would likely have resisted the utilitarian view of dialogue espoused by contemporary social researchers, particularly in contexts where dialogue is initiated by arms of the state.

In addition, in Levinas’ thinking, maintaining openness to what we cannot know when we enter a dialogue is more important than seeking a specific outcome, or maintaining the norms of reasoned argumentation. Indeed, Levinas suggested that reason itself – if it is understood to be an internal process of thinking, which results in our understanding of ideas – emerges from dialogue with the Other. ‘One may legitimately ask oneself’ he suggested, ‘whether the internal discourse of the cogito is not already a derivative mode of the conversation with the other’. In Levinas’ reading, the face-to-face encounter with the Other allows for a kind of ‘dialogue preceding reason’. This dialogue can be characterised by play and creativity and opposes egocentrism and the domination of one party over the other. This way of thinking about dialogue offers a means of understanding dialogic participatory museum programs not only as means of shifting the attitudes and opinions

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35 In the reading of the philosopher Michael Gardiner, Levinas uses this dialogic, co-constitutive approach to understanding Self and Other to critique the ‘interiorised subjectivism’ and egocentrism of phenomenologists such as Edmund Husserl. Gardiner, “Alterity and Ethics”, 123.
38 The philosopher Michael Gardiner suggests that in Levinas’ work the bureaucratic state reconstructs the subject ‘along ideal lines set out by functionalist, instrumental reason … in short, the state cannot be genuinely pluralistic; it cannot register and protect difference’. Gardiner, “Alterity and Ethics”, 133.
39 Levinas, Of God Who Comes to Mind, 146. See also Gardiner, “Alterity and Ethics”, 133.
40 Levinas, Of God Who Comes to Mind, 142.
participants hold intellectually, but creating spaces for more unpredictable, affective and creative encounters. The philosopher George Salemohamed argues that what Levinas is calling for is ‘a pluralism not illuminated by the light of reason or the State … from the top but thriving in the intimacy of the intersubjective rapport of Self and Other’.\textsuperscript{41} In this view, the responsiveness and creativity of spontaneous intersubjective dialogue creates the potential for, but does not guarantee, peaceful coexistence. Levinas questions the ability of any organisation, especially one sponsored by the state, to plan or predict what that impact might be.\textsuperscript{42} However, if dialogue cannot be planned to achieve specific outcomes, how does Levinas see it as a process contributing to ‘ethical peace’? In Levinas, argues Salemohamed, ‘the whole social fabric is permeated by an inclination towards the non-synthesizable’.\textsuperscript{43} In practice, this means that an unpredictable ‘anarchy’ in which creativity and difference are experienced in spontaneous face-to-face encounters with an unknowable other, brings people closer to truth and peace than a rationally planned program could.\textsuperscript{44}

Writing in response to the very different traditions of linguistics and literary criticism, Mikhail Bakhtin articulated a perspective on dialogue that similarly plays on unpredictability and openness to difference. While Bakhtin’s work was broad ranging and his ideas evolved over time, like Levinas he was sceptical of the notion that dialogue can be understood through an appeal to reason. However, Bakhtin gave more attention than Levinas to the role of language in dialogue, arguing that ‘language lies on the borderline between oneself and the other’.\textsuperscript{45} In his rigorous analysis of dialogics Bakhtin offers a series of conceptual tools which support the analysis of dialogue in this thesis. Writing in the early- to mid-twentieth century Bakhtin opposed his work to the suggestion of nineteenth century linguists that language ‘arises from man’s [sic] need to express himself … as if there were only one speaker who does not have any necessary relation to other participants in speech communication’.\textsuperscript{46} He preferred the notion that language emerges from its social conditions


\textsuperscript{42} Salemohamed, “Levinas: From Ethics to Political Theology”, 200.

\textsuperscript{43} Salemohamed, “Levinas: From Ethics to Political Theology”, 200.

\textsuperscript{44} Gardiner, “Alterity and Ethics”, 133.


\textsuperscript{46} Mikhail Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres”, in \textit{Speech Genres and Other Late Essays}, ed. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson, University of Texas Press Slavic Series: No. 8 (Austin: University of Texas
and each utterance is part of a ‘chain of speech communication’. He argued that because a listener ‘takes an active, responsive attitude’ in a dialogue, the speaker does not expect passive understanding that … duplicates his or her own idea in someone else's mind. Rather, the speaker talks with an expectation of a response, agreement, sympathy, objection, execution, and so forth.

At the same time, the speaker puts together their utterance from utterances spoken already by others. A speaker draws on the conventions of ‘speech genres’ – be they ‘official speech’, or literary prose, or ‘intimate speech … imbued with a deep confidence in the addressee’ – and reworks them to suit their audience and the specific social context in which they are speaking. This is the basis of Bakhtin’s dialogism. This process of borrowing and responding leads Bakhtin to argue that ‘the unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction with others’ individual utterances’. As a result, Bakhtin’s dialogics avoid rigidity and resolution, and the privileging of one voice over others. Because of this, as Peter Barta and other contemporary scholars have argued, in Bakhtinian dialogue speakers maintain an ability to rework the meaning of language; they can speak in resistance to hegemonic and normative discursive structures characterised by dominance including those of colonialism, sexism, and racism. Of course, in the context of institutionally-sponsored anti-racist dialogue projects, speaking in opposition to colonialism, sexism, and racism maintains a different relationship with normative discourses.

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49 Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres”, 88. Before an utterance is made, he writes, ‘the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language. but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions; it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own’. Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, 294.
50 Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres”, 89.
51 In fact, just as Levinas suggested that ‘reason’ emerges from dialogue, Bakhtin maintained that ‘official speech’ is ‘always already constituted out of the same dialogic relations as gave rise to its unofficial, centrifugal other’. Peter I. Barta et al., “Beginning the Dialogue: Bakhtin and Others”, in Carnivalizing Difference: Bakhtin and the Other, ed. Peter I. Barta et al., Studies in Russian and European Literature, v. 6 (London: Routledge, 2001), 5.
The notion of dialogics offers a means of understanding the less subversive ways in which participants may co-opt more conventional discourses into dialogue. For example, as I will demonstrate in the empirical chapters that follow, when they are asked to consider racism and diversity, participants in the museum dialogues under analysis in this thesis are just as likely to articulate well-worn turns of phrase familiar from popular media commentary and public education campaigns as they are to challenge these dominant discourses. Bakhtinian dialogics offers a means of recognising these seemingly banal contributions as moments of appropriation, which are linked to a broader chain of communication.

The fluidity of meaning afforded by Bakhtinian dialogics is particularly significant for the role of irrationality in museum dialogues. As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, museum scholars have dedicated a great deal of attention to the ways in which museums instil a sense of order through their exhibitions and projects, with many arguing that museums tend to privilege rational and scientific thinking. A Bakhtinian understanding of communication invites an assessment of this rational museum discourse as one among many genres of speech that are active in museums. In the context of programs where participants are invited to speak, for example, museum visitors may choose to appropriate or upend such a discourse. Bakhtin’s notion of the ‘carnivalesque’ offers a tool for understanding what such a process of upending might look like. Inspired by the carnivals of the Renaissance, Bakhtin celebrated ‘the flowering of a gay, affirmative [and] … anti-authoritarian attitude to life founded upon a joyful acceptance of the materiality of the body’. In the carnivalesque, the confinements of rational, official speech are set aside, and a more unpredictable and anarchic freedom is temporarily unleashed. As discussed, in the context of nineteenth century museums, Andrea Witcomb recognised a comparable infusion into museums

53 Simon Dentith, Bakhtinian Thought (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2003), 66.
54 Dentith, Bakhtinian Thought, 66.
of irrational and seductive exoticism from world fairs. More recently, the British museum scholar David Francis applied notions of the carnivalesque in a literal sense to the festivals and public events held in the British Museum. While this work provides examples of phenomena in museums that compete with the hegemony of official speech, programs for participatory dialogue take this process a step further. By inviting participants to create content in response to one another, these programs create potential for the proliferation of a range of conflicting, unresolved discourses, which each serve different purposes, are potentially produced for different audiences, and maintain an uneven relationship with rationality and conventional forms of argument. In concert, this creates the potential for a cacophony of speakers both dialogic and carnivalesque in their upending of the official speech genres generally associated with the museum. When considered in combination with Levinas’ openness to the unknown in encounters with the Other, Bakhtinian approaches to dialogue offer a range of tools with which to understand the facilitation of dialogue in contemporary museum programs. In particular, they provoke an acknowledgement that much as museums might like to prescribe the nature and the content of a rational dialogue dedicated to advocating for social justice and anti-racism, such an approach can only ever be part of what emerges. Rather, when participants are invited to speak, the possibility of an irrational, and unordered cacophony is ever-present.

The presentation of dialogue: museums as biased third parties

This is not to say that dialogic programs should necessarily seek such an outcome. As a broad range of museum scholars have argued, even in participatory contexts museums generally maintain a high degree of control as to the physical outcomes of their practice. This is particularly the case for the presentation of content to a broader audience. The tension between normative appeals to

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56 Witcomb, Re-Imagining the Museum, 23.
reason on one hand and unreasoned exchange across the boundaries of difference on the other is vital for understanding dialogue in museum programs at an interpersonal level.

However, there is a difference between an interpersonal exchanges in the ‘everyday’ and the representation of dialogue by a museum. As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, a range of museum scholars have recognised the importance of museums being or becoming part of the everyday lives of their visitors. This way of thinking informs Andrea Witcomb’s work on the diverse public uses of museum spaces in the nineteenth century, as well as Elaine Heumann Gurian and Nina Simon’s evocation of contemporary museums as ‘third spaces’ where relatively unstructured everyday encounters take place in a welcoming and shared public space. In the context of this work it is tempting to read dialogic museum programs like Talking Difference as opportunities to document inclusive and ‘organic’ interactions between people as though they were everyday exchanges. This line of thinking would allow the museum to create spaces for ‘everyday multiculturalism’, which consists, in the words of Australian cultural critics Amanda Wise and Selvaraj Velautham, of

conviviality, of light-touch rubbing along, of competition for space, everyday racism and cross-cultural discomforts, of consumption, of inter-ethnic exchange and hybridity, encounter and hospitality.

The museum’s role, then, could be to offer a forum where visitors could share a range of perspectives without a need for boundaries or instruction. However, both the context and the intent behind dialogue shifts once it is no longer an exchange between individuals and instead takes the form of an activity presented and documented by a museum to achieve a specific purpose. Dialogic museum practice should be guided by the notion that dialogue is one means by which museums support social justice and thereby act on their social responsibility. If, as has been discussed,

60 Witcomb, Re-Imagining the Museum; Elaine Heumann Gurian, Civilizing the Museum: The Collected Writings of Elaine Heumann Gurian (London & New York: Routledge, 2006); Nina Simon, The Participatory Museum (Santa Cruz, Calif.: Museum 2.0, 2010).


62 In 2005, Elain Heumann Gurian argued that certain ‘buzzwords’ had taken the place of ‘social responsibility’ in museums – these included ‘community’, ‘forum’ and ‘meeting place’, terms that were used ‘imprecisely but fervently’. The emergence of these terms, she argued, occurred at the same time that the ‘urgency’ with which museums pursued their social responsibility decreased. Gurian, Civilizing the Museum, 74.
museums are to be ‘biased third parties’ enabling dialogue, this has an impact on the conceptual framework we need to analyse the documentation of dialogue in these programs. Thinking in this way, it is helpful to understand dialogue as text.

Bakhtin’s analysis of the dialogic nature of the novel is useful in this endeavour. The programs under analysis in this thesis offer evidence of the fact that museums, like authors, draw together many voices in dialogic programs. Bakhtin codified this process in his notion of heteroglossia: ‘another’s speech in another’s language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way’.63 Bakhtin also used heteroglossia to refer to a range of contexts outside literature including the overlapping and diverse genres of speech in everyday talk (‘social heteroglossia’), and the incorporation of linguistic diversity into official or rhetorical speech.64 In the novel, however, he found a particularly ripe context for analyzing the ways difference expresses itself in language. In Bakhtin’s reading, quality novelistic prose draws together ways of speaking associated with a range of cultural and socio-historical contexts, which constitute different ‘social profiles’ or ‘languages’.65 These social profiles are not whole and complete, but themselves draw together and borrow from other ways of speaking creating an internal dialogue even with an utterance. Bakhtinian heteroglossia reflects a lack of firm boundaries between these social profiles. But it also allows for the role of the author to shape dialogue between them, in a unique way.

The author utilises now one language now another in order to avoid giving himself [sic] up wholly to either of them; he [sic] makes use of this verbal give and take, this dialogue of languages at every point in his work in order that he himself might remain as it were neutral with regard to language, a third party in a quarrel between two people (although he [sic] might be a biased third party).66

In a participatory dialogue program, the museum plays a curatorial rather than authorial role. However, given their position as the party drawing together different voices in dialogue it is far

64 Bakhtin and Holquist, The Dialogic Imagination, 354.
65 Bakhtin acknowledged that this balance of voices is not always authentically achieved in novelistic prose and therefore will not always ring true for a reader. He wrote ‘we will recognise the naively self-confident or obtusely stubborn unity of a smooth, pure single-voiced language (perhaps accompanied by a primitive, artificial, worked-up double-voicedness). We quickly sense that such an author finds it easy to purge his work of speech diversity’. Bakhtin and Holquist, The Dialogic Imagination, 327.
more appropriate to consider museums as a ‘biased third party’ to a dialogue than as a mere administrator of a neutral forum.

This theoretical work suggests that museums could play a role in drawing out these different voices in dialogue projects, affording the differences between each a degree of clarity without necessarily reaching a resolution. As discussed in relation to Habermasean dialogue, that clarity may be in terms of encouraging shared validity claims around ‘truth’ and ‘rightness’ among some users. However, these differences may equally be drawn out in an affective sense, where the museum invites ‘unreasoned’, narrative-driven points of difference to sit next to one another in a way that invites listeners to consider what it might be like to live a life different to one’s own. In this sense, the installations and online displays in which museum dialogues are presented could act as texts, in which many voices are invited to speak, rather than as the spontaneous, ‘natural’ dialogues that take place in everyday life. As I will continue to argue throughout this thesis, the museum’s role in this process should be as an advocate for social justice, which involves selecting and presenting these texts in such a way as to support non-participating users to understand the social and political context of discourses of identity, cultural diversity, and racism as well as being invited to engage emotionally.

If the museum were to command too much control over the style of argumentation deployed by participants, the resulting dialogue might descend into a ‘purely logical analysis of … ideas that are parcelled out in voices’, rather than maintaining what Bakhtin sees as the nuance, contradictions, and complexity of ‘authentic speech’.67 Those who read into Bakhtin’s work a subversive, anti-hegemonic attitude, would likely be resistant to museums’ appropriation of the language of dialogue to pursue a governmental agenda.68 However, if museums were to remove themselves entirely from the dialogues they facilitate, they would reduce their capacity to encourage informed, respectful dialogue. As Richard Sandell argues ‘by including different viewpoints but failing to arbitrate between them museums imply that they are of equal value’.69 In facilitating participatory intercultural programs, then, museums must identify ethical means through which to both nurture and temper contributions from participants without reinforcing the

monolithic power of the institution. This requires that museums listen to, and take seriously, what participants say. Recent work by the Australian cultural critic Tanja Dreher offers a means of understanding this possibility. Dreher argues that participatory media creation should be about more than expression alone and highlights instead the role of listening. Dreher identifies a turn towards listening in scholarship about participatory and social media, arguing that the growth of social media and other platforms (including participatory radio) among Australian Aboriginal communities has allowed for a rapid expansion in the number of voices expressing unique and diverse perspectives, but that these voices are not necessarily listened to in a way that might create social change.\(^{70}\)

Here Dreher is not only referring to media audiences in a conventional sense, or peer networks in the context of social media. Rather, she is considering media production as a process of democratic participation, identifying the absence of structures through which policy makers and others in power could be encouraged to listen to the proliferation of Aboriginal voices. Dreher argues that a focus on individual expression in participatory and ‘social’ media plays into a neoliberal agenda of ‘digital disruption’ and market extraction, without facilitating a truly social space grounded on binding people together, contesting ideas, and enacting politics and social change.\(^{71}\) As a means of combatting this phenomenon, Dreher adopts Sherry Arnstein’s ‘ladder of participation’ to argue that ‘higher tier’ participation should involve participant ownership over the creation and dissemination of media with the aim of increasing the democratic potential of participation.\(^{72}\) Writing in a similar vein Spurgeon and Edmond argue for a distinction between ‘critical participatory media’ and other media forms as a means of supporting ‘the continuing development of inclusive social political and media cultures’ in contrast to previous ‘top-down’ models of participation.\(^{73}\) This embrace of higher tier participation requires not only that audiences are

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\(^{72}\) Dreher, McCallum, and Waller, “Indigenous Voices and Mediatized Policy-Making in the Digital Age”.

positioned to listen to the expression of voices, but that the institutions that influence the lives of participants are positioned to listen through the structure of participatory media projects.

When considered in the light of the burgeoning scholarship on museum participation, this perspective adds another layer to the argument that museums should play a role as biased third parties in participatory intercultural dialogue programs. While museums have ample skills to support the selection and presentation of content, if the institutions lack the ability to listen to and collaborate with their participants they risk recasting participatory dialogue programs within the power relations of coloniser and colonised that characterise traditional museum practice. As part of a broader process of working towards the decolonisation of museum practice, then, participatory intercultural dialogue projects should position participants as collaborators, who play a role in the planning of projects, the design of digital interactives, the facilitation of dialogue, and in the selection and dissemination of content. Through a co-creative process participatory dialogue projects may be better positioned to nurture critically nuanced contributions, affective and authentic moments of personal expression, and to advocate for social justice through the creation and dissemination of these texts.

Conclusion

This chapter has been predicated on the idea that museums should have an influence on the qualitative nature of the dialogues they facilitate. Working from this basis, by positioning dialogic museum programs in relation to dialogic theory I have outlined a conceptual underpinning for the processes by which museums can draw out the strengths of dialogic practice and direct these towards the goal of advocating for social justice and challenging prejudice. When placed in the context of contemporary museum practice, this literature invites the conclusion that museums should both temper and nurture contributions from participants. Museums are well positioned to encourage – but not impose – reasoned argumentation, which parallels elements of Habermasean

deliberation and communicative action. Working from Habermas’ notion of validity claims, one means of tempering the expression of baseless assertions could be to draw reference to empirical historical and sociological evidence and social norms related to social justice in the facilitation and design of dialogic programming. In making such interventions, museums would need to balance their openness to conflicting perspectives, with a cognisance that they are biased, interested parties to a dialogue, rather than neutral facilitators. However, such a project can only ever be incomplete. As the work of Levinas and Bakhtin suggests, the complexities of dialogue cannot be encompassed by an appeal to reason alone. Dialogic projects create opportunities for encounters across difference with unknown and unpredictable consequences. They also invite diverse modes of speech and other forms of expression that illustrate the plurality of contemporary communities and decentre the official speech of the institution. In nurturing this cacophony of voices, and presenting it to a wider audience, this analysis suggests museums should attempt to understand the many discourses from which participants may draw to articulate their perspectives. This creates the opportunity for museums to listen, to apply co-creative and participatory curatorial processes, and to more effectively advocate for social justice.

This chapter has provided a sense of what museums could achieve through dialogue programs. To understand the context in which these programs operate, in the next chapter I expound upon the historical basis and rationale for the emergence of interculturalism and participation in Australian museums. In later chapters, I illustrate these lines of argument with an analysis of the Talking Difference program at the Immigration Museum.
Chapter 2: Governments, Museums, and Intercultural Dialogue

Introduction

As I suggested in the Introduction to this thesis, while the emergence of new museology has inspired a range of critical practices, participatory intercultural dialogue programs continue the governmental role of museums. These programs aim to encourage and inspire particular attitudes and behaviours, albeit in a more nuanced and reflexive mode than was apparent in nineteenth century museums.¹

In this chapter I locate the Talking Difference project within the broader policy context of Australian governmental museum practice dedicated to promoting cultural diversity and opposing racism. As the British cultural policy scholar Clive Gray has argued, an exclusive focus on the content of cultural practice ‘abstracts this content from the organised context within which it operates, and thus can miss the importance of this context’.² Since the 1970s museums and other institutions in the cultural sector have increasingly adjusted their programming and content to respond to the ‘social needs’ identified by foundations and granting agencies as a means of accessing grant-based revenue.³ In the British and Australia this process has largely responded to government agencies and has often consisted of funding offered to promote social cohesion, challenge racism, and build literacy and other skills.⁴

This chapter locates the empirical work of the thesis in relation to these broader processes. In the first section I present a chronological narrative for the emergence of multicultural and, later, intercultural museum practice in Australia. This analysis includes an account of the emergence of instrumental funding programs. The second section brings this narrative up to the emergence of the Talking Difference project, focusing on the project's funding program ‘Arts About Us’, an anti-racism, arts-based initiative of the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth). Through analysis of documentation related to VicHealth and the host institution, the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, the chapter describes an alignment of interests between a museum and a funder concerned to build respect for difference and understanding of cultural diversity.

On this basis, I argue that participatory practices geared towards social justice continue, rather than significantly challenge, the governmental mission of state-run museums to build ‘citizenly competence’. Talking Difference and its funding program ‘Arts About Us’ not only aimed to correct behaviour considered to be inappropriate through the creation of content, but to open dialogue, which was expected to support a liberal, cosmopolitan outlook. Acknowledging that a governmental project can never be neutral, I argue that rather than a forum for ‘open dialogue’, this governmental structure created an opportunity for the museum to encourage principles of social justice and anti-racism. Instead of pursuing an ideological argument focusing on governmentality and the power asymmetry between museums and audiences, then, my primary interest is in how museums can better support opposition to prejudice through dialogue and participation.

**Background: instrumentalism in cultural policy**

As Tony Bennett has argued, public museums have played a governmental role since their beginnings in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. However, since the 1970s museums have increasingly come to be enlisted in achieving what Clive Gray calls ‘exogenous

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5 For more on this idea see Message, “Museums and the Utility of Culture”, 237; Lisanne Gibson, *The Uses of Art* (St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2001), 7.


effects’ beyond their core functions. Gray considers museums’ core functions to be ‘curatorship, education, entertainment, and infra-structural management of resources’. In this reading, which is echoed in the Australian context by museum researcher Carol Scott, the widening of the role of the museum into other areas of policy – such as building social cohesion, challenging racism, and contributing to skills development – is indicative of a trend in public policy since the 1970s towards ostensibly more ‘efficient’ and ‘accountable’ approaches to public spending, where outputs and outcomes take precedence over inputs and processes. In this context, Gray and others express concern that the ‘endogenous’ or core functions of museums – such as collecting and presenting heritage – are not considered to have the same political significance as policy-related outcomes such as developing skills and social cohesion. At its heart, this criticism is based on the assumption that there is an inherent value to the work of museums, which may be compromised by the introduction of interests beyond the core functions the institution.

When located within the broader field of museum studies, Gray’s criticism of instrumentalism in museums demonstrates a narrow view of the museum’s role in society. Gray and others acknowledge the agency of actors in the execution of ‘instrumental’ museum work, however in their effort to highlight the ‘exogenous’ influence of instrumentalism, these scholars perhaps lose focus on the complex ways in which socially-minded museum practice fulfills more broadly defined roles of the contemporary museum. For example, consider Elaine Heumann Gurian’s conception of museums as ‘third spaces’ that build social capital, and ‘create community’ through the facilitation of ‘interactions between strangers’. Kylie Message builds on this notion in her analysis of the National Museum of the American Indian in the United States and Te Papa in Aoteroa-New Zealand. She argues that ‘through entering into partnerships with governments, museums may facilitate community development via outreach programs and encouraging increased participation in the museum itself’. Within this field of practice, Message highlights

9 Gray, “Instrumental Policies”, 211.
12 Gurian, Civilizing the Museum, 111
‘cultural centre-like museums’ which ‘manifest themes of representation, participation, and access, and … use strategies of inclusion which are directed toward the production of positive outcomes in relation to other spheres beyond the museum’.  

Rather than being imposed by funders, and regardless of the availability of funding programs, these agendas are actively pursued by staff in some museums.

The historian and scholar of cultural policy Lissane Gibson offers a particularly strong critique of the ‘threat’ of instrumentalism. Gibson reiterates the fact that public museums have always been used by governments to achieve policy goals and calls into question the distinction Gray makes between the ‘core’ and ‘exogenous’ roles of museums. Gibson argues that the appeal to ‘core’ or ‘intrinsic’ values bolsters a reading of the museum’s role as tied to ‘high art’ and ‘heritage’, which has historically served the interests of a privileged elite. Instead, Gibson supports the ‘political imperative’ for museums ‘to become more inclusive’. Holding firm to this democratic vision of what museums can be, Gibson demands that we stop framing ‘instrumentalism’ as a new threat. Rather we should undertake constructive analysis of the interplay between cultural policy and cultural activity, analysis that should be grounded, she argues, ‘in the practicalities of culture’s administration’. In other words, rather than focusing on the failings of ‘instrumentalisation’ and government funding programs, we should look at the specific processes through which museums use government funding to become – or avoid becoming – more inclusive places. I build on this progressive understanding of the museum’s role throughout this thesis to argue that museums’ approach to facilitating dialogue must be both inclusive and offer a means of advocating for social justice.

As Message argues, this drive towards inclusiveness in museums relies not only on governmental directives in particular funding programs, but also on the adoption of language emergent in ‘various forms of communitarianism’ that became popular in international development, community arts, and community development particularly through the 1990s and 2000s. In her analysis Message identifies the limitations of an uncritical focus on neoliberalism and state power.

16 Gibson, 247.
17 Gibson, 225.
Instead, she favours the term ‘inclusive liberalism’ to describe the means by which contemporary governments foster the participation of community members in museums. Rather than being primarily concerned with market forces, and the commodification of culture, ‘inclusive liberalism’ here refers to a partnership-based form of governance that aims to be ‘citizen-focused, relationship-based and collaborative’.\textsuperscript{18} This language is replicated in the funding programs that have supported the projects examined in this thesis. It is a language and practice that has emerged as a result of several decades of collaborative community work in museums.

**Australian museums and multiculturalism**

In 2011, Viv Szekeres, former Director of the Migration Museum in Adelaide, highlighted the importance of community-based practice to the emergence of more culturally diverse museums in Australia in the 1960s. She identified the emergence of migrant-specific cultural heritage organisations and museums as an important part of this process that happened prior to the embrace and formalization of multiculturalism in Australian Government policy.\textsuperscript{19} Following the settlement of significant numbers of Displaced People in Australia after the Second World War, migrant groups began to initiate community-based cultural heritage organisations primarily for the purposes of maintaining ethno-specific identities within particular communities, rather than necessarily for sharing with a broader, mainstream audience. For diasporic communities from Eastern Europe, Szekeres argues, these cultural heritage groups provided a means of keeping ‘their patriotism and nationalism alive with folk dancing, singing and other arts and crafts’.\textsuperscript{20} In the early years of settlement, Szekeres argues, these groups worked on the assumption that Displaced People would soon be returning to Eastern Europe, where they would resume their traditional cultural practices. By the 1960s these diasporic community groups had formed established cultural heritage organisations, and in some cases ran small museums as ‘community initiatives’ such as

\textsuperscript{18} Message, “Museums and the Utility of Culture”, 224.


\textsuperscript{20} Szekeres, “Museums and Multiculturalism”, 1.
the Adelaide Lithuanian Museum, which opened in 1967. While she acknowledges the impact of government policy, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, Szekeres joins other scholars to advocate for a ‘bottom-up’ rather than a top down perspective on intercultural practice.

Clearly migrants had long championed for their own rights (including cultural rights) in Australia. However, the introduction of multiculturalism as national policy in 1973 had an important influence on the diversification of Australian museum practice. In its wide-ranging sense of inclusion and respect for diversity, multiculturalism as government policy offered a new outlook for mainstream Australian museums. This sentiment is encapsulated in Immigration Minister Al Grassby’s description of multicultural Australia as a family. ‘In a family’ he argued,

the overall attachment to the common good need not impose a sameness on the outlook or activity of each member, nor need these members deny their individuality and distinctiveness in order to seek a superficial and unnatural conformity.

Alongside the fact of increasing cultural diversity in Australian communities, this new language of inclusivity had a significant and enduring impact on the articulation of cultural identity in museums.

The 1975 Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections (commonly known as the Pigott Report) represents a key development in this direction. Among other

21 Szekeres, “Museums and Multiculturalism”, 3.
26 Matthew Trinca and Kirsten Wehner, ‘Pluralism and Exhibition Practice at the National Museum of Australia’ in South Pacific Museums: Experiments in Culture, eds Chris Healy and Andrea Witcomb
objectives, the Committee was formed to ‘institute new developments and institutions, with particular attention to the establishment of a national museum of history in Canberra’. In fulfilling its brief, the Pigott Report did not identify the representation of multiculturalism as a priority for the Australian museum sector. However, in its definition of the museum as a site of ‘legitimate doubt and thoughtful discussion’ and recognition of intercultural contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia, the report was significant to the emergence of more dialogic and participatory intercultural practice in museums. The report argued that:

one of the most significant themes of (Australia’s post-1788) history is the racial contact which resulted when originally separate people, with unlike cultures, value systems or symbolic world views, suddenly became linked.

The report was also supportive of regional and community-based museums as representative of communities’ needs. The Pigott Report laid the groundwork for mainstream museum practices that facilitated intercultural dialogue. When the report’s core recommendation was finally fulfilled almost thirty years later with the opening of the National Museum of Australia (NMA) in 2001, the Museum’s first Director, Dawn Casey, evoked a similar sentiment arguing the NMA should ‘speak with many voices, listen and respond to all, and promote debate and discussion about questions of diversity and identity’.

Such a perspective on the role of museums built on the legacy of multiculturalism and the rapid diversification of public life in Australia after the Second World War. For example, the Galbally Report on Migrant Programs and Services (1978) encouraged a focus on the representation and celebration of cultural diversity in Australia, including through the establishment of the Special

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28 However, the report did identify international precedents of multiethnic representations in Canada and Mexico. Pigott, Report on Museums and National Collections, 53.
29 Pigott, Report on Museums and National Collections, 73.
30 Pigott, Report on Museums and National Collections, 11.
31 Szekeres, “Museums and multiculturalism”, 1.
Broadcasting Service (SBS), the Federal Ethnic Communities Council of Australia, and the development of a network of federally-funded Migrant Resource Centres. The advocacy for the recognition of diversity in the Galbally Report was influential in museums. In 1981, the South Australian Government Report on *Museum Policy and Development* (commonly known as the Edwards Report) called for stronger and more inclusive representation of minority cultures in South Australian museums. The idea that people should be encouraged – by governments and their institutions – to respect and understand the cultures of others was influential in government multicultural policy over the course of the 1980s and the Edwards and Galbally reports created an appropriate policy environment for the emergence of the state-funded Migration Museum in Adelaide, which opened in 1986. Following the Galbally Report’s insistence that multicultural Australia should be a place where people learn about ‘other cultures’, institutions like the Migration Museum began to build on a governmental logic of exhibiting ‘multicultural’ content targeting a mainstream audience. This shift also precipitated a range of participatory practices. The Migration Museum included a ‘Forum Gallery’, curated through a participatory process with

33 Szekeres, “Museums and multiculturalism”, 1.
35 Szekeres, “Museums and multiculturalism”, 3. There is a difference between the ‘preservation’ of cultural heritage that Viv Szekeres identifies in the community-based culturally-specific museums emergent in the 1960s onwards, and the active engagement of a mainstream audience, which became more common following the Fraser Government’s adoption of the recommendations of the Galbally Report.
community members. In 1998, Melbourne’s Immigration Museum would follow with a similarly participatory space, the ‘Community Gallery’.

As has been noted by many critics, the work of museums in this space has generally been undertaken in accordance with a discourse of recognition and celebration. The Adelaide Migration Museum’s *Chops and Changes* exhibition (1999) exemplifies this tradition with its celebration of ‘our multicultural market packed with foods, people, places and history’. Likewise, the *Impacts* gallery (1998-2003), at Melbourne’s Immigration Museum featured an essay by writer Arnold Zable, which worked with the familiar, celebratory metaphor of ‘the many melodies that make up this diverse symphony of ours’. Exhibitions of this sort have been characterised by Australian scholars such as Viv Szekeres, Ian McShane, Andrea Witcomb and Kylie Message as representative of the ‘liberal tradition’ or ‘enrichment narrative’ of migration heritage. In this reading, which owes much to Ghassan Hage’s critique of multiculturalism, the representation of migrant experiences is seen to deploy a simplistic version of multiculturalism for a White audience. Here, migrant experiences are shorn of the enduring impacts of displacement, inequality, discrimination and loss, and performed through superficial cultural representations, which are seen as ‘enriching’ the majority White culture. In addition, as Andrea Witcomb has argued, many of these exhibitions ‘remain within the frame of multiculturalism as a mosaic by focusing on individual ethnicities rather than on the kind of cross-cultural contact that really produces multicultural societies’.

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39 Quoted in Witcomb “Can museums move beyond pluralism?”, 52.
40 Arnold Zable, “Celebration: Museum Victoria Discovery Centre Infosheet” (Museum Victoria, 2003), Museum Victoria Digital Archive.
42 See Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, (Sydney: Pluto, 1998), 120. See also, Witcomb ‘Migration, social cohesion and cultural diversity, 55
43 McShane, “Getting In”, 123-124.
44 Witcomb ‘Migration, social cohesion and cultural diversity’, 55.
The process by which cultural identities are sequestered into a variety of static, homogenous, and distinct cultural groups has been labelled as reductive and essentialist by left-leaning cultural critics. Ghassan Hage has identified the power differentials involved in such processes. In reference to discourses surrounding immigration and multiculturalism in Australia, Hage argues that ‘White cultural mixers’ demonstrate their mastery over subordinated groups by coordinating an emergent cultural diversity, and determining which forms of culture are considered acceptable and unacceptable within the structures imposed by liberal humanism and global capitalism. Some have questioned the centrality Australian museum scholars give to Hage’s critique on the basis that it overshadows a range of more inclusive practices evident in Australian museums. Likewise, debate on a much larger scale continues as to the ongoing merits and legacy of multiculturalism as a means of understanding intercultural encounters. Scholars in a range of disciplines – including Paul Nesbitt-Larking, Bikhu Parekh, Will Kymlicka and, in Australia, Tim Soutphomassane and Ien Ang – have all defended multiculturalism in one form or another on the basis that it can promote civic participation and intercultural understanding in complex societies. However, the idea that the static, homogenous representation of cultures has limited multicultural museums’ capacity to engage with complex forms of cultural identification and interaction has been


influential in museums in Australia and internationally.\(^{49}\) This critique has been essential for the application of more dialogic and intercultural practice in museums. The movement towards more fluid, dialogic, and complex representations of culture contributes to the policy environment that led to the Talking Difference project.

**Governments and participatory intercultural dialogue: Arts About Us and Talking Difference**

The notion that dialogue across cultural boundaries can be more powerful for engendering respect for cultural difference than monocultural representations and didactic statements has changed the landscape for governmental interventions related to cultural diversity. Museums and their funders have begun to respond to the empirical work of museum scholars and social scientists examining dialogue.\(^{50}\) Psychologists, sociologists and scholars of education, have all investigated the impacts of participatory dialogue in a range of contexts.\(^{51}\) Many of these approaches have focused on staff or participant attitudes to cultural difference or racism. Among these approaches have been qualitative and quantitative assessments investigating the impacts of creative dialogue among high school students from the perspective of conflict resolution studies,\(^{52}\) sociological analyses of museum visitor and participant surveys,\(^{53}\) and evaluative ethnographies of anti-racist dialogues


\(^{50}\) This may be a product of a heightened emphasis on outcomes commonly known as ‘evidence-based policy making’ in which governments became increasingly likely to support policy interventions that could be shown to have empirically measurable impacts. Carol Scott, “Museums: Impact and Value”, *Cultural Trends* 15, no. 1 (March 2006): 45–75; Gray, “Instrumental Policies: Causes, Consequences, Museums and Galleries”, 215.


\(^{52}\) Wayne, “‘Is it just talk? Understanding and evaluating intergroup dialogue’”, 451-478.

among tertiary students.\textsuperscript{54} The findings of these studies vary widely. At a personal level, researchers working with participants in structured dialogue have drawn conclusions regarding participants’ increased ability to understand their ethnic-racial identity,\textsuperscript{55} and to feel empathy and positive emotions.\textsuperscript{56} At an interpersonal level, researchers have emphasised the potential for the emergence of friendships, and of more egalitarian approaches to social problems.\textsuperscript{57} However, scholars of social work Adrienne Dessel and Mary E. Rogge argue that the empirical literature on intercultural dialogue is far from complete, and ‘in community, organizational, and interethnic settings … use of dialogue techniques has far outpaced any systematic efforts to measure the results of dialogue interaction’.\textsuperscript{58} Nevertheless, empirical analysis of intercultural dialogue as a tool for increasing intercultural understanding is significant partly as it has been cited as a basis for funding dialogic programs in a range of contexts.\textsuperscript{59}

In Europe, where intercultural dialogue is most prominent as a public policy initiative, the Council of Europe’s 2008 intercultural dialogue White Paper positioned dialogue as a means of contributing to the emergence of ‘a vibrant and open society without discrimination, benefitting us all, marked by the inclusion of all residents in full respect of their human rights’.\textsuperscript{60} In addition, the white paper defined dialogue as a tool for promoting ‘respect for human rights, (and) promotion of democracy and the rule of law’ among disparate groups.\textsuperscript{61} The Council of Europe has since

\textsuperscript{55} Aldana et al., “Raising Ethnic-Racial Consciousness”, 129.
\textsuperscript{56} Dasgupta & Rivera cited in Dessel and Rogge, “Evaluation of Intergroup Dialogue”, 213.
\textsuperscript{58} Dessel and Rogge, “Evaluation of Intergroup Dialogue”, 200.
\textsuperscript{59} See for example the report emerging from the Northern Interfaith Intercultural Network, a collaboration between La Trobe University and numerous local governments in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. Michális S. Michael Joseph A Camilleri, Janelle Cairns, “Northern Interfaith Intercultural Network Project: Building an Interfaith and Intercultural Network for Melbourne's Northern Suburbs”, (Melbourne: Centre for Dialogue, La Trobe University, 2008). 34.
funded a range of programs including some in museums, which apply a government approach by deploying intercultural dialogue as a means of shifting autochthonous residents away from prejudice and towards intercultural understanding. In Australia, scholars of dialogue and anti-racism such as Michális S Michael have identified the effectiveness of open-ended dialogue as a means of building intercultural understanding without imposing strict boundaries over the nature of exchanges. Likewise, in their reviews of anti-racist interventions Anne Pedersen et al. have recognised the capacity of dialogue to support mildly prejudiced participants to come to their own conclusions and feel heard, while gently challenging their prejudice. These scholarly interventions have had an impact on dialogic practice in community and museum settings. VicHealth cited Pedersen et al.’s ‘Talk Does Not Cook Rice’ report as a basis for the program that funded Talking Difference. This relationship between scholarship and funding is representative

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65 Camilleri, Michael, and Cairns, “Northern Interfaith Intercultural Network Project”.

66 Among 16 projects, the program funded two museums and an art gallery to achieve this goal. Dialogue was supported on the basis that ‘studies show that approaches that engage people in discussion about issues of discrimination and diversity are more effective than those relying exclusively on imparting information’. Further, guidelines suggested that ‘the preparation of a group-devised performance work by people from various ethnic backgrounds could give opportunities for group members to discuss issues that are important to them … can provide a safe place for people to share their experiences and for those stories to be woven into the theme and content of the work being created for performance’. VicHealth, “Promoting Diversity Through the Arts, Funding Guidelines – Community Arts Grants” (Melbourne: VicHealth, February 2009), 9, provided in hardcopy by Jim Rimmer, VicHealth, 22 May 2015.
of the emergence of governmental support for nuanced and dialogic practice in the Australian cultural sector.

The emergence of intercultural dialogue as a field of discourse supporting partnerships between museums and funders also builds on the long history of museums providing spaces for engagement with the cultures of new migrants in Australia. Both Talking Difference and Arts About Us emerge within a field of discourses that assign particular value to museums and art as agents of social change, and to intercultural dialogue as a means of challenging racism. The relationship between Talking Difference and Arts About Us demonstrates an alignment of interests between the Immigration Museum and VicHealth according to these values that predates the Arts About Us program and Talking Difference.

Since its opening in 1998, the Immigration Museum has received funding from VicHealth to support its cultural programming. In the early 2000s, the Museum used VicHealth funds to present a series of events profiling culturally diverse groups and communicating public health messages about diabetes and smoking. These one-day festivals featured music, dance and performance and were planned in consultation with representatives of ethno-specific community organisations. At times, this balance of cultural performance and public health messages led to eclectic programming. The Active for Life Latin Sunday on 13 August 2000, for example, featured a talk from the International Diabetes Institute alongside tango, poetry and a fourteen-piece drumming performance. Programs for the Arabic SmokeFree Festival in 2001 featured coffee readings, films and dance, and the following statement: ‘promoting the SmokeFree message and creating SmokeFree environments is extremely important as there is no safe level of smoking’.

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69 Immigration Museum, “Program Arabic SmokeFree Festival”, Program, 19 August 2001, Museum Victoria Digital Archive. The Museum encouraged community collaborators like the Australian Arabic Council to ‘spread the partnership message of Smoke Free environments and lifestyles’ and offered to work with them to ensure that these messages were communicated effectively. Padmini Sebastian, “Letter to the Australian Arabic Council”, 1 February 2001, Museum Victoria Digital Archive.
In addition to offering a vehicle for messages about physical health, the cultural programs at the Immigration Museum contributed to a broader message about social inclusion. The Arabic SmokeFree Festival flyers stated that

increasing participation and involvement in arts activities can break down social isolation, increase feelings of connection and belonging, and contribute to mental and physical health. Art and health – together we are making this a healthier state for all Victorians.70

The program reflected a theme in VicHealth-funded programs that continued through the 2000s to the Arts About Us program in 2009. For VicHealth, arts and cultural programming offer a means of combatting poor mental health including depression and anxiety, and promoting social inclusion.71 For the Museum, these practices support the celebration of cultural diversity in Victoria and the exploration of contentious and challenging social and cultural issues.72 There is evidence in these programs of a negotiation between the Museum’s interests and those of VicHealth. While there is a degree of slippage between these interests, there is also an alignment about the value of inclusive and culturally diverse public events. In her analysis of the political context surrounding the opening of the Immigration Museum, Kylie Message identifies a similar

71 There is evidence of this perspective in VicHealth’s Participation for Health: A framework for action 2009-2013. The framework aims to address the ‘social and economic determinates of mental and physical health.’ Alongside ‘physical activity, social connection and access to economic resources,’ VicHealth lists ‘freedom from discrimination’ as a social determinate of mental and physical health. The framework makes central ‘direct participation programs’ including in the arts. The outcomes included in this framework demonstrate the ambition and broad scope envisioned for participatory programs funded by VicHealth. At the individual level, the framework suggests participation in public health programs facilitates ‘acceptance of diversity,’ and ‘respectful, supportive and equal relationships.’ At an organisational level, the framework suggests that participation programs can create ‘inclusive, responsive, safe, and supportive’ organisations that ‘work in partnerships across sectors.’ At a community level, the framework also highlights inclusivity, responsiveness, safety and support, and identifies civic engagement, cohesion and community responsibility as central to the potential benefits of participation. Finally, at a societal level, the Framework appears to focus on the potential influence that public health participation programs may have on government practice and resource allocation. From this perspective, participation is positioned to develop ‘integrated, sustained and supportive policies, programs and legislative platforms for health’ as well as ‘strong leadership’, ‘social norms and practices that support health,’ and ‘responsive and inclusive governance structures.’ VicHealth, “Participation for Health: A Framework for Action 2009-2013” (Melbourne: VicHealth, 2009).
alignment of interests between the Immigration Museum and the Victorian Government more broadly. Given it enjoyed bipartisan support from the Victorian Government in the early 2000s, Message argues, the Immigration Museum was able to play a role in controversial public debates about racism, multiculturalism and immigration that would have been difficult for an organisation like the National Museum of Australia, for example, given its relationship with the Australian Federal Government at that time.\(^73\) The alignment of interests between the museum and state government agencies exemplified by programs the Immigration Museum delivered with VicHealth’s support across its first ten years of existence offers some context to VicHealth’s interest in supporting intercultural dialogue at the Immigration Museum through the Arts About Us program.

The Arts About Us (AAU) program began in 2009 as a means of addressing risks to health and wellbeing encountered by people who experience social exclusion due to race-based discrimination. The program was delivered in two three-year rounds. The first round, from 2010-2012 (initially called Promoting Diversity Through the Arts) funded 16 arts projects in medium and large organisations including arts organisations like Museum Victoria and the National Gallery of Victoria and other organisations like the Centre for Multicultural Youth, and the City of Greater Dandenong.\(^74\) The second round, from 2012-2015, was limited to seven arts organisations. The guidelines for the first three-year iteration of the program, identified race- and ethnicity-based discrimination as key social and economic influences on mental health in Victoria.\(^75\) While VicHealth operates exclusively in Victoria, its embrace of an explicitly anti-racist agenda in the Arts About Us program coincided with what Kylie Message has identified as a sharpened focus on anti-racism following the election of a Labor Federal Government in 2007, and the subsequent National Anti-Racism Strategy and the high profile ‘Racism: It Stops With Me’ campaign by the Australian Human Rights Commission, which were both launched in 2012.\(^76\)

\(^75\) VicHealth, “Promoting Diversity Through the Arts, Funding Guidelines”, 4.
\(^76\) Message, *Museums and Racism*, 93.
As is the case for most health promotion interventions, the Arts About Us program was based on empirical research into the effectiveness of anti-racism interventions at both interpersonal and systemic levels. The former referred to interactions between people, including insults, staring, and exclusion, the latter to the potentially less visible ‘requirements, conditions, practices, policies or processes’ that unfairly penalise people of particular racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. The ‘Building on our Strengths’ report, published by VicHealth in 2009, acknowledged an interplay between interpersonal and systemic racism and advocated for multi-layered funding programs including projects that target racism with individuals, groups and organisations, as well as functioning at a ‘societal’ level.

As discussed, Arts About Us was also influenced by the ‘Talk Does Not Cook Rice’ review, which acknowledged the effectiveness of the arts as an anti-racist practice. The review highlighted the capability of community arts and theatre to raise awareness of race-based discrimination and promote positive imagery of particular groups, challenge myths and stereotypes, and build empathy.

Building on this report’s findings, the program’s funding guidelines identified ‘promising approaches’ for challenging interpersonal racism. These included providing accurate information to program participants (particularly in relation to the high proportion of Australians who are opposed to racism), emphasising activities that build empathy with cultural others, highlighting incompatible beliefs, building positive social norms, and building an understanding of both commonality and difference between people from a

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78 Paradies et al., “Building on Our Strengths”, 7.

79 As discussed, this recommendation was supported by extant research into the effectiveness of anti-racism interventions. For example, Pedersen et al. emphasise the importance of layering multiple approaches to challenging racism. Pedersen et al., “How to Cook Rice”, 55–63.

range of cultural groups. Subsequently, VicHealth required that funded organisations identify which of the seven ‘promising approaches’ would be applied in the delivery of their projects.

Developed in response to this funding opportunity, the Talking Difference project was initially conceived as a ‘multi-platform, multi-layered and new media presentation of digital stories’. Museum Victoria’s grant application to VicHealth indicated that the project would build connections and relationships with artists and communities who reflect Victoria’s diversity to create digital stories for presentation on-site and online … (and) … establish a forum for dialogue and exchange about diversity related issues.

The Museum worked towards other priorities beyond the delivery of an anti-racist project, in its development of Talking Difference. The initial application was prepared by Padmini Sebastian, the Manager of the Immigration Museum, and Linda Sproul the Manager of Public Programs at Museum Victoria. Two years before the Talking Difference application was submitted, Sebastian had published an article in the journal Museums International foreshadowing some of the central ideas from the Talking Difference project. In reference to the Immigration Museum’s exhibitionary practice, she argued that:

through dialogue and discussion, there are opportunities to inform and influence the character of the place that we live in, to encourage ongoing community discourse, and play a transformative role in society.

Likewise, in Museum Victoria’s Strategic Plan 2008-2013 the organization committed to collaborating ‘with diverse communities to develop programs that promote social cohesion and actively foster access’.

These phrases are fairly general, as is the case for much documentation referring to organization-wide practice. However, they demonstrate that the central tenants of the Talking Difference program – the commitment to dialogue, and the goal of promoting ‘social cohesion’ – were not

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83 Sebastian, “Mobilizing Communities and Sharing Stories: The Role of the Immigration Museum in One of the Most Culturally Diverse Cities in the World”, 92.
introduced to the Museum by the Arts About Us program but were aligned with broader movements within the organization and in response to trends across a wider field of museum practice.\textsuperscript{85}

In its final report to VicHealth, the Museum identified four among VicHealth’s seven ‘promising approaches’ as having the most significant impact on the project. These were promoting dialogue, building empathy, addressing false beliefs and stereotypes, and facilitating inter-cultural contact.\textsuperscript{86} The Museum identified the Portable Studio installation as particularly effective in promoting dialogue by allowing ‘participants to share their thoughts, feelings and experience using a multimedia platform’. Through the display of ‘personal experiences’ central to this installation, the Museum considered itself capable of building empathy, on the basis that ‘the sharing of experience has provided a connection between individuals and communities who otherwise may not come in contact with one another’. The Museum quoted particular examples of content produced in the Studio to argue that the project had addressed false beliefs and stereotypes in the form of both questions – ‘have you judged someone based on the colour of their skin?’ – and answers:

\begin{quote}
when you ask, “where are you from?” what do you mean? Do you mean what is my ethnicity, what are my parents or grandparents ethnicity? You need to be specific because I am from Australia just like you.\textsuperscript{87}
\end{quote}

I give this content and the related assumptions about the role of dialogue more attention in later chapters of the thesis.

The importance placed on the inclusion of people from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds continues the thread of multicultural programming emergent in post-Second World War. That these voices were brought into dialogue with one another in Talking Difference builds on ‘the need to develop multiculturalism through community education’ identified in the Edwards Report, and

\textsuperscript{87} Museum Victoria “Talking Difference, Final Report to VicHealth”. 
follows the emergence of intercultural practice in museum practice. The fact of these voices being recorded and represented in the service of such a socially minded goal as ‘challenging race-based discrimination’ recalls the work of museums working with cultural diversity from the 1970s onwards. This is a governmental role, which is re-cast here to invite contributions from a broad range of participants, rather than simply presenting or performing ‘cultural diversity’ as a form of didactic messaging. Perhaps most importantly, Talking Difference is the product of an instrumental funding process. While the project fits neatly within the strategic interests of both Museum Victoria and VicHealth, the funding body outlines the field of discourses within which the project operates. In this way the project continues trends in the relationship between government and intercultural dialogue practice emergent in Australia since at least the 1980s.

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn together two very different kinds of analysis to trace some of the antecedents of Talking Difference, and the role of a ‘reformatory’ governmental funding program in shaping the project. The chapter has traced the emergence of more culturally diverse practice in Australian museums and the increasingly explicit means by which governments use museums to achieve social policy outcomes not directly related to their traditional roles.

In the first section I traced the role of community-led museums and shifts in public policy in reforming contemporary institutions as sites for the celebration of cultural diversity and the facilitation of dialogue. This background demonstrates that participatory intercultural dialogue projects like Talking Difference emerge in a socio-historical context and policy environment designed to support liberal, cosmopolitan attitudes towards cultural diversity and prejudice.

The relatively consistent alignment of interests between funders and funded organisations has been a significant part of this. As Kylie Message has argued, a form of inclusive liberalism, through which government agencies and museums pursue a vision of multicultural Australia through

participatory programs is central to this process.\footnote{In the use of this term I am attentive to Kylie Message’s application to museum of Craig and Larner’s idea of inclusive liberalism. The term describes a process by which ‘new forms of local social governance that aim to be citizen-focused, relationship-based, and collaborative’. Message, “Museums and the Utility of Culture”, 242.} The documentation outlining the relationship between VicHealth and Museum Victoria provides an example of such an alignment. In each instance, the reforming role of the museum as an arm of the state continues, but over time this comes to be executed through more dialogic and reflexive mechanisms such as the Talking Difference Portable Studio. As I will continue to argue throughout this thesis, rather than pursuing an ideological argument based primarily on the inequitable power dynamics between government institutions and participants, my interest is to identify ways in which museums can better pursue social justice and intercultural understanding through dialogic practice – despite (or even because of) their governmental role. In cognisance of the fact that museums will continue to function in a governmental mode seeking to facilitate dialogue and intercultural understanding I ask: how can they better play this role?

While the official documentation from VicHealth and Museum Victoria presents a cohesive vision of ‘inclusive liberalism’, my examination of project delivery and the content produced by participants demonstrates that there are tensions between projects like Talking Difference and this vision of contemporary Australian interculturalism. This examination forms the core of the following chapters.
Chapter 3: The Talking Difference Portable Studio

Introduction

Having laid the groundwork in the last two chapters for an analysis of participatory practice and intercultural dialogue in museums, I now turn to the central case study of this thesis: the Talking Difference project initiated by Melbourne’s Immigration Museum (hereafter ‘the Museum’). Over the next three chapters, I present an in-depth account of the project. This work is based on qualitative analysis of the media produced by participants, interviews with staff, observation of workshops, and analysis of project documentation. Prefiguring these more substantive analyses, this chapter outlines and chronicles the processes by which the program came into existence and the mechanisms the Museum put in place to foster intercultural dialogue. As museum scholar Richard Sandell suggests, museums are not neutral forums for ‘dialogue’ or ‘engagement’,¹ rather the design and configuration of spaces, programs and digital interfaces play a key role in facilitating interactions between users, shaping the museum experience as a whole.² It is therefore necessary to examine the planning, design, administrative and operational factors that led to Talking Difference taking its final form. This chapter outlines the chronological development of the project, including its planning, preparation, workshop and pilot phases. As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, while the first three years of the project took place before I had begun my doctoral research, the Immigration Museum’s archive of planning, delivery and evaluation documents offers a strong record of the mechanisms the Museum put in place to facilitate dialogue

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over this period. The chapter draws on these archives as well as my own observations as museum staff member.³

What emerges from the analysis of these sources is that while the Museum’s chosen mechanisms for facilitation played a role in shaping dialogue, the Museum was reluctant to summarise and select responses created in the Talking Difference in the context of the Portable Studio. This had the result, I argue, of casting the Portable Studio as an experience closer to visiting a loosely collated archive than to a curated museum display.⁴ To understand how this came to be the case, the origins of the project are significant.

**Planning**

As discussed in the previous chapter, Talking Difference originated as an Arts About Us program funded by VicHealth, which was predicated on the idea that dialogue offers a means of challenging race-based discrimination.⁵ With this in mind, once the project had funding in place the Museum undertook to identify the interventions that would best:

build connections and relationships with artists and communities who reflect Victoria’s diversity
to create digital stories for presentation on-site and online … (and) … establish a forum for dialogue and exchange about diversity related issues.⁶

The Museum assembled a project team, consisting of the Community Engagement Manager, Online Development Manager, an intern and myself as Senior Programs Officer. By December

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³ As noted in the Introduction, I worked as Senior Programs Officer at the Immigration Museum between 2009 and 2013. As discussed, the Talking Difference Portable Studio continues to tour to local libraries, but this thesis presents analysis of content produced in the first phase, and content produced during the period of study from 2013 to 2016.

⁴ The principle of provenance is central to archival management. Rather than imposing a curatorial vision over content, archivists maintain the original arrangement of material as it was first presented to them. Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration*, Second Edition (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co, 1966), 97. As I argue throughout this thesis, the lack of such a curatorial vision in Talking Difference was one of the factors that delimited the extent to which the project was positioned to advocate for principles of social justice.


2009, we had developed a project plan outlining three years of activity grouped under the themes ‘Creative Engagement’, ‘Outreach’ and ‘Online Participation’. In addition, each year a portion of the project budget was set aside to fund a modest fellowship for an emerging artist to work with ‘culturally diverse communities’ and the Museum in the creation of new multimedia content. The ‘Creative Engagement’ year – roughly the 2010 calendar year – involved a series of workshops for young people from culturally diverse backgrounds with a professional filmmaker. These workshops included opportunities to create video material related to cultural identity and race-based discrimination. At the same time, we developed the idea of the Portable Studio. At this stage the Studio was conceived as space for participants to create media in response to one another. In the third year, the intention was that the project would bring together multimedia content from each of the previous interventions in a website for public presentation. In March 2010, after we had developed this broad outline, we conducted a one-day community consultation session with representatives of migrant and youth organisations to discuss ‘questions around cultural difference and how these may impact communities, (and) digital technologies including multimedia, web design and computer games’. The Museum invited participants from its existing network of stakeholders in migrant communities, which had been developed over a decade of community planning and festivals. The consultation generated broad discussion of the

12 For more on the Immigration Museum’s community engagement program see Chapter Two: Governments, Museums, and Intercultural Dialogue and Padmini Sebastian, “Mobilizing Communities and Sharing Stories: The Role of the Immigration Museum in One of the Most Culturally Diverse Cities in
potential of a project like Talking Difference to promote cultural diversity, and also of the
significant role social media plays in diverse communities. One participant suggested that Talking
Difference provided an opportunity for cooperation between different groups and across
generations, asking ‘what can older and younger people bring? We won’t all offer the same thing
or want the same information’. Another reflected on the sophisticated use of social media by
members of Melbourne’s Afghan community as they communicate with colleagues and family in
Afghanistan as an example of the potential for social media to play a role in the project.

While this consultation offered rich insights, it did not have a significant impact on the
development of Talking Difference. The group was not assembled again to contribute to the
project. This was partly because the program outline had already been developed by the time the
consultation took place. While a gesture towards consultation was maintained, our team’s initial
plans progressed without an enduring commitment to collaborative planning or co-creation with
community representatives. On reflection, this exemplifies what museum scholar Bernadette Lynch has called ‘empowerment lite’. The opportunity for Talking Difference to function as a

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15 In addition to this community consultation, members of the Talking Difference project met with staff from
a range of organisations in the hope of sharing content and contacts in the community. These
included the National Gallery of Victoria, the Jewish Museum of Australia, the Anti-Racism Action Band
(at that stage a part of Victorian Arabic Social Services), Footscray Community Arts, New Australia
Media, the City of Greater Dandenong, La Mama theatre, Carlton, and the Centre from Multicultural
Youth. These meetings followed a suggestion from VicHealth staff that organisations funded under the
Promoting Diversity through the Arts/Arts About Us program could benefit from working with one
another. While these meetings did not lead to lasting collaborations, museum staff used some of the
working relationships museum staff developed at this stage to attracting participants to the Talking
Difference Portable Studio. The Centre for Multicultural Youth was a key resource for attracting
participants to the workshops at the beginning of the Portable Studio’s tour of the City of Brimbank in
2011. Likewise, early contact with teaching staff in the Media Department at RMIT University assisted in
the promotion of the Talking Difference Fellowship program to emerging artists for the Talking
Difference Fellowship project (see below) and resulted in the recruitment of the film maker Ana Vaz in
the 2010. Museum Victoria, “Talking Difference Project Team Meeting Minutes”, 5 February 2010,
Museum Victoria Digital Archive.
16 For an analysis of the various ‘tiers’ of participatory programming see Simon, The Participatory Museum,
Chapter 5, Paragraph 10.
17 Bernadette T. Lynch, “Whose Cake Is It Anyway? A Collaborative Investigation into Engagement and
Participation in 12 Museums and Galleries in the UK”, Summary Report (Paul Hamlyn Foundation,
‘high tier’ participatory program, for example by establishing a working group consisting of participants and representatives of external organisations with an interest in challenging racism, was lost. With it was lost the opportunity to significantly re-work the power dynamics of the relationship between the program’s participants and the Museum. Nevertheless, while Talking Difference provided few opportunities for ‘high tier’ participation, the program did provide a wide range of opportunities for ‘lower tier’ contributory participation. Working in a contributory mode, the project provided a range of contexts and mechanisms for face-to-face dialogue between participants.

Mechanisms for dialogue – Phase I

In mid-2010, alongside a range of other interventions, I worked with the project team on a brief

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20 The first year included a Pilot Team, which took a more traditional community arts approach to multimedia creation. The group included young people from a range of cultural and educational backgrounds who took part in five monthly workshops that were each designed to engender dialogue between participants, build participants’ skills ‘in expressing themselves’, and produce multimedia content that could be published online. In addition to the Pilot Team, the first Talking Difference Fellow, filmmaker Ana Vaz was appointed in 2010. Vaz created two film projects, including a series of ‘Moving Portraits’ for which she set up a photographic booth at the Eid Festival in Broadmeadows and offered to take family portraits. With the permission of her subjects, she filmed them preparing for each photograph, creating in the process a series of very tender silent films. The films were presented in slow motion, which accentuated small details such as an uncle bending to adjust his niece’s hijab. While this work was affecting and powerful, it was aired only on the Museum’s website and was not successfully integrated into the ongoing activities of Talking Difference. For this reason, I have not focused on these interventions in my analysis. Here I am using the definition of community arts offered by Gillian Rose as a process through which ‘communities (are) enabled, through funding, to create their own cultural expressions as compared to the traditional approach of democratising culture through touring art to
for a touring installation at that stage called a Temporary Media Site (TMS). At the time we hoped the TMS would:

facilitate dialogue about cultural difference and diversity in a new and creative way by offering participants the opportunity to access and create short multimedia pieces. This content would then be made available online as part of a broader, social media-based content production campaign.21

This proposal was partly inspired by the touring Story Tent from the Museu da Pessoa, the Brazilian branch of the Museum of the Person, which invited users to record oral histories with a facilitator in a portable recording tent in public places around Brazil.22 The installation was intended to offer ‘a new, engaging experience regardless of the participants’ background with the ideas or the technology’.23 After an open tender process, we contracted a Melbourne-based interactive design firm, coincidentally called Portable Studios,24 to produce the digital interface, and an architectural firm, Edwards Moore, to build the physical Studio.

In this first iteration, the Studio took the form of a custom-designed temporary structure consisting of brightly colored felt drapes supported by a triangular steel frame (see Fig. 1). The design choices made in the development of the Studio played a role in shaping the user experience.25 For example, the contemporary color scheme, and striking shapes and materials in the built form brought the language of contemporary exhibition design to the spaces the Studio visits. From the outside, the Studio appeared grey, but inside was lined with pink curtains, providing a bright backdrop for the videos created.


24 The Temporary Media Site later became known as the Portable Studio, though this was unrelated to the name of contracting firm.
25 For more on the role of design in shaping participatory experiences see Simon, The Participatory Museum; Mason, “The Dimensions of the Mobile Visitor Experience”.

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When it was assembled in public libraries, this semi-enclosed space (approximately 3 meters by 3 meters) stood out from its surroundings creating a sense of spectacle. For example, the designers’ use of heavy theatrical curtains, which had to be pushed aside as visitors entered the space created a sense of occasion that a mobile application or web-based platform perhaps could not have. Part of the brief for the built form of the Studio was that it should ‘completely conceal participants and

26 See Counts, “Spectacular Design in Museum Exhibitions”.

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Fig. 1: Talking Difference Portable Studio. Photographer: Rodney Start Copyright Museum Victoria 2012
also provide unobstructed access between inside and outside’. This was driven by a sense that the Studio should elicit a degree of intimacy and an environment in which users could create personal responses. Designers used triangular cutouts so that the user could feel enclosed, while their feet were still visible from the outside. In each touring location, the Studio was presented with a sign that read:

What is it? The Portable Studio from Museum Victoria is a place to get creative with ideas about cultural diversity, difference and race-based discrimination. Inside, you can respond to video questions created by community members using a touch screen, video camera and a microphone.

Inside, visitors interacted with a software program developed over six months between February and August 2011. In the Design Brief for the Portable Studio software, we requested that the contractors outline a series of ‘projects’ participants could undertake through a digital interface, and suggested some examples. The Brief suggested these projects should ‘provide an opportunity to create media that most participants would not have had before; be simple to explain and use; be fun and engaging; produce digital content that demonstrates cultural diversity in Victoria; (and) allow participants to respond to each other’s stories, to spark dialogue’. In completing these projects the Museum hoped participants would create an ambitious breadth of content including:

- stories about their understanding of, or encounters with cultural difference;
- more ironic and playful engagements with the idea of cultural diversity, eg; character acting, skits, mash-ups of media content;
- [and] more abstract, creative responses including music, visual art, design.

Users would be invited to respond to ‘trigger material’, created in other multimedia interventions which would be chosen by Museum staff for ‘its ability to spark dialogue about cultural diversity’. The Museum hoped the software would show participants’ contributions ‘to be linked

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to other work produced … to create the impression of a dialogue focused on certain themes’.33 One of the modules proposed in the Brief was a ‘[l]arge scale “Question and Answer” … graphic display through which participants pose questions about cultural diversity and create answers to the questions of others’.34 The Brief gave examples of the sorts of questions it hoped might be included, such as: ‘when is a time that you felt invisible; when do you feel most at home; [and] how do you respond to racial discrimination?’35

The software proposed by the successful contractors was loyal to this brief, though rather than providing a variety of ‘projects’ only the ‘Question and Answer’ option would be made available.36 After a design and testing phase involving a series of meetings between Museum staff and staff from Portable Studio, the first iteration of the software was completed in September 2011.37 The software was designed to be presented on a 21 inch touch screen with a separate camera. A wireless keyboard was available, along with two standard computer speakers stored in a box at users’ feet. Users touched the screen to interrupt a screen saver featuring an animation of the words ‘Talking Difference’ assembling and dissembling in bright colours. As indicated below (Fig. 2), a randomly selected video question then played in the centre of the screen. Beneath it was an option to ‘Add your own response’ and running along the bottom of the screen were a series of speech bubbles – some depicting the faces of other users – with the instruction: ‘View a response to this question’. Users could press arrows to navigate through these responses, or to move on to another question altogether.

36 The proposal divided development of the Portable Studio into a number of stages and proposed that only the first of these could be completed with the available funding. This stage would produce software allowing users to browse and view questions and responses, add new responses (audio, video, or text), and flag questions as inappropriate. The proposal also included tutorial screens and a simple spreadsheet for staff to access the data produced by participants. In later stages, the contractors suggested the software could be modified to allow remote access to Museum staff to manage responses and publish on line as well as an option for users to create their own questions. Portable Studios, “Talking Difference Pod Stages”, 2011, Museum Victoria Digital Archive.
A button labelled ‘Show me how’ triggered a short instructional video, which framed the purpose of the interactive as encouraging dialogue about ‘what makes us different and what makes us the same’. When a user chose to add a response, they were prompted to enter a ‘nickname’ to be displayed publicly, and asked if they preferred to respond with video, audio, drawing, or writing. If they chose to create a video or audio response, the next screen offered a ‘record’ symbol and a countdown. Users were reminded of the question to which they were responding by text at the top of the screen. If they chose to respond with writing, a simple text box appeared. For the drawing option users were provided with coloured pens and a small whiteboard, which they would hold up to the camera to create a two second ‘snapshot’ video of their drawing. Finally, they were asked to tick a box agreeing to the project’s terms and conditions, which were adapted from Museum Victoria’s ‘Conditions of Use for Online Contributions’. It is safe to assume that few users read the Terms and Conditions in their entirety. At the time, Museum staff were aware of this problem

Fig. 2: Talking Difference Portable Studio User Interface. Copyright Museum Victoria 2012.

39 As is turned out, this was the least popular option and was revised in the second iteration of the Studio.
40 While there is no record of how many users read the Terms and Conditions, my assumption here is informed by Yannis Bakos’ study of 48,000 visitors to online software companies which found that ‘very
and included a summary on the main page, which explained that participants’ contributions would be made publicly available by the Museum. The terms and conditions offer an impression of the limits to the dialogue envisioned by museum staff. ‘While we encourage discussion and value feedback’, they stated, ‘we expect all contributors to demonstrate an appropriate level of respect for alternative points of view and for people’s privacy’.41 A contribution to the Portable Studio could be ‘edited, removed or not published if Museum Victoria consider(ed) it to be:

- defamatory, or otherwise unlawful or that it violates laws regarding harassment, discrimination, privacy or contempt
- intentionally false or misleading
- an infringement of copyright or other intellectual property rights
- abusive or offensive, including obscenity, blasphemy and racial vilification
- compromising the privacy of yourself, other contributors or of Museum Victoria staff, or containing inappropriate personal information
- seeking to endorse commercial products or activities or to solicit business
- deliberate provocation of other community members
- asking for a valuation or comment on the worth of an object’.42

In practice, the identification of inappropriate content was taken on in an ad hoc fashion by library staff and users who were invited to flag content they found to be inappropriate. This ‘flagging’ mechanism removed the offending material from public view until it could be reviewed by museum staff. Users were asked to include a reason for flagging the material and usually entered one word such as ‘silly’, ‘rude’, or ‘inappropriate’.43 This was presented internally at the Museum as a kind of ‘community moderation’. However, since museum and library staff were the ones most likely to flag material, most of these flags were a form of official rather than ‘community’ moderation in the sense more commonly applied to online environments.44

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44 Of the 268 items that were flagged as inappropriate in the first phase of the Studio the majority (60 percent, 163) were flagged by Museum staff, which is indicative of the staff practice of reviewing content at the end of each residency. The most common reason for flagging content given by non-Museum users was ‘silly’ (13), which, given the small sample, may reflect the style of a single librarian, rather than an assessment of multiple users. In his taxonomy of approaches to online moderation, US legal scholar
While this moderation put some limits on what could be presented, the Studio did not sort content by theme or quality. Once the system had randomly selected the first question for a user to view, the user browsed through a randomly ordered set of questions. Early in the planning process members of the project team met with museum staff working on the project that would later become the Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours exhibition.  Participants in the meeting raised the possibility of a ‘joint online presence’ for the new exhibition and Talking Difference. Members of the exhibition team thought the message produced at such a site should be ‘more structured and curated’ whereas the emphasis of Talking Difference was on facilitating ‘fluid’ or ‘organic’ exchanges. In my recollection, this difference in approach was one of the reasons the two projects diverged from one another. Not only were questions displayed at random, responses to each were displayed in the order in which they were produced, rather than according to theme, quality, or location. This choice had a lasting effect on the kind of the dialogue the project was able to facilitate and present.

The result was that the experience of using the Studio was more akin to accessing an archive than a carefully curated, narrative-based museum display. In one sense, this freed the Portable Studio from the boundaries that museum scholar Danial Spock has identified in behaviourist or ‘coercive’

James Grimmelmann presents norm-setting among a community of users as one among many approaches to organising content. While the intention of the project was to instill a culture of moderation and review among users, in practice, the project was generally more aligned with Grimmelmann’s notion of moderation by exclusion enacted by figures of authority, rather than a peer group. James Grimmelmann, “The Virtues of Moderation”, Yale Journal of Law & Technology 17 (January 2015): 42–109.

As discussed briefly in the Introduction to this thesis, Kylie Message has positioned the exhibition as a form of anti-racist praxis arguing that ‘beyond the role played by the overarching concepts of identity and belonging, important themes exist in the exhibition, including racism and questions about how the museum has sought to relate to the changing social context and climate of multiculturalism within which it operates’. Kylie Message, “Returning to Racism: New Challenges for Museums and Citizenship”, in Museums and Migration: History, Memory and Politics, ed. Laurence Gouriévidis, Museum Meanings (Abingdon, Oxon & New York: Routledge, 2014), 46.


In some ways, this debate aligns with the ‘endless source of conflict’ between curatorial staff and education staff in the 1960s and 1970s that Kathleen McLean identifies in her analysis of dialogue in museums. See Kathleen McLean, “Museum Exhibitions and the Dynamics of Dialogue”, Daedalus, no. 3 (1999): 89.
digital interactives where:

either the visitor gets precisely what I (developer/designer/educator) want them to get, or the thing’s a flop … the interactive forces the visitor to conform to it on its terms, not the visitor’s terms.\textsuperscript{48}

The Portable Studio presented content without interpretation, summary or synthesis and hence encouraged the possibility of multiple contradictory responses being co-presented. However, this approach also limited the extent to which the Museum could draw out the complex differences between ideas and arguments presented. Rather, crucial elements such as the order in which visitors encountered perspectives, the range of demographics they encountered, and the range of opinions presented on particular topics was left to chance. I give these considerations more attention in later chapters. However, what is clear from the planning for Talking Difference is that while the Museum relinquished a degree of control over dialogue in the Portable Studio, the project was intended to facilitate dialogue that supported an anti-racist agenda.

One site where the Museum maintained a higher degree of control over this process was in the workshops which proceeded each Portable Studio residency. These were conducted in each touring location. From its completion in August 2011, the Studio was assembled and dissembled for fortnightly residencies in public libraries in outer suburban Melbourne and regional Victoria, and at the Immigration Museum. The Studio debuted with an initial tour of libraries in the City of Brimbank in Melbourne’s West in late 2011 and early 2012. This included visits to public libraries in Sunshine, Sydenham and Deer Park.\textsuperscript{49} We chose the City of Brimbank because of its high level of cultural diversity and because of an existing relationship between the organisations.\textsuperscript{50} In preparation for these residencies a group of young people was invited to take part in workshops related to the Studio through advertisements in the local library and the networks of the Brimbank


\textsuperscript{49} For a full listed of touring locations and dates see Appendix A: Talking Difference Portable Studio Touring and Workshop Schedule.

Youth Services and the Centre for Multicultural Youth.

The group, known as the Talking Difference Champions, gathered in a library in Melbourne’s Western suburbs and nearby community facilities for six, hour-long training sessions. The Museum engaged an external workshop facilitator to work with me in the development of workshops with the goal of preparing the young people to ‘produce seed content for the Talking Difference Portable Studio’ and ‘learn skills in group facilitation (to prepare) their own sessions with community members in the Portable Studio’. While facilitator led the workshops, I had a role as a co-facilitator. Representing the voice of the Museum, I explained operational details in these workshops, such as dates, places and limitations, while the facilitator led discussion of personal identity and cultural diversity. This aligned with an early aspiration in Talking Difference that the voice of Museum staff would be decentred in favour of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) participants and contractors external to the Museum.

The workshops generally focused on personal identity and concepts of similarity and difference rather than taking an historical or systemic approach to understanding racism. In one activity participants were asked to break into pairs and share three stories they felt described ‘who they are’. Other activities included role-playing, in which participants practiced explaining the rationale and function of the Portable Studio to ‘passers-by’ and encouraged them to participate in the project. This was intended as a means of preparing participants to deliver their own workshops in libraries alongside the Studio. While they were planned and advertised in the libraries, however, these follow up workshops failed to attract any participants from the general public. Thus, the key

52 For example, the first workshop featured a ‘What makes me’ exercise in which participants asked any questions they liked about the workshop facilitator. He would respond in such a way as to lead the conversation to discussion of difference and diversity. Museum Victoria, “Talking Difference Portable Studio Champions Workshop 1 Running Sheet”, 23 June 2011, Museum Victoria Digital Archive. One of the workshops was held at the Immigration Museum and included a tour of the Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours exhibition. The workshop included a discussion of the exhibition’s tram scenario, an immersive video installation in which visitors stand inside a recreation of a Melbourne tram and watch a fictionalised recreation of a racist incident projected on one wall. Visitors choose to watch the scenario from a range of perspectives including victim, perpetrator, and witness.
lasting input workshop participants had on the project was through the creation of the ‘seed questions’. Perhaps as a consequence of the workshops’ focus on difference and commonality, the questions participants produced in this first phase of the project had a distinctly personal element to them. They ranged from the very specific – such as ‘what do you think of your skin colour?’ – to broader questions, such as ‘what has your culture taught you?’ These questions were then presented in the Studio for its tour of Brimbank Libraries and most remained for the next stage of the tour.54

At the conclusion of the tour of Brimbank, VicHealth invited the Museum to present the Studio as part of the Arts About Us Roadshow traveling to regional centres across Victoria. In 2012, the Studio completed two-week residencies in the towns of Shepparton, Bairnsdale, Lakes Entrance, Horsham, and Mildura.55 Given the distance staff would travel from Melbourne, we modified the original workshop program for the regional tour so that participants took part in a single workshop, which I facilitated on the first day of each residency. This represented a departure from the original idea of contracting CALD facilitators external to the museum to facilitate workshops. At this time, we also expanded the target participant groups beyond CALD young people. To attract participants to the workshops I worked with advice from community organisations in each location, including shire councils and libraries, Aboriginal cooperatives, ethnic and migrant support services, TAFEs (Technical and Further Education institutes) and schools.

The regional workshops allowed less time for skills development and focused on the process of devising and recording questions for the Studio. I began workshops with an introduction to the project and the Studio followed by an activity about immigration history borrowed from the education programs at the Immigration Museum. I asked participants to think back through

54 For an analysis of the questions produced in the Talking Difference project, see Chapter Five ‘Dialogue in Talking Difference’. For a full list of the questions created in the Portable Studio between August 2011 and March 2016 see Appendix B: Talking Difference Portable Studio Questions.

generations of their family and identify a family member who migrated to Australia, concluding with the message that ‘all non-Indigenous Australians share a recent migrant heritage’. I then talked through statistics from VicHealth related to racism, highlighting their finding that:

Vichealth research shows that most Australians agree different cultures living together is a positive thing. It also shows that race-based discrimination has become a serious mental health issue in Victoria. One way of challenging this is by engaging in open and respectful dialogue.

This focus on racism and research was a product of a ‘tightening’ of the workshops after the Brimbank tour around the core messages of the Arts About Us program. I showed participants previous questions from the Studio and asked them to respond as a group or in pairs. I facilitated conversation about each question, aiming to draw participants’ attention to VicHealth’s ‘promising approaches’ for challenging race-based discrimination. The workshop concluded with an explanation of how to use the Portable Studio and time for participants to create questions.

Our intention was that participants would create questions relevant to people in each local community. However, the questions participants created rarely referred specifically to local issues and more often referred to issues broadly relevant to the participant groups. For example, Aboriginal participants in Lakes Entrance and Bairnsdale created questions related to Aboriginal identity and politics at a national level, recently-arrived refugee background residents in Mildura.

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58 As discussed in Chapter Two ‘Governments, Museums and Intercultural Dialogue’, VicHealth’s seven Promising Approaches are ‘building empathy, addressing false beliefs and stereotypes, building positive social norms, highlighting incompatible beliefs, promoting dialogue, emphasising commonality and diversity, facilitating inter-cultural contact’. VicHealth, “Promoting Diversity Through the Arts, Funding Guidelines – Community Arts Grants” (Melbourne: VicHealth, February 2009), Provided in hardcopy by Jim Rimmer, VicHealth, 22 May 2015.
59 These included the following ‘I’m very clear on my Aboriginal cultural history, my background, it is my identity, it is who I am as a person, it shapes my values, and I’m very clear on my history with my laws and rules for everything living and not-living, and I have very strong values. But I was wondering, what’s your culture? What are your values?’, Talking Difference Portable Studio (TDPS), User Question 41, Phase 1.
created questions related to resettling in Australia after arriving by boat. I then added these questions to the Studio software. The installation remained in each library for a fortnight.

This regional tour was my last time working personally on Talking Difference and produced my most enduring memories of the project. Assembling and dissembling the Studio with library staff in each town, delivering workshops, and driving alone across Victoria with the Studio all strengthened my connection with the work and ideas. As I mentioned in the Introduction these months of work immersed in the practical day-to-day delivery of the project offered a catalyst to begin my current research and seek answers to the broader questions that guide this thesis. However, the project continued after I resigned from the Museum in 2013 and developed and changed over time.

Mechanisms for dialogue – Phase II

In 2013, the Immigration Museum received VicHealth funding to continue Talking Difference in the second round of the Arts About Us program. The Museum’s proposal was to develop a new Portable Studio for schools. Beginning in 2013, the new Studio toured to classrooms across Melbourne in a program organised in partnership with the Department of Education and the Catholic Education office. In addition, the Museum developed a separate ‘community’ Studio which would continue to tour to libraries and community centres from 2014 onwards. The Talking Difference Fellowship continued throughout this second phase of the project and was linked to the school workshops. Artist-facilitators would conduct workshops with school children through media such as hip hop and animation. As I mentioned in the Introduction, while school-based programs offer rich sites for the analysis of museum programming and intercultural dialogue, given the rich body of literature developed by other scholars this thesis focuses on the elements of Talking Difference that occurred in public spaces.

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60 For more on the process of producing questions in workshops see Chapter Five ‘Dialogue in Talking Difference’.
61 For a list of residencies and workshop locations see Appendix A: Talking Difference Portable Studio Touring and Workshop Schedule.
62 As discussed in the Introduction, between 2012 and 2014 researchers at Deakin University and Melbourne University undertook an Australian Research Council funded project entitled ‘Using
In this second phase the Museum retired the original studio and took a different approach to the design process. Rather than contracting designers to build a bespoke installation, the Museum ordered an off-the-shelf display system from Germany consisting of dozens of brightly coloured interlocking magnetic triangles. The principal difference between this installation and the first iteration of the Portable Studio, was that users no longer recorded in a ‘semi-enclosed’ space. There was an opening in the curved wall of the display directly behind the user. This meant that users were less detached from the space around them, perhaps felt less intimacy, and the videos produced in the second phase were less consistent in their composition due to the absence of the backdrop curtains and the presence of library visitors in the background.

Fig. 3: Talking Difference Portable Studio Phase II. Copyright Museum Victoria 2016.

Once the workshops had been presented, and the questions loaded onto the Studio, the installation was made available for members of the general public to create responses. Between 2011 and 2016, over the course of the 31 residencies under consideration in this thesis, participants created 152 questions and over 1,255 responses. While these rates of participation may seem low, research by scholars of participatory design Daniella Petrelli et al. suggests that only a fraction of users can be expected to create content in digital interactives. In their analysis of digital interactive elements at the Museum voor Cultuur en Wetenschap (Museum for Culture and Science) in the Hague, Netherlands, Petrelli et al. found only 2.5 percent of users actually produced content using the devices. They cited similarly low rates of participation in another digital Dutch museum installation, where only 17 percent of visitors even touched the device more than once during the period of analysis. Of course, rates of participation will vary depending on the intention and design of each installation. What is clear is that the rates of participation in the Portable Studio satisfied Immigration Museum staff, who highlighted the amount of content created as an example of the project’s ‘success’ in the final report delivered to their funders VicHealth. The vast majority of this content engaged (in some way) with the project’s broad focus on race-based discrimination and cultural diversity. While I have preferred qualitative over quantitative methods in this thesis, in my examination I found only a very small number of responses did not at least engage in some small way with the question at hand. I present the results of this examination over the course of the next two chapters.

A small selection of this content was eventually made available on the Museum’s website. This online activity featured heavily in the Museum’s aspirations for fostering dialogue though Talking Difference. The Museum proposed a ‘multi-platform’ project, where online engagement was made central. But as the project progressed, public online engagement became less of a priority and engagement through the mechanism of the Studio and workshops was prioritised. When it was launched in 2012, the Talking Difference website featured a kind of re-creation of the Studio.

which was mainly for the presentation of selected video questions and responses created in the physical Studio. Users could contribute their own responses by text or by uploading a video to an external website, like YouTube or Vimeo, and emailing a link to Museum staff. While some text comments were created over the course of the project, few participants took up the option of submitting videos online. This likely reflects the lack of a fluid means by which participants could add their content. There were several attempts over the course of the project to engender dialogue online, with limited success. In 2010 the Museum posted information about the workshops to a blog on the Museum’s website and encouraged participants to reflect on their experiences. This intervention had minimal take up. For example, during the Portable Studio residencies, I posted some content from the Studio on the Museum’s Facebook page and linked it to the profiles of participants who had created seed questions. This took place on an ad hoc basis, however, and did not create any sustained online interaction. During the school programs, the Museum led a series of online workshops using Google Hangouts as a video conferencing tool to link school students with the Talking Difference Fellow. The Museum published a recording of one of these ‘hangouts’, but again, while the content of the video included a degree of dialogue and interaction it generated minimal online interaction.

So, while the project was originally intended to create spaces for intercultural dialogue online, in practice the key sites of dialogue created by Talking Difference were in physical spaces either through workshops or in the Portable Studio. Partly for this reason, I focus on these physical sites in my analysis over the following chapters.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the mechanisms the Museum put in place to facilitate dialogue through Talking Difference. Over the course of the project, the Museum came to maintain stricter

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67 Museum Victoria, Talking Difference with L-Fresh the Lion, video documentation of Google Hangout with the Talking Difference Artist Fellow, 21 December 2014, accessed 1 September 2018 available from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IbNadgWFh7g.
68 On 20 July 2018, the video had received 168 views, four likes, and no comments.
boundaries on the nature of the participation it engendered. Aside from early community consultation and engagement in the project’s first year, community co-creation and collaboration in Talking Difference was limited to the workshops at the beginning of each residency. While an artist fellowship, and schools program continued alongside the Portable Studio, the archive of questions and answers created in the Portable Studio offers the most literal form of dialogue, and thereby offers a ready means of addressing this thesis’ focus on the emergence, practice and social meaning of intercultural dialogue as it is documented and disseminated by museums. This chapter has demonstrated that while the Museum set themes for the content created in workshops, the Portable Studio itself functioned more like an archive than a curated museum experience. A significant element of this was that content was displayed on the basis of the date it was created, rather than to fulfil a curatorial vision. As I will argue throughout this thesis, the Museum’s decision not to highlight individual responses, or draw contending responses together, itself a product of the Talking Difference team’s commitment to decentering the curatorial voice of the museum, may have limited the extent to which the Studio functioned as a tool to advance reasoned and affecting engagement with the perspective of others. In the following chapters, the workshops accompanying residencies of the Portable Studio and the content participants produced in the studio form the basis of the analysis. This begins in the next chapter with a critical analysis of the ways in which the museum framed identity, and how participants framed their own processes of identification in response.69

69 See Rimi Khan for more on the notion of participants in community arts programs frame their identities as much as they are framed by discourses arts funding and programming. Rimi Khan, *Art in Community: The Provisional Citizen*, Palgrave Pivot (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
Chapter 4: Identity in Talking Difference

Introduction

Questions of identity were at the heart of Talking Difference. In over a thousand contributions Portable Studio users around Victoria produced a cacophony of representations, variously identifying themselves as funny, clumsy, gay, Aboriginal, Maltese, Australian, cosmopolitan. In this chapter, I disentangle these representations of identity as a means of assessing the effectiveness of the Studio as a tool for encouraging forms of dialogue that express respect for, and acceptance of, cultural difference.

In my analysis I consider these representations as products of a museum intervention, and thereby, contributions to discourses of identification, rather than as documents informing the more ethnographic project of establishing the ‘identity’ of participants. As Richard Sandell has argued museums ‘generate ideological effects by constructing and communicating a particular vision of society’. Indeed, whether or not they were influenced by the museum’s framing, many users of the Portable Studio aligned themselves with the Immigration Museum’s intention of ‘celebrating cultural diversity’ and ‘challenging race-based discrimination’. Having said this, while the structure of the installation and accompanying workshops mediated the content produced, the contributory nature of the projects saw a shift in speaking position from the curator to the user. The result of this shift was a messy and complex field of representations, rather than the cohesive approximation of identities more common in conventional exhibitionary practice that is intended to communicate diversity. In the Studio these many representations sat parallel to one another. They form the basis of the analysis in this chapter.

4 This is in contrast to the Talking Difference website, where content was selected to address particular themes, including ‘identity’, ‘music’, ‘media’, ‘skin colour’. Museum Victoria, “Talking Difference”,
I begin with an examination of the ways in which the Museum framed identity in the workshops and the Portable Studio, before moving to the digital content created during the Studio’s residencies. I divide my analysis into moments where participants foregrounded fixed notions of ethno-cultural collective identity, and moments where participants foregrounded personal dispositions, experiences of hybridity and other forms of identification.\(^5\) I use these categories to make sense of the many forms of identification that the Studio encouraged, rather than to draw clear boundaries between them. In this project I am attentive to established scholarly work on the negotiation between individual and collective notions of identification.\(^6\) As we shall see throughout this chapter, while many participants in Talking Difference performed ethno-cultural

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\(^5\) Anthon\(\text{y}\) K. Appiah, “Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction”, in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann and Charles Taylor (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1994), 151. I am conscious here of the distinction that John Falk, a pioneer in the field of visitor research, made between capital ‘I’ identities and lower-case ‘i’ identities. The former, he argued had been foundational to the way in which museums had defined their audiences since the 1960, and include age, gender, location, and ethnicity. The latter referred to more generic dispositions related to visitors’ lifestyles, opinions, and attitudes, which Falk considered to indicate more clearly than other identifiers ‘how visitors construct meaningful experiences before, during, and after visits to cultural institutions’. John Falk, quoted in Emily Dawson and Eric Jensen, “Towards A Contextual Turn in Visitor Studies: Evaluating Visitor Segmentation and Identity-Related Motivations”, *Visitor Studies* 14, no. 2 (July 2011): 127-40.

\(^6\) For example, while the political philosopher Charles Taylor acknowledges that collective identification, such as identification with ethno-cultural assemblages, is never static and is forged through dialogue, when considering claims for recognition he argues that collective identifications should take precedence over individual preferences. Here a claim for recognition could be part of a formal process of advocating for one’s cultural rights, or just as easily could refer to a claim as informal as creating a video in Talking Difference. Taylor’s foregrounding of collective identities is intended to offer a means of providing equal dignity for all people in society through a politics of difference. The political philosopher Anthony K. Appiah has questioned the balance Taylor strikes between individual autonomy and collective identification. He calls for an account of identity that is ‘not too tightly scripted’ and recognizes the limitations of both a ‘monological’ vision of identity – isolated at the level of the individual – and a culturally essentialist vision of identity, where the autonomy of the individual is subsumed within a collective claim for recognition. Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and “The Politics of Recognition”: An Essay*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992); Appiah, “Identity, Authenticity, Survival”; Stuart Hall, “A Conversation with Stuart Hall”, *The Journal of the International Institute* 7, no. 1 (1999): [no pages].
identities welded to a notion of the collective, the Studio also facilitated responses that prioritised individual over collective identification.\(^7\)

In the following analysis I argue that the Studio enabled participants to describe nuanced identifications in dialogue with a field of collectivities and discourses, unbounded by established museological norms regarding the representation of difference, and that this is one of the strengths of the project.

**Framing identity: the role of workshops in the process of representing identity**

The Portable Studio ostensibly represented a drive to decentre the official speaking position of the Museum. This is exemplified by the effort the museum made to develop questions for the Portable Studio with those who participated in the workshops. A crucial part of this process was as a means of framing identification in the Studio, including choices the Museum made in gathering workshops participants. For the first tour to Brimbank Libraries in 2011, and in many of the tour sites to follow, the Museum targeted young people who were defined as ‘culturally and linguistically diverse’ (CALD).\(^8\) The focus on attracting young people as champions for the project

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\(^7\) This push and pull between individual autonomy and collective identification, of course, fuels a wealth of sociological and cultural analysis. Some postcolonial thinkers such as Homi Bhabha have located the dialogue between individual autonomy and collective identification within the language of migrancy and cultural flows, positioning contingency and hybridity as constitutive factors in the construction of ‘in between’ postcolonial identifications. Others, such as Stuart Hall, have tempered a constructivist appreciation of the contingency of identity with an acknowledgement that identity is not ‘what you get up in the morning and feel like being’; rather, the constitutive elements from which individuals form their identities are to be found in their social and historical conditions. In Halls’ reading these identifications are ‘never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across difference, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions’. Hall, “Who Needs Identity?”, 4. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge Classics (London and New York: Routledge, 2004). Hall, “A Conversation with Stuart Hall”, No page; Hall; Appiah, “Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction”.

\(^8\) Over time Museum staff found that the Portable Studio had a broader appeal in terms of audience. In an interview for this thesis, Tatiana Mauri, the Project Manager said that the project ‘transcended ages and included people ‘from really young primary school age right through to people in their eighties ... each having really meaningful contributions to the overall dialogue of the project’. This shift had an impact on the organisations that the Museum approached with its call out for workshop participants, particularly once the project took up residencies in regional Victoria. The Museum approached organisations from well outside a youth focus, including Aboriginal Land Councils, Local Government...
in Brimbank emerged from a perception that the program would most appeal to a younger audience. In its earliest incarnation in Melbourne’s western suburbs, the Museum targeted young people aged 15-25, and approached youth-focused organisations to advertise the opportunity. The Talking Difference ‘champions’ who took part in the first workshops included young people originally from Tanzania, Sudan, South East Asia and Eastern Europe. The focus on CALD young people in the first phase of the project invites comparison with a broader field of practice and scholarship focusing on ‘ethnic youth’. The trope of the ‘young CALD leader’ has been central to discourses of critical multiculturalism, particularly in Australia and the United Kingdom, and much of this work tends towards engagement with hybridity and fluidity of identification. In most instances the project positioned migrants and refugees from the local community as facilitators of dialogue, thereby challenging traditional structures of expertise in museum practice.

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Flyers were distributed by the Centre for Multicultural Youth and Brimbank Youth Services, who shared a building across the rear carpark of the Sunshine Library.

Stuart Hall has hailed emergent youth music cultures that combined elements of music from around the world as demonstrative of ‘a new cosmopolitan, vernacular, post-national, global sensibility’. Stuart Hall, “Whose Heritage? Un-Setting ‘the Heritage’, Re-Imagining the Post-Nation”, Third Text, no. 49 (1999): 13. Likewise, writing about the inadequacies of contemporary policies of multiculturalism, the economist and scholar of immigration Jock Collins positioned a focus on youth as a means of moving away from the ‘static, stereotyped and essentialist notions of ethnicity that have characterised the philosophy and practice of Australian multiculturalism’ and called for recognition of ‘the fluidity and global connectedness, alliances and identities of contemporary immigrant communities in Australia, particularly second generation youth’ Jock Collins, “Rethinking Australian Immigration and Immigrant Settlement Policy”, Journal of Intercultural Studies, no. 2 (2013): 173.

The sense that young people have a particularly fluid intercultural imagination is reflected in the growth of youth-centred arts and intercultural dialogue programs in Australia and the UK. CALD young people were a target group for intercultural dialogue programs for many years before Arts About Us and Talking Difference. In the rise in intercultural programming that followed the September 11 attacks, organisations like the Centre for Multicultural Youth became leaders in the delivery of intercultural dialogue programs. Internationally, over a similar timeframe many intercultural dialogue programs targeted adolescents as people at a unique stage of development of ‘critical thinking and civic agency’. Adriana Aldana, Katie Richards-Schuster, and Barry Checkoway, “Dialogic Pedagogy for Youth Participatory Action Research: Facilitation of an Intergroup Empowerment Program”, Social Work with Groups 39, no. 4 (October 2016): 339–58, doi.org/10.1080/01609513.2015.1076370. Michális S Michael, “Developing a Regional Interfaith and Intercultural Network in Melbourne’s Northern Suburbs”, Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice 4, no. 2 (2012): 15–46.

In some instances, rather than being gathered a ‘community members’, the attendees of the workshops
The workshops aimed to avoid limiting the boundaries of the project to ethno-specific identification. While elements focused on the history and sociological characteristics of racism, the workshops generally focused on narrative, personal identity, and concepts of similarity and difference. As project facilitator Sam Boivin suggested in an interview for this thesis:

Talking about identity … gives them the opportunity to kind of introduce themselves (which creates) a safe space (with) people feeling a bit more comfortable within the space … conversations around racism and discrimination (were) better after the initial period about talking about identity.14

In one activity participants were asked to break into pairs and share three stories they felt described ‘who they are’. This activity was expanded in a later incarnation of the workshops when the presenter wrote his own name on the centre of the whiteboard and gradually drew out descriptors for his identity using arrows. He explained the French and English heritage in his name, his background as a migrant from New Zealand, his interest in basketball and music, and his role as a father. All of these elements, he said, contributed to making him who he was. He then invited participants to write their names in the centre of sheets of paper and to draw out similar elements of their identity on the page. Each participant would then share their sheet with the group. These activities balanced a sense of identification understood in relation to collectivities (such as ancestral nations) with a sense of identification understood at the level of the individual (such as personal preferences).

were staff from the library or local council.

13 Museum Victoria, “Champions Workshop 4 Running Sheet”. One of the workshops was held at the Immigration Museum and included a tour of the Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours exhibition. The workshop included a discussion of the exhibition’s tram scenario, an immersive video installation in which visitors stand inside a recreation of a Melbourne tram and watch a fictionalised recreation of a racist incident projected on one wall. Visitors choose to watch the scenario from a range of perspectives including victim, perpetrator, and witness. I remember one workshop participant – a young man originally from Africa – identifying with this scenario from his own experiences of racism on public transport in Melbourne. In the same session, this participant expressed a sense that he was tired of being filmed and asked that the cameras be turned off. This was one of a number of uncomfortable moments for myself as a co-facilitator because it highlighted the tension between supporting participants to express their views on one hand and harvesting ‘content’ for benefit of the museum’s program on the other.

14 Sam Boivin, Interview, 8 April 2016.

15 Sam Boivin, Interview, 8 April 2016.
The workshops grounded the exchange of ideas related to culture, politics, and society – ideas that could conceivably have formed the basis of an impersonal Habermasean public deliberation16 – in the personal experience of participants, rather than sociological or statistical analysis. This unfolded differently in different workshops. For example, in a workshop in Melbourne’s western suburbs, participants had been briefed before the workshop that the visiting Portable Studio would provide an opportunity for them to ‘tell their story’.17 The workshop took place during a regular session for learners of English – a group consisting entirely of first generation migrants. The result was that when it came time for participants to reflect on the notion of identity and culture in contemporary Australia, each took turns to tell a story of migration. The participants generally told stories in terms that reproduced the tropes Australian museum scholar Ian McShane has identified in museum representations of migrant history.18 These include the ‘rebirth’ narrative which focuses on how things changed for the better for migrants on arrival in Australia. For example, one participant, a migrant from Italy, reflected that ‘the hard things were the language, but I push myself and I am happy’. Another participant from Iraq said, ‘I love this country, I found peace here, I’m happy at work, happy everywhere’.19 In another workshop in rural Victoria, where the majority of participants were born in Australia, rather than addressing migration stories, the conversation tended to focus on interpersonal prejudice and stereotypes. These conversations, too, were grounded in the personal experience of participants. Participants spoke about feeling negatively stereotyped for their white skin when visiting East Timor, or for having red hair in Australia.20

In response, the facilitator placed these experiences in comparison with an example of sustained racial discrimination. He relayed the experience of a Sikh man involved with the project. The facilitator told his story like this:

[This man has] been identifiable as a Sikh his whole life. And every time someone makes a joke [about it] it’s like a tap on the shoulder. So people would make fun of his beard when he was trying

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20 Participant Observation, Talking Difference Workshop, 8 April 2016.
to grow a beard, when he was fourteen years old, someone makes fun of his turban, another tap on the shoulder; a couple of weeks later, someone makes a reference, ‘what’s in his backpack, is there a bomb in there?’ it’s a joke, you know ‘just kidding mate, it’s a joke, don’t take offense’.

[With each of these instances, the facilitator would slowly tap himself on the shoulder]

Over time it just builds up and builds up, and you know, now he’s a 25-year-old man and … whenever anyone says a joke … he just has to stop them straight away. Because he can no longer tolerate that in his life. Now for the person who’s making that joke, they’re maybe not realising that this is something that’s been reoccurring throughout someone’s life. And I asked him how often it happens, and he says on a weekly basis.21

This story prompted silence around the room.22 It is telling that in the limited time the facilitator had to communicate a message about racism, he chose to tell a story related to personal identity and experience, rather than to recount data available to the Museum through VicHealth. This reflects the importance that storytelling, and personal experience played in the framing of identity in the project. Importantly, as opposed to the Portable Studio, the facilitator here brought together contrasting experiences of cultural difference in such a way as to provide social context. Without this intervention, the workshop participants would not have had the tools to distinguish the intermittent (and generally lighthearted) attention sometimes drawn to red hair in Australia, from the sustained discrimination and ‘jokes’ commonly experienced by non-White Australians. As we will see in the analysis of content, this provision of considered social context around the expression of identity and difference was unusual in the Studio itself. This is despite the fact that the questions participants created for the Studio invited a diverse array of identifications.

Some of the questions participants created for the Studio foregrounded collectivities; for example, ‘what has your culture taught you?’, and ‘have you ever been ashamed of your cultural background?’23 Others foregrounded individual inclinations and preferences such as ‘do you express yourself with what you wear?’ and ‘what does music mean to you?’24 As discussed in Chapter Three, these questions were accompanied in the Studio by an optional instructional video

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21 Participant Observation, Talking Difference Workshop, 8 April 2016.
23 Talking Difference Portable Studio (TDPS), User Question 27, Phase 1; TDPS, User Question 141, Phase 2.
24 TDPS, User Question 12, Phase 1; TDPS, User Question 13, Phase 1.
that framed the project as an opportunity to discuss ‘what makes us different, and what makes us the same’. These prompts framed the Portable Studio as a site of liberal cosmopolitanism, where participants were invite to express identification with a range of collectivities as well as individual preferences. The Studio presented many voices alongside one another, rather than the omni-present, disinterested narrator – ‘the reassuringly measured voice of unassailable institutional authority’25 – that might ordinarily play a role in synthesising evidence and narrating the performance of identity. This invitation for participants to speak opened the field of representation beyond common boundaries for the representation of difference, an impression supported by the following analysis of participant responses in the Portable Studio.

Discourses of collective identity in the studio

The breadth of possibilities for the representation of identity in Talking Difference did not always lead to the hybrid, contingent, and intersectional identifications celebrated in much scholarly work on the notion of identity. Many participants articulated collective identities in relation to ‘cultural heritage’, perhaps at odds with a more fluid sense of identity. In this section I present content from the Studio that foregrounded relatively fixed discourses of collective identity under three themes: Aboriginal identities, national identities, and migrant identities.

‘It is who I am as a person’: Representing Aboriginal identities

Narratives produced by and about Aboriginal people can complicate the vision of identity in a globalising world as fluid, hybrid and unmoored from place. Aboriginal Australian scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson offers a convincing critique of the postcolonial embrace of migrancy and hybridity as metaphors for identity in settler colonial contexts. Surveying work by Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy and others, she argues that the reification of unfixed and hybrid identities in postcolonial writing evades proper understanding of the notion of belonging, particularly where

inadequate attention is given to the ‘legal and social status … economic and political relations (and) imperial legacy’ of settler colonial environments. In reference to Aboriginal belonging Moreton-Robinson argues that an emphasis on migrancy silences Aboriginal people’s ‘ontological relationship to land, the ways that country is constitutive of us’. In this argument Aboriginal Australian subjectivities cannot be divorced from the context and experience of colonisation, particularly the legal fiction of terra nullius, which has been used to undermine Aboriginal claims to belonging in Australia. Some contemporary museums have begun to present separate spaces for Aboriginal narratives. In recognition of the unique status of Aboriginal identities in Australian cultural life, these Museums have conducted the planning and development of exhibitions and programs in a more collaborative manner than in spaces that focus on ‘mainstream’ narratives.

Unlike a conventional exhibition, the content in Talking Difference is presented without interpretation. The spontaneous and brief nature of contributions to the Studio limited the extent to which participants were encouraged to provide the context for which Moreton-Robinson calls. For example, in describing their identities, Aboriginal participants in the Studio rarely referred explicitly to the social and political impact of colonisation. However, contributions by Aboriginal participants did tend to present a sense of identity as complete and unchanging rather than as hybrid and in flux. This was more often the case in the questions created than in the responses they

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27 Moreton-Robinson, “I Still Call Australia Home”; Bhabha, The Location of Culture.
29 Exhibitions like the First Peoples gallery, part of the Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre at Melbourne Museum, deliver narratives deeply connected to the land and landscape, as well as contemporary reflections on diverse Aboriginal identities and political action. As curator Amanda Reynolds explained, these narratives, objects, and design elements were assembled over many years of collaboration with an Aboriginal Reference Group. Amanda Reynolds, “First Peoples Exhibition, Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre at Melbourne Museum”, Museums Australia Magazine 22, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 20–23. For an analysis of the role practice of this kind plays in broader discourses about Aboriginality in Australia see Chris Healy, “Very Special Treatment”, in South Pacific Museums: Experiments in Culture., ed. Chris Healy and Andrea Witcomb (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University ePress, 2006), 6.1-6.10.
elicited. The following questioner, a participant in a workshop with an Aboriginal organisation in Lakes Entrance, Victoria, took the unusual step of outlining her speaking position as part of her question:

I'm very clear on my Aboriginal cultural history, my background. It is my identity; it is who I am as a person. It shapes my values, and I'm very clear on my history with my laws and rules for everything living and non-living, and I have very strong values. But I was wondering: what's your culture? What are your values?30

Without going into detail about the nature of these laws and rules, the speaker presents a sense of certainty about her Aboriginal identity and its relationship to ‘everything living and non-living’. She does not present identity as a constant negotiation in a field of shifting cultural flows, but as steadily reliant on ‘cultural history (and) background’. By adding a question about culture and values to this statement, the questioner creates a space for the reciprocal articulation of non-Aboriginal identities. The description of cohesive Aboriginal norms as a basis for identity in the present offers opposition to the physical and cultural dispossession of Aboriginal people in which, as Aboriginal historian Tony Birch argues, ‘Europeans have either denied the indigenous people’s presence, or have completely devalued our cultures’.31

In interpreting these expressions of Aboriginal identity as cohesive, I do not mean to argue that they appear static or unresponsive to political circumstances.32 In some instances Aboriginal participants appear to have used the studio to leverage a sense of a cohesive cultural identity as a tool of advocacy in response to broader discourses of indigeneity in Australia. For example, in Bairnsdale in Victoria’s east, an Aboriginal participant produced a question that invited direct criticism of assimilatory practices:

Why does Indigenous Australia have to change to suit mainstream Australia? When is mainstream Australia going to change or work closely with the Indigenous people of Australia?33

30 TDPS, User Question 41, Phase 1.
32 I am cognisant here of North American anthropologist Audra Simpson’s critique of traditional ethnography a process of essentialising Indigenous cultures according to ‘timelessness, procedure and function’. Simpson, “On Ethnographic Refusal”, 68.
33 TDPS, User Question 34, Phase 1.
The question provided little description or context regarding Aboriginal identity and could refer to any number of assimilatory social and political practices. It relies for its meaning on the notion that Aboriginal identity should be maintained in resistance to assimilation. In this way, the question contributes to a discourse of cultural resistance, in which the maintenance of Aboriginal cultural practices in itself offers a form of resistance to the continuing effects of colonisation.34

Working in a similar way, a question created in Lakes Entrance in Victoria’s east drew attention to controversies around the date on which Australia Day is celebrated: 26 January. This date commemorates the landing of the First Fleet from Britain in 1788. The day has long been marked by Aboriginal people as a day of protest in acknowledgement of the devastating impact of European invasion.35 The questioner asked ‘What does Australia Day mean to you? What are you celebrating on Australia Day?’36 She did not describe Aboriginal identity or present a specific narrative about Australia Day. However, in the context of broader debates about 26 January, an Aboriginal woman presenting this question represented a subtle articulation of Aboriginal prior occupation of Australia and resistance to hegemonic discourses of nationalism. While few in number, the questions produced by Aboriginal people in the Portable Studio present coherent and cohesive Aboriginal identities at once in opposition to hegemonic colonial discourses and in dialogue with a broader, non-Aboriginal community.

36 TDPS, User Question 39, Phase 1.
Responding to Aboriginal collective identity

The responses prompted by these questions took the presentation of identity in different directions. There was only one response to the question that asked ‘what is your culture? What are your values?’ A respondent from Lakes Entrance wrote:

I was very impressed when I heard you say what you said about your values etc. as an Aboriginal person. Good on ya mate! We need people like you to speak up against all this multicultural bullshit that's wrecking this country! … People like you and I can make a big difference. We can set the wheels of change in motion. By sticking to what we KNOW is right! What is my culture? Well, I'm a white European Aussie. So, we respect the land, the people who were there before us. We have a clear set of rules and ethics re what's right and wrong.37

Like the question that prompted it, this response works in opposition to the notion of identity as fluid and hybrid, but it exposes some of the tensions that can emerge when identity is presented without context as being bounded to cultural tradition. Over the course of three days, this respondent contributed over 3,500 words of text in the Studio variously criticizing ‘multiculturalism’, ‘feminist greed’, ‘political correctness’, and ‘big business’.38 The respondent offered a conditional celebration of ‘good’ Aboriginal people writing, ‘I am often astounded by the way Aboriginal people can make me think of things in a different way to what I am accustomed to, being a white European-Aussie’.39 However, she said:

It's a shame they did not remain a pure breed because, in the ‘multicultural mongrelisation’ process, the Aboriginal people lost many of their great survival skills they possessed, and it destroyed the moral etc structure of their society, causing many of their current social problems.40

These responses are evidence of the unwieldy nature of user-generated programming. Like an overburdened shopping trolley, at times the discourse in the Portable Studio takes only the slightest push to veer off in a surprising direction. The initial question opened space for engagement with identity as bounded by cohesive cultural traditions. The respondent took this offer – and the offer of other questions in the Studio – to build an argument based on racial essentialism, leaving crucial narratives about colonialism and violence out of the frame. Perhaps because of the lack of an

38 TDPS, User Response 1337663262459, Lakes Entrance Library, 21 May 2012.
39 TDPS, User Response 1337663262459, Lakes Entrance Library, 22 May 2012.
40 TDPS, User Response 1337574023713, Lakes Entrance Library, 21 May 2012. Written response left unfinished.
interpretive framework articulating Aboriginal narratives of colonialism and dispossession, it appears this user was relieved of the responsibility to consider the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal speaking positions and experiences. Because of this, while both questioner and respondent in this sequence present forms of collective identification in opposition to a notion of fluidity and hybridity, these identifications are disembedded from their constitutive historical and social contexts.41

When considered together, the instances of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people addressing the notion of Aboriginal identity in the Portable Studio reveal two themes. Firstly, the Studio appears to have provided an opportunity for Aboriginal people to present a sense of identity as bounded to cultural heritage, rather than as something that is always fluid and hybrid. Some Aboriginal participants appeared to leverage this sense of cohesiveness in opposition to the marginalisation of Aboriginal people from the hegemonic processes of Australian settler colonialism, a process epitomised by the statement ‘why do Aboriginal people have to change?’42 However, the political potency of this performance of identity was undermined by the lack of historical and political context provided as part of the Studio experience, with the result that non-Aboriginal responses to the Aboriginal participants’ contributions tended to lack specificity and depth of understanding.43 The co-presence, without interpretation, of these very different forms of identification is a product of the uncurated nature of the Studio. As we will see through this chapter and the next, while lack of curation limited the depth of exchanges in Talking Difference, it allowed for a broad scope of identifications across the content of the Studio.

41 Hall, “A Conversation with Stuart Hall”, No pages.
43 I return to an analysis of the impact that a lack of socio-historical context had on the nuance with which participants engaged with ideas in the Portable Studio in my discussion of dialogue in Chapter Five: Dialogue in Talking Difference.
In its opposition to ‘multiculturalism’, the contribution above reflects an appeal to a discourse of collective identification grounded in an integrationist, uniform and static rendition of national identity. This form of identification functions in tension with the relatively unconditional pluralism that categorised the Talking Difference workshops. Rather than speaking of their own processes of identification many of the respondents who evoked this discourse focused on migrants who they thought should subsume their identification with ‘migrant cultures’ under a vaguely described sense of the Australian national identity. An example is provided in the following response to the question ‘how culturally diverse is Frankston?’

Wondering around Frankston I see a lot of cultures represented. And a lot of those have integrated to the Australian way of life. Some stick to their traditional way of life which is their right to do. And we can appreciate that. But overall, they have to realise they're an Australian first, and their culture comes second. Their culture doesn't come first over their Australian nationality.

This response positions migrant cultures as second tier collective identities, which should be subsumed beneath the banner of ‘Australian nationality’. A similar sense was prompted by one of the questions created in rural Victoria: ‘should all people accept an Australian way of life, including laws, the way you dress, and the way you behave?’ The question invited a reading of national identity characterised by an isomorphism of law, dress and behavior. This notion of ‘the Australian way of life’ may have influenced participants’ responses, or at least may have attracted respondents predisposed to describing national identity in bounded and uniform terms. One respondent wrote:

I believe that everyone that comes to Australia should have to read the Australian history, abide by all the laws and just be respectful to the people that are here. Everything that has happened in you[r] country leave it behind when you come to Australia.

As was the case in the previous example above, in this response, the user evokes a common integrationist perspective, devaluing the continuing connection many migrants maintain with their
home countries. Other respondents took a more flexible approach to the integration of migrants into the ‘Australian way of life’, but maintained clear boundaries about what was and was not acceptable. In these responses participants positioned the ‘Australian way of life’ as a discourse of collective identification, which was more enduring and more important than ‘culture’ which was considered to be susceptible to change. One respondent wrote: ‘Yes, they should [accept the Australian way of life]. There needs to be respect for what was here before migrants arrive [sic] and contribute their share to shaping our culture’. Here the language of a shared process of ‘shaping our culture’ appears to be borrowed from a discourse of multiculturalism. In this case, it is underpinned by an identification with a collectivity labelled the ‘Australian way of life’, which is assumed to be uniform and static. This evocation of the ‘Australian way of life’ may refer to the systems supporting democratic governance and human rights that scholars of liberal multiculturalism such as Will Kymlicka posit as the unifying principles of Western pluralistic societies. Equally, however, the phrase may be intended to represent more vaguely defined principles such as ‘the fair go’, which can elide boundaries between everyday cultural practices, systems of governance, and notions of national identity. Another respondent said:

I think maybe a bit of leniency should be given to people who break a law that isn't a law in their country. In terms of the way that you dress, I think you should be able to wear whatever you want. As long as it doesn't impact too much.

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50 TDPS, User Response 1337320287425, Lakes Entrance Library, 18 May 2012.
53 While no precise definition of ‘the Australian way of life’ is offered, as was the case in the examples above the response engages with a normative discourse of national identification where ‘what was here’ takes precedence over migrants’ cultural ‘share’.
54 TDPS, User Response 1338777677652, Horsham Library, 4 June 2012.
This respondent went on to define the ‘impact’ of certain ways of dressing by recounting a media story related to a woman wearing a ‘burqa’ to work without having worn an Islamic covering in a job interview.55

In these examples, users identify with a discourse of national identity that undermines the relatively unconditional ‘celebration of cultural diversity’ common in the Talking Difference workshops. In these articulations of identity, the participants position themselves as ‘cultural managers’ of migrant others, rather than reflecting on their personal identifications as individuals or with collectivities.56 In this way, the responses maintain a power structure of host and guest, which advocates of critical multiculturalism have identified as a problem of intercultural governance in liberal plural societies.57 These responses provide evidence that the ‘open’, user-generated nature of Talking Difference supports the expression of a range of identifications, in this case nationalistic and perhaps culturally essentialist forms of collective identity in tension with broader discourses of cultural pluralism. While this may reflect attitudes to national identity that are common among Australian people more broadly,58 it represents a significant departure from recent approaches to representing cultural diversity in museums.59 These responses complicate the idea that the content produced in Talking Difference presents a coherent message supportive of ‘cultural diversity’ and in opposition to discrimination.

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55 This may have been a reference to a much-publicised case in the UK where a Muslim woman was dismissed from her role as a teaching assistant because she refused to remove her Islamic covering. Mark Simpson, “The Woman at Centre of Veil Case”, BBC News, 19 October 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6068408.stm; Paul Broster and Padraic Flanagan, “Ban It!”, Express.co.uk, 21 October 2006, http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1370/Ban-it.


Celebration of cultural diversity as national identity

Alongside these representations, other participants who identified with a sense of national identity in the Studio articulated collective identification in reference to discourses much more closely aligned with the project’s intention of ‘celebrating cultural diversity’. Many participants evoked a discourse of national identity deeply underpinned by the acceptance of cultural difference. One respondent said:

I am Australian. I think a couple of real strengths of Australian culture/attitudes [are that] we believe in giving people a fair go; anyone can make good, if they work hard, and grasp opportunities; anyone is as good as the next person. ‘Good on ya, mate!’

As was the case in the contributions above, this response demonstrates a conditional acceptance of difference. The idea that ‘anyone can make good if they work hard’ reflects the notion that inclusion in Australian society is dependent on individual labour and participation in contemporary capitalism. Elsewhere, participants identified a more open-ended theme of positive intercultural contact as a central element of Australian national identity. In response to the question ‘do you like sport?’ one respondent said:

I love sport because it goes beyond the cultural divide. It allows all to participate regardless of age, gender, race and many other things. I am glad Australia embraces lots of different sports.

Responses like these represent an identification with Australian multicultural traditions common among users of the Studio. Here, Australian national identity is considered to be particularly, if not uniquely, accepting of cultural difference. In these examples, then, participants represent a version of Australian national identity in opposition to the more exclusionary discourses of national identity represented above.

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60 TDPS, User Response 1338781021981, 4 June 2012, Horsham Library.
61 Ghassan Hage identifies a ‘middle class’ characteristic of Australian multiculturalism which celebrates, for example, the doctors and lawyers in migrant communities rather than working class people. While the identification of hard work in the video quoted above could cross class boundaries, the idea of acceptance with limitations resonates with Hage’s critique of the foundational role that globalized capitalism plays in the formation of multicultural discourses in Australia. Hage, Against Paranoid Nationalism, 114.
62 TDPS, User Response 1327713601371, 28 January 2012, Identity exhibition
63 Witcomb, “Can Museums Move beyond Pluralism?”.
This theme was not unique to the representation of Australian national identity. Respondents to the question ‘what is the best thing about your culture?’ identified a broadly conceived respect for others and openness to difference as a lead characteristic of their own cultural backgrounds. In reference to Indonesia, one said ‘I was born in a place where reciprocity is taught from day one. If you are kind to others, the others will be kind to you’. Another, born in Sierra Leone, articulated a similar perspective writing that their culture taught them ‘wherever you go don't forget where you are from and who you are. Always be accepting of others’. The identification of egalitarianism and acceptance as traits of the speaker’s culture – rather than as more universal values – was particularly pronounced among users from English-speaking Western countries. For example, a user from England wrote that their culture ‘made me more open and aware of other cultures’ and an Irish user identified ‘integration’ as an example of Irish culture. A third user from California reflected that for a long time they thought they ‘never really had a culture and my family wasn’t specifically Irish or anything’. However, they later realised that:

The beauty of my culture was that it was American, it was … this kind of blending of so many different groups and it allowed my family to be very diverse and for my family values to be very accepting of a lot of cultures. I feel that I come from a very accepting family because we have no one specific identity.

There is some slippage in this response as to whether the user considers ‘American’ to be a specific culture, or an absence of ‘one specific identity’, which allows for a liberal and cosmopolitan openness of cultural difference. However, the user appears to see the two categories – ‘American’-ness and being ‘accepting of a lot of cultures’ – as interrelated. The Studio clearly enabled the association of specific ethno-cultural backgrounds with this sense of cosmopolitan openness to difference.

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64 TDPS, User Question 27, Phase 1.
65 TDPS, User Response 1327113229140, 21 January 2012, Immigration Museum.
66 TDPS, User Response 1326081595243, 9 January 2012, Immigration Museum.
67 TDPS, User Response 1326250562422, 11 January 2012, Immigration Museum; TDPS, User Response 1326169365833, 10 January 2012, Immigration Museum.
68 TDPS, User Response 1326334977870, 12 January 2012, Identity exhibition.
69 This response is perhaps exemplary of an American exceptionalism through which, as Edmund Fong argues, some consider the United States to be ‘a nation uniquely devoted to individual liberty, opportunity, and freedom’. Edmund Fong, *American Exceptionalism and the Remains of Race:Multicultural Exorcisms*, Routledge Series on Identity Politics (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2014), 5.
‘I heard some song I remember my country I remember all good thing in my life’: Representing migrant identities

Users who identified with specific ethno-cultural backgrounds did not restrict their expression of identity to these collectives. Migrant narratives in the Studio articulated complex forms of identification related both to their countries of origin and to their homes in Australia. In this way, the contributions of migrants disrupted what the scholar of multiculturalism Anne Marie Fortier has called the ‘assumed isomorphism of space, place and culture’ often associated with collective identification.70 Many participants who identified as migrants presented a nuanced relationship between collective and individual identifications, while speaking in support of a discourse of multiculturalism. Following Fortier’s framework for approaching migrant memory, these responses support the notion that the Studio both avoids the ‘reification of uprootedness as the paradigmatic figure of postmodern life’ and gestures towards ‘the ways in which cultural identity is at once deterritorialised and reterritorialised’.71 These migrant narratives were often expressed in terms of now familiar tropes of ethno-specific collective representation.72 This was affirmed in the rural city of Shepparton, where a participant created the following response to the question ‘what does music mean to you?’

I am from the Iraqi community … I like the music … the Arabic music it's so wonderful they play with – we call it Oud, I don't know what they call it in English. So, the music is something I use it in the car I heard some song I remember my country I remember all good thing in my life, so I think the music's important for all the people now.

But I need to know about music in the future, maybe they put something here to teach us how to use the playing piano or record, I want to know about the Zimbabwean music how did they work.73

The speaker gestured to a man behind him saying, ‘I think we have here, I think it’s a good player’. We do not see the face of the ‘good player’, but we hear him laugh when he is mentioned. At the mention of Zimbabwean music, the man gestured to his right, where another man, apparently of Zimbabwean heritage, smiled and nodded. In this video, the speaker evoked Arabic music as something alive – ‘music is something I use’ – and reminiscent of ‘my country and all good thing

70 Fortier, Migrant Belongings, 1.
71 Fortier, Migrant Belongings, 1.
72 McShane, “Challenging or Conventional?”; Witcomb, “Can Museums Move beyond Pluralism?”.
73 TDPS, User Response, 8 March 2012, Shepparton Library.
in my life’. This carries a degree of personal reflection, which invites other users to consider the affective and mnemonic role that ethno-specific cultural symbols play in the development of identity. While the user described what might be considered to be a collective identity founded on ethno-specific cultural symbols, he positioned these symbols in a way that reflected their importance for him personally. By saying ‘I need to know’ about the music of other cultures, the speaker also evokes the well-established pedagogical role of multiculturalism as a form of community education. In this way, this contribution documents a positive and lighthearted exchange that speaks to a discourse of multiculturalism in which collective identity is foregrounded.

Many users who identified as migrants or as migrant-background Australians affirmed the theme of life in Australia being characterised by openness to cultural diversity. In response to the question ‘describe yourself – who are you?’ two brothers using the Studio together reflected on the impact of migration on their family. They celebrated Australia’s ‘wonderful mix of cultures and freedom’ and the ‘opportunities’ their grandparents’ migration from Greece had afforded them. In response to the question ‘do you like Melbourne?’ a user from Bangladesh said:

By the grace of God, I have come here, and I can call this place my home. And I'm proud to do so because this place is so wonderfully planned, so beautiful and friendly of the inhabitants there and the culture is still multicultural and there is a friendly gesture of … the population to the outsiders.

In many instances people with migrant backgrounds used the Studio to express narratives of gratefulness about life in Australia. For example, the following response to the question ‘what

74 In presenting this idea I am attentive to Stuart Hall’s positioning of identity as a relationship with the Other that is embedded in discourse, rather than a cohesive whole grounded in historical experience. ‘Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond’, he writes, ‘actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves’ Hall, “Who Needs Identity?”, 4.


76 TDPS, User Question 9, Phase 1.

77 TDPS, User Response, 27 January 2012, Identity exhibition

78 TDPS, User Response, 7 September 2011, Sunshine Library
does being an Australian mean to you?" created by a man who listed his place of birth as South Sudan:

It is good for me because I get a lot of freedom, and everyone has rights. Education is free, kids are free to learn more, and kids can get more education. They are healthy, we are safe from war, we get food. We are happy because the government is looking after us. Everyone is equal, and we are so proud to live in Australia.

Another user said ‘I feel great being Australian. Peaceful country. I think it’s a great country in the world, I feel very proud. And I feel lucky for being in Australia ... Very peaceful’. These reflections evoke a version of the ‘rebirth’ narrative that Ian McShane has identified in the representation of migrant experiences in museums. It is important that this is located in relation to what Ien Ang has criticised as the overwhelming discourse of celebration evoked again and again in official commemorations of the nation, (which) has the effect of repressing the expression of some of the darker, more conflictual, less harmonious reverberations of living together in a culturally diverse society.

While I am mindful of this critique and pay attention to some of these ‘less harmonious reverberations’ elsewhere in the thesis, these positive identifications are clearly relevant to users of the Studio and I believe we should ‘hear’ these responses and not dismiss their articulation of identity in the rush to perform critique. For now (ahead of the analysis presented below and in Chapter Five) I which to note these responses offer both a different perspective and a degree of richness to the articulation of collective identities offered elsewhere in the Studio.

In combination, the examples presented in this section indicate that the Studio enabled participants to represent identification with relatively fixed collectivities without the Museum distilling these representations into an overarching narrative about diversity and belonging. While these representations varied in the extent to which they demonstrated openness to difference and opposition to prejudice, this capacity to encourage the presentation of a broad field of collective identifications is one of the strengths of the project.

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79 TDPS, User Question 30, Phase 1.
80 TDPS, User Response 343, Swan Hill Library, 12 February 2014.
81 TDPS, User Response 353, Swan Hill Library, 12 February 2014.
82 McShane, “Challenging or Conventional?”.
83 Ien Ang, On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2005), 139.
'The more you see in the world the more you change': Shifting identities in the Studio

One result of the Studio’s openness to a range of contributions was that it represented identification as a messy process rather than one inevitably aligned with fixed and neat collectivities. This was encouraged by the many questions calling on respondents to articulate aspects of their personal identity without explicitly appealing to any one notion of collective identity. This occurred, for example, with questions such as: ‘describe yourself. Who are you?’84, ‘what does it mean to belong?’85 and ‘why is your identity important to you? Have you wished you could change who you are?’86 But assuming participants are prepared to articulate an ‘individual identity’ relies on a culturally specific conception of identity commonly associated with Western liberalism.87 The structure of the Portable Studio, a platform for individuals to present and respond to questions, could be seen to confound the expression of more collectivist forms of identity, such as those often associated with Chinese culture.88 However, while this may have deterred some users from engaging with questions related to individual identity, many users responded to these questions by foregrounding individual affiliations without drawing reference to collectivities. The result was that many contributions complicated the association of identity with fixed collectivities representing identifications characterised by personal dispositions, change, and hybridity.

84 TDPS, User Question 9, Phase 1.
85 TDPS, User Question 81, Phase 2.
86 TDPS, User Question 72, Phase 1. This was particularly the case in the first phase of program, where questions inviting the expression of personal identity were in the majority. In the second phase of the project, questions that had been effective in prompting responses tended to be re-recorded in each location and more of these referred specifically to cultural identity and racism than in the first phase of the project. See Chapter 5: Dialogue in Talking Difference for a closer analysis of the role that the framing of questions played in facilitating dialogue in the Studio.
87 Appiah, “Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction”.
Challenging fixed, stereotypical interpretations of race and cultural identity

The openness of the questions offered the opportunity for users to create and represent narratives challenging associations between individuals and stereotypical discourses ostensibly based on ‘race’ or ‘ethnicity’. Unlike many of the participants who addressed Aboriginal identification and national identification above, many respondents appeared not to speak with the intention of ‘challenging stereotypes’. Rather, it appears that the Studio offered a site for lighthearted reflections, where they described their interests and personal dispositions without reference to specific ethno-cultural identifications or associated discourses. For example, in response to the question ‘describe yourself – who are you?’ a young man in regional Victoria who was originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo said:

[I am] kind, gentle … I like to challenge myself, I take opportunities, and I'm happy, I like to keep everybody happy”.89

This contribution offers a confident representation of an individual sense of identity. However, when it is considered in relation to broader media discourses related to young African men in Australia, it takes on another meaning.90 This representation challenges the racialised association with violence the sociologist Joel Windle has criticised in Australian media discourse surrounding African young people.91 A number of children of Sudanese-background also created responses that challenged discourses that position Sudanese young people as culturally isolated in Australia.92

89 TDPS, User Response 1330667517148, 2 March 2012, Shepparton Library
90 I am guided here by Stuart Hall’s assertion that the manner in which discourses frame and inform the creation of meaning by audiences – and working on the understanding that both the production and reception of the videos in the Portable Studio become part of ‘the totality formed by the social relations of the communicative process as a whole’. Stuart Hall, “Encoding/Decoding”, in Culture, Media, Language, ed. Stuart Hall et al. (London: Hutchison, 1980), 93.
Two girls using the Studio together said, ‘we like helping other people because we want to help the world … and sometimes if there's people lonely we help them’. Even relatively mundane representations of individual identity, when they are interpreted in relation to racialised public discourses, challenge stereotypical representations of group identities. For example, consider the following contribution from a young girl created in the Deer Park Library:

I was born in Sudan … I like school and writing, and I like going to parties and having fun. Yeah and I'm kind of nice, to others, I'm nice when other people respect me, I respect them too.

These responses invite the identification of points of commonality regardless of (or perhaps in contrast to) users’ presumptions about people from Sudan. They thereby offer a more complete picture than is commonly presented in media discourses related to Sudanese migrants. As was the case with the representations of identity above, there is no socio-historical context provided in the Studio, which would locate these responses in relation to discourses of racism and prejudice. However, in these responses people from a range of cultural backgrounds express themselves in public space with confidence and often humor. Their ethno-cultural background is not necessarily relevant to the intended meaning of these responses, but by representing complex individuals, this content challenges common stereotypes about ‘cultural others’, and offers a relatively nuanced representation of cultural diversity.

‘The more you see in the world the more you change’: Representations of change and hybridity

Not all users described personal dispositions as such a solid basis for identity. Others foregrounded elements of personal identity characterised by change and hybridity. Many of these responses maintained a dialogic notion of the formation of identity, which highlighted individual experiences and interactions as important sites for shaping evolving identities. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given

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93 TDPS, User Response 1321426526976, 16 November 2011, Deer Park Library.
94 TDPS, User Response 1322118822620, 24 November 2011, Deer Park Library.
95 Viewing these representation of individual identity offers viewers something similar to the ‘positive contact’ across the boundaries of culture that Anne Pedersen et al. suggest may reduce prejudice under certain conditions. Pedersen et al., “How to Cook Rice: A Review of Ingredients for Teaching Anti-Prejudice”, 58.
its phrasing, responses to the question ‘has your identity changed from time to time?’ provided strong examples of this process:

Your identity changes slightly every time you talk to different types or groups of people. It is human nature to want to fit in and be like everyone else – to increase your chances of being accepted.

Yes, my identity has changed as time moves forward. Your identity changes with age, the more you see in the world the more you change.

In examples like these, participants represented identification as a process that takes place in encounters with others. This evocation of a dialogic vision of identity aligns with scholarly thinking across the social sciences about the interrelation between the self and the other in the formation of identity. Stuart Hall’s notion that ‘identities are constructed through, not outside, difference’ is particularly important to recognising the complex conceptualisation of identity implied in these ostensibly facile representations. However, as was the case with many of the articulations of collective identity described above, the contingent and brief nature of the Portable Studio relieves these participants of the responsibility to engage with the socio-historical context in which these encounters take place. This limits the depth with which respondents engage with the different experiences and conditions that shape their encounters. That the Studio offered a platform for these representations to be created and displayed alongside responses that

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97 TDPS, User Question 3, Phase 1.
98 TDPS, User Response, 1324861587288, 26 December 2011, Immigration Museum.
99 TDPS, User Response, 1328416350081, 5 February 2012, Immigration Museum. Respondents did not develop further on this sort of articulation of change. This may have been because of the polar nature of the question. I return to this idea in the following chapter on dialogue in the Portable Studio.
foregrounded collective identification is demonstrative of the broad field of identifications supported in Talking Difference. Importantly, this breadth of representation positions the Studio to engage with differences in identification without these differences being explicitly rationalised according to a broader argument about ‘cultural diversity’ in the Studio.

Other prompts in the Portable Studio added depth and nuance to the process of representing identity by engendering longer and more critical responses. Answering the question ‘has your identity changed from time to time?’, one user said:

> Well, yes … I was born in Yugoslavia, I was born in 1982 and until I was nine or ten the country I knew about was Yugoslavia … I didn't know about Serbian, Croatian and these distinctions between people, and then the war started and suddenly, because I was from Serbia, it was mandatory to be Serbian, it was mandatory to be Orthodox Christian and I guess I was just in a sense of debate. You know, it's not good to tell a teenager what they have to be... so I think I just lost a sense of national identity … I was Yugoslavian and then, nothing after that.103

Here, national identity was presented as a shifting category with which individual actors have a fluid relationship. This user produced a narrative that engaged not only with ethno-cultural identity, but also with religion, adolescence, and a sense of loss. This sense of individual identity as forming in dialogue and tension with broader collectivities emerged in a wide range of longer form responses, particularly those produced by migrants and visitors to Australia. In many instances, these participants articulated contingent, hybrid identities drawing fragments from a range of collectivities.104 In response to the question ‘describe yourself, who are you?’ one user responded:

> I am a migrant; I am always half and half, wondering who I really am, with family both here and overseas. Wherever I am living, I am always missing the other side. I know I am lucky to be living in Australia with its wonderful mix of cultures and freedom; but sometimes I miss the English sense of humour, and of course the fish and chips.105

This response balances the ‘hyphenated’ and sometimes ‘hybrid’ notion of being ‘half and half’ with an evocation of British identity as a fixed collectivity exemplified by fish and chips and ‘the English sense of humour’. That these symbols of ‘Britishness’ were presented here as a cultural identity distinct from the Australian Anglo-Celtic mainstream resonates with the relatively recent

103 TDPS, User Response 1325554094635, 3 January 2012, Immigration Museum.
104 Bhabha, The Location of Culture.
105 TDPS, User Response 1320381279077, 4 November 2011, Immigration Museum.
emergence of British diasporic cultural performance in Australia.\textsuperscript{106} Another example comes from a respondent to the question ‘who are you?’\textsuperscript{107} created at the Immigration Museum:

I’m still trying to figure out who I am entirely, but the basics: I’m of multi-ethnic decent, I’m Filipino on my mum’s side and East Indian on my Dad’s, I was born in Toronto, Canada, the home of many mixed ethnicity children. I speak English and French like a lot of Canadians do, I’m really passionate about a lot of things … I really like to laugh, I like to eat, I love to talk to people, I love to see how people think and discussing how the world works with them and seeing where they come from.\textsuperscript{108}

This response engages with a number of discourses of identification simultaneously. The participant’s identification with her multi-ethnic decent, multi-lingual upbringing, and dialogic and cosmopolitan outlook supports a range of the discourses that Talking Difference set out to encourage. That both this and the previous response were recorded at the Immigration Museum is important. Responses from the Immigration Museum were more often characterised by hybridity and a liberal cosmopolitan perspective than those recorded in outer suburban Melbourne or regional Victoria. This may be because of the context provided by the Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours exhibition, or may be because the Museum consistently attracts highly educated audiences who may be more inured to the language of cosmopolitanism.\textsuperscript{109} This latter notion is supported by

\textsuperscript{106} The representation of these narratives alongside ethno-specific narratives from elsewhere in the world casts them within the unique discourse of British diaspora in ‘multicultural’ Australia. As Sara Wills argues, given the historical association of Australian national identity and ‘Britishness’, British migrants have traditionally been represented ‘as ready participants in a broader national embrace’ in a way that can cloud over personal stories relating to ‘upheavals of place, home and the fracturing of connections and relationships’. These upheavals, which are common to the experiences of migrants generally, have been underrepresented in Australian public discourse about British migration. Sara Wills, “When Good Neighbors Become Good Friends: The Australian Embrace of Its Millionth Migrant”, \textit{Australian Historical Studies} 36, no. 124 (2004): 332–54. See also, Andrea Witcomb and Mary Hutchison on the historical emergence of British identities alongside ‘other’ ethnicities in Australian museums’ engagement with migration. Andrea Witcomb and Mary Hutchison, “Migration Exhibitions and the Question of Identity: Reflections on the History of the Representation of Migration in Australian Museums, 1986-2011”, in \textit{Museums and Migration: History, Memory and Politics}, ed. Laurence Gouriévidis, Museum Meanings (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2014), 228–43; Sara Wills and Kate Darian-Smith, “Beauty Contest for British Bulldogs? Negotiating (Trans)National Identities in Suburban Melbourne”, \textit{Cultural Studies Review} 9, no. 2 (2013): 65, doi.org/10.5130/csr.v9i2.3564.

\textsuperscript{107} TDPS, User Question 9, Phase 1.

\textsuperscript{108} TDPS, User Response 13260846873069, 9 January 2012, Immigration Museum.

the fact that the participant above expressed familiarity with the themes of the project and finished her contribution by saying ‘I love projects like this. Museums really enthral me, and the pursuit of knowledge really interests me’.\textsuperscript{110}

However, the representation of identities as complex and contingent was not unique to contributions made at the Immigration Museum. One of the few contributions that addressed the impact that shifts in social context can have one’s sense of identity was created in the outer-western Melbourne suburb of Sunshine:

The question was who am I, which is a tough question because ‘who am I?’ does depend on ‘where am I’ sometimes. When I was in my home country, which is Bangladesh I was in the top strata of society in terms of economic, financial standing and education and all those things, and then I migrated to Australia a few years back and because of many problems, and barriers that I am facing, I am now in the bottom strata of this society. So ‘who am I’ has changed. I was an … ambitious young man, in his early twenties, just finishing university, and joined a good employer in a responsible position, willing to start his future and challenge the future, you know, chance to work in front of him. But now I am starting all over, from zero almost. So, now I am on the wrong side of the borders trying to get a foot in the door of this society and this economy and making it my real home.\textsuperscript{111}

Here, the user presents a sense of identity deeply connected with his socio-economic constraints. While the response represents a sense of migrancy and fluidity of identification, this is different from the liberal pluralism that characterises the responses above. The participant’s engagement with material conditions such as employment and housing is particularly rare in the Portable Studio. While participants present a broad range of identifications variously representative of hybridity and contingency, important aspects of the process by which migrants rebuild a sense of identity in countries of arrival, including economic marginalisation and limited opportunity, are rarely given attention.\textsuperscript{112} Whether it emerged from the Museum’s framing of the project, or as a product of the interests of the participant group, the focus on cultural difference limited the extent of the intersectional engagement apparent in the Studio content.

This is regrettable since an appreciation of hybridity and fluidity in the representation of identity naturally invites an intersectional perspective.\textsuperscript{113} Such an appreciation would be attentive to the overlapping means by which participants frame their identity in addition to ethno-cultural

\textsuperscript{110} TDPS, User Response 1326084687306, 9 January 2012, Immigration Museum.
\textsuperscript{111} TDPS, User Response 131538159115, 7 September 2011, Sunshine Library.
\textsuperscript{112} Fortier, \textit{Migrant Belongings}.
\textsuperscript{113} Robert, “Getting Intersectional in Museums”.

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identification; for example, in terms of gender, sexuality, ability and class. Despite the growing interest in intersectionality across the social sciences, the Immigration Museum was clear that the program should primarily address cultural difference and racism, rather than other forms of identification and discrimination such as sexism, homophobia, and ableism. As discussed in Chapter Two, this was partly the result of the governmental structure in which the program sits given that it was funded primarily to challenge race-based discrimination.

Evidence of intersectional identifications

However, in some instances participants utilised the Studio to create more intersectional responses. Some respondents aligned their resistance to racism as bystanders with resistance to multiple other forms of discrimination. For example, in response to the question ‘do you feel like you can easily express yourself without being judged?’ one participant wrote:

Everybody judges everybody, but I don’t think that’s any reason to stop expressing yourself. If anyone makes a racist or homophobic or sexist remark, I will always challenge them … as a woman, I am particularly happy that I have rights in this country that are denied women in many other countries ... good for Australia, just needs to keep working at it, give the voice to as many people as possible.

Other users took the openness of the questions to address ways of identifying that fall outside ethno-cultural identifiers, and to leverage the Studio to advocate for recognition of other forms of

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116 TDPS, User Question 2, Phase 1.

117 TDPS, User Response 1320456761725, 5 November 2011, Immigration Museum.
difference. For example, in response to the question ‘do you have freedom in your life? If not, what's stopping you from getting freedom?’

118 a wheelchair user in Sunshine said:

I live in a respite facility and I have carers looking after me and they say that they've got a duty of care to look after me and some staff try and stop me from having an extra biscuit, but I say there's nothing wrong with my mind, apart from my physical aspect and all that. I say that ‘why can't I have a biscuit when I'm just like everyone else’ ... so why is it any different? I've got the mind so why should they treat me differently and try and stop me.119

Here, the user speaks in opposition to the notion that her physical disability should be the essentialising marker of her experience. Importantly, she articulates her position as a form of advocacy and locates her advocacy in a specific context. As is the case for many of the responses recorded in the Portable Studio, then, this user’s framing of identity is ‘strategic and positional’.120 Other users took a similarly strategic approach to defining strands of their identity that fell outside the project’s stated focus on cultural diversity and race-based discrimination. For example, the following response to the question ‘do you remember a time when you were treated differently because of the way you spoke or how you looked?’121:

I'm a Lesbian, which means I fall in love with the people who have the same gender as mine … I love my families and friends who are different sexual orientation from me. Welcome to my world, I will never treated [sic] you differently just because you fall in love with the people who have different gender from you.122

In both of these instances the questions were open in their focus and invited reflection on ways of identifying outside the bounds of ethno-cultural affiliation. While these users strategically represented different ways of identifying, they did not expose the ways that ‘racial, gender, sexual, and class oppressions operate together’ in the manner of intersectional in the academy.123 However, the openness of the questions the Portable Studio created a platform for the expression of multiple forms of identification, including those that foregrounded ethno-cultural affiliations, individual dispositions, hybrid and changing forms of identity, and ways of identifying that fell outside the framework of ethno-cultural affiliation. In many instances, these representations of

118 TDPS, User Question 15, Phase 1.
119 TDPS, User Response 1316048185889, 15 September 2011, Sunshine Library.
121 TDPS, User Question 29, Phase 1.
122 TDPS, User Response 1326248236842, 11 January 2012, Immigration Museum.
identity played a strategic role adding complexity to the broader narrative of ‘celebrating diversity’.

Conclusion

The examples provided throughout this chapter indicate that Talking Difference successfully elicited a range of responses that both conformed to and confounded established norms for the representation of identity in museums. While the Museum maintained frames within which it hoped participants would articulate ‘culturally diverse’ identifications, these did not eventuate in a reproduction of simplistic or synthetic collectivities in the Studio. However, for the most part users appeared to align themselves with the Museum’s cosmopolitan framing of identification, and many of the responses reproduced a discourse broadly celebratory of ‘cultural diversity’. This may support the notion that the discursive context created by the installation interpellates subjects into producing particular representations. At the same time, among these representations, some users articulated culturally essentialist, and nationalist perspectives in tension with this cosmopolitan discourse.

The analysis supports the notion that user generated content provides opportunities to disrupt curatorial control over the meanings produced and consumed in their interventions. Rather than simply acting as a site for the governmental reproduction of hegemonic discourses, the Studio offered some scope for the negotiation of discourses that speak to conflicting agendas. This positioned Talking Difference to recognise and bear witness to some of the complexities of identity

124 Sandell, Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference, 3.
in a postcolonial settler society, and to broaden the field of discourses with which participants engaged in their representations of identity. The workshops’ focus on personal identification and early preference for working with CALD young people favoured a range of responses including fluid, cosmopolitan forms of identification. Some users foregrounded their identification with coherent and relatively static collective identities; this was the case for some Aboriginal participants, who appeared to speak in resistance to colonising discourses. Other users evoked fixed and essentialist notions of Australian national identity. Many users, however, expressed forms of identification which broadly aligned with a cosmopolitan narrative grounded in ‘celebrating cultural diversity’. This included respondents who foregrounded collective identifications, as well as those who foregrounded individual, hybrid and contingent forms of identification. The result was a messy field of representations, which gave Studio content a feel of authenticity the Museum could not hope to re-create through the static approximations of collectivities more common in conventional museum displays.

The Studio was less successful at providing social and historical context for these representations. Without a clear interpretive framework, or an approach to interaction design that might have encouraged users to provide context, the content had more in common with the culture of personal disclosure common to social media, than with the potentially more transformative exposure of social and historical contexts through structural critique. In addition, while the Studio facilitated and co-presented multiple forms of identification, it did little to draw participants into dialogue.

Because the role of the museum in facilitating dialogue has been central to my analysis, I have generally steered away from analysis that draws a direct comparison between the media production in Talking Difference and participation in social media platforms. However, as discussed in Chapter One, the work of participatory media scholars such as Tanya Dreher offers a means understanding media production as a process of expression that doesn’t necessarily prompt social change or foster understanding. Scholars of social media such as Steffen Albrecht and José van Dijck suggest a reason for this in relation to social media platforms. Offering analyses of ‘peer to peer’ media production, both scholars expose the lack of genuine sociality and democratic participation on social media platforms. While the museum’s objectives in presenting Talking Difference are not representative of the market-oriented systems of control and dissemination associated with social media platforms, the lack of prolonged interpersonal exposure, and structures to support informed structural critique created an environment that was similarly isolated from the potentially more transformative forms of sociality for which these scholars of social media advocate. José van Dijck, The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Steffen Albrecht, “Whose Voice Is Heard in Online Deliberation?: A Study of Participation and Representation in Political Debates on the Internet”, Information, Communication & Society 9, no. 1 (February 2006): 62–82, doi.org/10.1080/13691180500519548.
beyond the superficial conceit of responding to a single question. These concerns form the basis of the examination in the following chapter.
Chapter 5: Dialogue in Talking Difference

When I look to another individual who is different to me, I become curious to know more about them and wonder where they might be living and what region of the world they might belong to. It triggers curiosity to go and ask questions, meet them, talk to them and have some of my questions answered when I see a person… who look [sic] different from me.¹

A young man from Afghanistan created this response to the question ‘what does an Aboriginal person look like?’ when visiting the Talking Difference Portable Studio in the Mildura public library in Mildura in north-west Victoria. It neatly summarises the rationale behind placing dialogue at the centre of the Talking Difference program, and much contemporary participatory work in museums.² As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, intercultural dialogue is presented in much museum research and practice as the natural tool for developing understanding and acceptance across cultural boundaries. In Talking Difference there was certainly evidence of participants embracing this idea.³ Participants described the value of dialogue as a means of developing understanding and to work through disagreement and conflict. The following response to the question ‘can you express yourself without being judged?’ demonstrates this idea:

Sometimes we can disagree with people and we need to be able to understand when they disagree on our thoughts or some action that we do. Because everybody’s different so we need to understand the differences.⁴

While many users of the Portable Studio were taken with the idea of dialogue, to what extent did the program actually facilitate dialogue? Did it really position participants and their interlocutors of different cultural backgrounds ‘to ask questions, meet them, talk to them and have some of [their] questions answered’?

¹ Talking Difference Portable Studio (TDPS), User Response 1342160555773, 13 July 2012, Mildura Library.
⁴ TDPS, User Response 1327383372989, 24 January 2012, Immigration Museum.
In Chapter One: Understanding Dialogue, I argued that dialogue should encourage participants to express a range of perspectives incorporating critical reflection grounded in knowledge of social and historical context, as well as more affective reflection grounded in personal experience. I argued that, while they should remain cognisant of the contingent and irresolvable nature of dialogue, museums should attempt to synthesise these various threads guided by a responsibility to support the principles of social justice. Throughout this chapter, I gauge the extent to which the Museum shaped the dialogues that took place in Talking Difference and identify what forms of dialogue the project enabled and constrained. Perhaps surprisingly for a project dedicated explicitly to facilitating dialogue, Talking Difference featured few instances of face-to-face exchange in real time. As discussed in Chapter Three: The Talking Difference Portable Studio, the bulk of the interactions took place through the virtual interface of the Studio, an environment in which users created standalone responses to questions, rather than participating in back and forth exchanges.5 The project most effectively drew participants into face-to-face dialogue in the workshops at the beginning of each residency. In this chapter I am attentive to the means by which the Museum shaped the dialogue through the process of creating questions in workshops. Subsequently, through an analysis of the content produced, I identify key themes evoked by participants that reflect common public debates about skin colour, multiculturalism and cultural diversity, and refugees and asylum seekers.

In my analysis of what forms of dialogue the museum enabled and constrained in Talking Difference, I argue that the Museum was successful in eliciting a range of perspectives, but that the dialogue could have been richer had the Museum allowed for longer, more open-ended exchanges between participants throughout the project, and exerted more curatorial oversight in the presentation of content. As the first sites for dialogue between participants, the workshops held at the beginning of each residency offer a good starting point for this analysis.

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Dialogue in person: the workshops

As discussed in previous chapters, the workshops allowed time for discussion in groups and pairs, time for collaborative work developing questions, and time to record these questions using the Portable Studio. The workshops encouraged participants to engage with perspectives that were different to their own in an open and respectful manner. In this openness to structured exchanges, of all the interventions that made up the Talking Difference project, these workshops provided conditions closest to those Habermas imagined for reasoned public deliberation.6

Towards the beginning of a workshop in rural Victoria, the facilitator played a video question and response to an audience of young people.7 The video featured a young woman wearing an Islamic headscarf, analysing the notion of belonging in Australia. In response to the question ‘have you ever been asked where you’re from?’ she said:

I've definitely had people ask me where I am from, it's a really difficult question to answer, especially because when people ask you, they expect a certain response. They expect you to say, ‘Oh hey, I'm from some place in Africa’, when really, I'm from the same place you are from, we are all from Australia, right? What do you mean when you say, ‘Where are you from?’ Look, you ask me that question, but I ask you, what do you mean ‘Where are you from?’ Do you mean ‘Where were your parents from?’ do you mean ‘Where were their parents from?’ ‘What's your ethnicity?’, ‘What's your cultural background?’ Because you need to be more specific when you ask the question. Generally, my response is ‘I'm from Australia”, but they are like “No no, but where are you really from?” And I'm like ‘Wait wait, hold on, I just said I'm from Australia! Don't you get it?”8

The participants responded with a supportive laugh, apparently recognising the speaker’s frustration.9 By showing this video at the beginning of the workshop, the facilitator modelled several frames within which the Museum hoped the workshop would operate. Firstly, the video framed the workshop session as a space where participants were enabled to challenge common assumptions and stereotypes in a manner similar to the videos described in Chapter Four. Presenting a Muslim woman addressing assumptions made because of the colour of her skin encourages a shift away from many mainstream representations of Muslim woman, particularly

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6 Habermas, “Reconciliation Through the Public Use of Reason”.
7 Participant Observation, Talking Difference Workshop, 12 July 2016.
8 TDPS, User Response 684, 4 December 2015, Maribyrnong City Council.
9 Participant Observation, Talking Difference Workshop, 8 April 2016.
woman who wear headscarves. The video also presented a personal perspective with a high degree of authenticity. By saying ‘you ask me that question, but I ask you, what do you mean?’ the speaker does not address herself purely to abstract notions of belonging, but in effect addresses the people she feels have questioned her belonging. This rhetorical approach personalises the exchange and encourages viewers to understand the encounter from her perspective. The response displays critical insight. The speaker grounds her argument in a multifaceted understanding of the relationship between place and belonging, making a distinction between generations of migration, national identity, ethnicity, and cultural background. The selection of this response offers insight into the norms the Museum hoped to engender in the workshops. It reflects an effort to create what the scholar of conflict resolution Ellen Wayne has called ‘a safe environment for expression and self-disclosure’. In this way, the Museum struck a balance between reflective analysis of social norms related to culture and identity on the one hand, and reflection about how these norms play out in the personal experience of the speaker on the other. 

Aparna Hebbani and Charise-Rose Wills trace the media representation of women who wear Islamic headscarves in Australia from the Iran-US hostage crisis in 1979, through 9/11, the Bali bombings and beyond. They argue that the Australian media routinely depicts Muslim women who wear headscarves as variously ‘oppressed, passive, submissive, victims of Islamic fundamentalism, a threat to democratic values, and potential jihadist suicide bombers’. Analysing a series of interviews with Muslim women, they document some of the approaches Muslim women who wear headscarves use to respond to these stereotypes including by being ‘active citizens’ in Australia. Aparna Hebbani and Charise-Rose Wills, “How Muslim Women in Australia Navigate through Media (Mis)Representations of Hijab/Burqa”, Australian Journal of Communication, no. 1 (2012): 87–100.

In a sense, the example offers a degree of Bakhtinian heteroglossia by carrying a dialogue within itself through which the speaker contrasts different voices to contribute to her argument. Mikhail Bakhtin, “Heteroglossia in the Novel”, in Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader, ed. Simon Dentith, Critical Readers in Theory and Practice (London & New York: Routledge, 1995).

In this way the response echoes Anne Marie Fortier’s notion that narratives of diaspora disrupt the isomorphism of place, identity and culture. Fortier, Migrant Belongings, 1.

See also Ellen Kabcenell Wayne, “Is It Just Talk? Understanding and Evaluating Intergroup Dialogue”, Conflict Resolution Quarterly 25, no. 4 (Summer 2008): 451–78. This idea was reiterated in an interview with program facilitator when he said that giving people an opportunity to express themselves creates ‘a bit of a safe space, and it’s got people feeling a bit more comfortable’. Sam Boivin, Interview, 8 April 2016.
example of an ‘insightful’ response. However, the video had the effect of modelling the tone for the kind of dialogue the Museum hoped to enable.

This balance of personal narrative with critical reflection on discourses of cultural identity played out in the dialogues between participants during the Talking Difference workshops. At the workshop in Melbourne’s eastern suburbs, for example, participants talked about interactions they had had across cultural difference in Australia. This workshop was for library and other Council staff, most of whom were first generation migrants. A participant, originally from Eritrea, who had lived in Australia for almost thirty years noted that people speak to her excessively slowly saying ‘people talk to you as though you don’t understand’. She linked this to the lack of representation of non-white people in the mainstream media – mentioning the Australian soap Neighbours – which, in her view, limits Anglo-Australians’ experiences with cultural difference. Another participant described her feeling as an Anglo-Australian by saying: ‘I feel so boring … everyone knows what I eat … I don’t have any heritage … [at school] I wasn’t anything remarkable’. On the one hand, this statement articulates what Peggy McIntosh and others have framed as the invisibility of whiteness in popular discourses about race, which can make it difficult to recognise white privilege. However, this statement led to a dialogue between participants from a range of cultural backgrounds about the position of white ‘mainstream’ culture in a broader multicultural Australia. In response to the participants’ claim that she ‘wasn’t anything remarkable’, another participant who had spoken about her Chinese background said, ‘you are’. A third participant said, ‘people wouldn’t imagine you were feeling you are different’.

The tone with which participants addressed one another in this workshop displayed the intimacy of colleagues with an existing relationship rather than strangers. While in general few workshop

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14 Participant Observation, Talking Difference Workshop, 12 July 2016.
attendees were staff, many had preexisting relationships. A similar degree of intimacy between participants was evident in workshops in workshops observed in Melbourne’s west, east and in rural Victoria. This is one of the differences between the dialogue apparent in the workshops and that which took place in the Studio: the Studio appears mostly to have been between strangers. Bearing this in mind we might consider the acceptance and warmth in the statement ‘you are [remarkable]’ as akin to Bakhtin’s notion of ‘intimate speech’. According to Bakhtin, utterances made in the context of an intimate relationship are:

imbued with a deep confidence in the addressee, in his [sic] sympathy, in the sensitivity and goodwill of his responsive understanding. In this atmosphere of profound trust, the speaker reveals his internal depths. This determines the special expressiveness and internal candor of these styles.

This sense of intimacy and the expectation of understanding were also apparent later in the conversation in the workshop in Melbourne’s east when participants discussed white nationalism and anti-immigration sentiment. The Anglo-Australian participant to whom I referred earlier reflected that she thought people who hold these views are worried that their ‘identity is fragile’ and so that they ‘rage[d] against the fragility of identity [to] hold onto sameness’. In response to the Anglo-Australian participant’s characterisation of Australia as a racist country, another participant who was originally from Egypt reflected, that as a new migrant, she had generally found Australia to be a welcoming, supportive place:

For me it’s a bit different, people are very patient, they want to understand what I’m going to say … generally I’ve found people respectful … it’s human stuff, it depends on the person is good or not.

This exchange offers an example of the balance between a critical and conceptual engagement on the one hand and personal experience and narrative on the other. In this encounter the Anglo-Australian participant engaged critically with a broadly conceived notion of fragile white Australian identities characterised by racism and anti-immigration sentiment. At the same time,

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19 See Appendix A for a full list of Talking Difference Workshops.
22 Participant Observation, Talking Difference Workshop, 12 July 2016.
in gentle opposition to this notion, an Egyptian migrant participant highlighted the acceptance and understanding that had characterised her experience in Australia. There are specific historical contexts that make each of these perspectives possible. The Anglo-Australian speaker spoke on behalf of ‘others’ in opposition to prejudice and inequity grounding her perspective in a discourse of anti-racism. On the other hand, the Egyptian-Australian participant presented a perspective in opposition to the notion that Australia is a racist society – ‘generally, I’ve found people respectful’ – grounded in personal experience. These perspectives are based on similar ideals – a notion that all people in Australia should be treated with respect – but engage with racism from different speaking positions. These exchanges provide evidence of the Talking Difference workshops’ capacity to enable interactions across cultural difference that balance contending personal experiences with more universal notions of representation and belonging. The face-to-face co-presence in the workshops allowed for more responsiveness in the dialogue than was apparent in the digital content from the Studio. The lack of facilitative structure enabling the identification of the context and broader discourses that each participant addressed, however, limited the extent to which participants could develop a sense of the reasons for their different perspectives.

This was particularly apparent when participants were divided into pairs to discuss questions printed on laminated cards. The only instruction the facilitator generally gave was for participants to ‘have a chat’ about the questions, which were selected from those that had been created in previous workshops. At the workshop in Melbourne’s east, two women discussed the question ‘have you ever challenged someone on something they said?’ In response, one said that in China ‘we don’t challenge’ and that it was therefore difficult for her to challenge people in Australia. In addition, she felt she would not be able to ‘compete in English’ in an argument. By contrast, the other participant who was originally from Egypt said, ‘yes, I challenge, I know my rights’. She gave an example regarding childcare arrangements for her daughter saying, ‘they should have looked after her better’, and noted that she complained to the company responsible.

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24 These cards featured questions that had previously been shown to encourage a bulk of responses in the Studio including ‘have you every challenged someone on something they said?’ and ‘how do you identify yourself?’ Participant Observation, Talking Difference Workshop, 12 July 2016.
26 I reflected after this exchange about the possibility that I had influenced the nature of the dialogue. Each of the other pairs spoke with one another while completing this activity, and, in some instances
In this exchange, each participant articulated and compared contrasting stories from their everyday experiences without coming to a particular resolution. The participants did not address the notion of challenging racist language or behaviour, which, when considered in the broader context of the Talking Difference project, was an implicit goal of the question. Rather, the dialogue took its own course, demonstrating that one participant’s notion of ‘Chinese culture’ as non-confrontational was distinct from another participant’s notion of her rights-based sense of the value of confrontation. While the exchange is exemplary of the capacity of Talking Difference to encourage a range of perspectives, and dialogue ‘for its own sake’, it also demonstrates the lack of a structure to draw out the rationale and assumptions behind these differences. In this sense the exchange lacked synthesis. This is perhaps a product of the dialogue being led by the participants themselves, without further guidance or facilitation from the Museum beyond the provision of the initial question. As education scholars Heather Smith and Steve Higgins have argued, eliciting a broad field of perspectives without providing effective feedback – in the form of context or comparison – can limit the extent to which participants share and co-construct meaning. Without this structure and guidance, in the short time they had together it was difficult for workshop participants to uncover and discuss the assumptions that informed one another’s perspectives.

appeared to speak to me rather than to each other. This is likely a reflection of the degree of authority I held as an ‘official’ presence in the room. As a reflexive researcher, then, the conclusions I draw from my observation of workshops should be informed by the possibility that more intimate and richer dialogues took place in these workshops than I was able to observe. Kim Etherington, Becoming a Reflexive Researcher: Using Our Selves in Research (London and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004), 11.

27 In his review of central ideas related to dialogue, Richard Sennett identifies the dialectic notion of synthesis as a means of finding common ground in dialogue, to listen and seek to understand the nuances of your interlocutor’s perspective through a ‘verbal play of opposites’. I use the term ‘synthesis’ in cognisance of Richard Sennett’s argument that focusing exclusively on a dialectic model of thesis-antithesis-synthesis may limit the potential for building empathy and, thereby, understanding through dialogue. However, as I continue to argue throughout the chapter, I am not convinced that the application of structure and facilitation to encourage participants to come to a reasoned synthesis of ideas necessarily precludes dialogue from building affective ‘unreasoned’ relationships. Richard Sennett, Together: The Rituals, Pleasures, and Politics of Cooperation (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2012), 18–22.

More often, the collaborative environment of the workshop appeared to encourage agreement with the possibility of social discomfort, appearing to lead participants to tone down opinions in a bid to avoid conflict. For example, two young people in a workshop in rural Victoria had a difference of opinion while discussing stereotypes in the media. One argued that the association between ‘Muslims’ and ‘terrorism’ is an example of a stereotype. The other said ‘yeah, but it doesn’t help that [terror attacks committed by Muslims] keep happening’.29 The first speaker argued back that, ‘in the Muslim world there are not that many, there are more mass murderers who are white’. The second speaker quickly agreed, perhaps aware that by making a link between Islam and terrorism she had stepped out of the dominant narrative of the workshop, which had been to ‘challenge stereotypes’ such as those linking Islam and terrorism. If this is the case, the participant’s sense that she should retract her statement is likely to have been exacerbated by my presence observing the conversation.30 The exchange is indicative of the way in which conflicting ideas were not consistently drawn out in the Talking Difference workshops. There is evidence in this exchange of the ‘cosy adjustment’ that the philosopher of dialogue David Bohm identifies in his analysis of small group dialogues, where participants prioritise bonds with one another, rather than identifying the differing assumptions that underpin their disagreement.31 As noted above, if the workshops had been designed to highlight the assumptions that underpin judgements about culture, politics and identity, the participants may have been better enabled to talk through their various perspectives of the relationship between ‘Muslims’ and ‘terrorism’, and the discourses that informed these perspectives. This alternative conversation may have been fraught and conflictual but would have been more likely to prompt a complex exchange between participants.32

This lack of facilitative structure is likely to have been a product of the fact that Museum staff considered one of the key purposes of the workshops to be the delivery of a ‘product’ in the form of questions for the Portable Studio, with opportunities for dialogue providing the necessary context for this task.33 While this product was itself a means of engendering further dialogue, this

29 Participant Observation, Talking Difference Workshop, 8 April 2015.
30 Further to my reflection above about influencing the content of workshop dialogues, I was introduced at the start of the workshop as a research and ‘former Museum staff member’, so my presence is likely to have reinforced the dominant messages the Museum had presented in the introduction to the workshop.
33 Interview, Sam Boivin, 8 April 2016.
intention set boundaries on workshop dialogue. Rather than the overriding intention of the workshops being to sit with one another and draw out the complex differences between participants’ world views and the assumptions that inform them, it was to create questions to feed into the Portable Studio.

When the Talking Difference workshops moved onto the task of creating questions for the Portable Studio, the facilitator recreated the physical structure of a traditional school classroom by standing at a whiteboard at the front of the room while the group took turns to make suggestions, which he then transcribed and edited. Generally each of the group participants would make some contribution to this process, though the most emphatic and extraverted participants would spoke more often. To get the conversation started, the facilitator would offer a general theme for the first question, such as: ‘what about something to do with the media?’ In many cases, particularly in the second phase of the program, the facilitator built on questions that had already elicited a high number of responses. This meant that the facilitator appeared to have a clear impression of what sort of question would be effective before the group had begun to contribute. In response to his query about the media, for example, one participant suggested the question: ‘does the media represent you?’ The facilitator then transcribed the question as: ‘does the Australian media represent the whole Australian community?’ While this may indicate an element of coercion by the Museum in the development of questions, participants clearly felt able and welcome to contribute. They spoke over one another in an active and respectful negotiation and articulated a sense of pride once the whiteboard was full of questions.

However, the facilitator worked to elicit questions within a preconceived framework. In a bid to encourage questions that might encourage dialogue focused on notions of social justice,

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34 Participant Observation, Talking Difference Workshop, 12 July 2016; Participant Observation, Talking Difference Workshop, 8 April 2015.
36 This suggestion picked up on a common theme in Talking Difference question with previous questions including ‘do you think the media represents all people living in Australia equally? Are migrants portrayed differently to other Australians?’ ‘do you think media influences perceptions of race and colour?’ and ‘does the Australian media represent young people fairly?’ Participant Observation, Talking Difference Workshop, 8 April 2016.
37 Participant Observation, 12 July 2016. This echoes the process noted by Smith and Higgins’ study of educators in the UK, where it emerged that educators maintained an impression of the direction a group dialogue should take while facilitating dialogue. Smith and Higgins, “Opening Classroom Interaction”.
particularly with regard to local issues, for example, he suggested that participants create a question that asked ‘for improvements’ in the local area. In the workshop in eastern Melbourne, this engendered a series of proposed questions which were quickly revised. Figure one provides an indication of participants’ and facilitators’ considerations in developing questions.

While the facilitator generally provided the frame within which participants crafted questions, this example demonstrates some of the competing priorities at play in the development of questions. The inclusion of a range of perspectives, including migrant resettlement staff and library staff, allowed the focus of the question to shift from a general consideration of local leadership, through the very specific consideration of library programming, to a more generalised consideration of the experiences of ‘non-English speaking’ migrants, before finally settling on a question that made central the experiences of the respondent. While similar themes appeared repeatedly in different locations, the process of crafting questions in each workshop observed for this thesis reflected a respectful negotiation of competing priorities which made central both the experience and understanding of participants and envisioned the likely respondents to questions.

As discussed in Chapter Three, while there was a range of questions produced in the Studio, the questions developed in the first phase of the program tended to focus on personal identity and experiences, rather than social issues such as racism and discrimination. These questions included: ‘has your identity changed from time to time?’; ‘describe yourself – who are you?’; and ‘do you feel like you can easily express yourself without being judged?’ In the second phase of the program questions coalesced around key themes including Australian media, stereotypes, experiences of racism, and Australian national identity. This was partly as a result of the facilitator introducing previously successful questions in workshops, which were re-recorded and rephrased in each new location. As discussed above, while the process of phrasing questions was based in participation and dialogue, the facilitator had a strong role in identifying the themes questions would address.

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38 See Appendix B: Talking Difference Portable Studio Questions, for a full list of questions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed Question</th>
<th>Reason given for change</th>
<th>Who proposed change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What can local leaders do to challenge racism?</td>
<td>Not specific enough.</td>
<td>Participant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What can libraries do to be more welcoming/inclusive/recognise cultural diversity?</td>
<td>Does not address existing library programs.</td>
<td>Participant (library staff).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What more can libraries do to be more welcoming/inclusive/recognise cultural diversity?</td>
<td>Too general.</td>
<td>Participant (migrant resettlement staff).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What more can libraries do to help people settle?</td>
<td>Too specific and library focused.</td>
<td>Participant (library staff).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What challenges do people from non-English speaking backgrounds face?</td>
<td>No reason given</td>
<td>Participant and Facilitator together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What languages can you speak? What challenges do people from non-English speaking backgrounds face?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1: An example of the process of creating a question in Talking Difference workshops (Participant Observation, Talking Difference Workshop, 12 July 2016).*
Ultimately, there are two implications of this approach to creating questions and facilitating dialogue in Talking Difference. On the one hand, the guidance of the facilitator draws into question the extent to which the questions can be considered to have been spontaneously volunteered by participants. As Bernadette Lynch has argued, it is common in ‘participatory’ museum activities for staff to set the agenda and thereby limit the control and ownership participants have over the outcome. On the other hand, the application of these clear boundaries brought focus to the questions produced in the workshops. The framing of questions according to predetermined themes was a rare instance of the program providing structure in the facilitation of dialogue. This process provided a thematic anchor to the otherwise unwieldy stream of content produced once the Studio was presented on its own in public spaces.

Dialogue on screen: The Portable Studio

The questions created in the Talking Difference workshops framed and structured the dialogue that took place in the Portable Studio. Questions took a variety of forms, including closed questions (which privileged particular responses), polar questions (which presented a premise with which participants were invited to agree or disagree), and more open questions, inviting a range of responses and reflections. The idea that questions should be open rather than closed if they are to prompt critical reflection is, of course, not new. The influential pedagogical work of John Dewey and Paulo Freire, among others, supports the notion that learning through open inquiry and dialogue, rather than through answering questions with a single clear answer positions participants to express and build upon their own experiences with critical insight. Despite this being widely accepted among educators and facilitators of dialogue, a number of questions in the Studio clearly favoured specific responses. Following linguists Brian Reese and Asher Nicholas, some of these

41 Smith and Higgins, “Opening Classroom Interaction”; Hein, “Museum Education”.

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closed questions can be considered ‘biased’ in the sense that they ‘convey an expectation, or bias, on the part of the speaker toward a specific answer to the question’. In this way they function as both questions and assertions. For example, the questions ‘should all people accept an Australian way of life, including laws, the way you dress, and the way you behave?’ and ‘why does Indigenous Australia have to change to suit mainstream Australia?’ both present an assertion that betrays the speaker’s expectations of respondents. As we saw in Chapter Four, the result was that these questions tended to encourage responses that supported the assertion at their heart, with most respondents choosing to respond by suggesting that ‘all people should accept an Australian way of life’ and that ‘Aboriginal Australia’ should not have to change to suit ‘mainstream Australia’. The resulting dialogue was impoverished by the structure of the questions; they did not engender a range of perspectives or create conditions in which these varying perspectives could be compared and contrasted.

However, most questions were more open, inviting a range of responses. Some of these were simple polar questions, presenting an idea with which respondents were invited to agree or disagree. For example, some invited reflection on personal experience, such as: ‘have you ever been asked where you are from? How did you respond?’; or ‘have you ever challenged someone on something they did or said to somebody else?’ Most of these added a modifying qualitative question beginning with ‘why’ or ‘how’, such as: ‘Are you proud of your skin colour? Have you ever wished that you could change it? Why?’ While responses tended to engage with the binary

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43 Reese and Asher, “Biased Questions, Intonation, and Discourse”, 141.
44 TDPS, User Question 31, Phase 1.
45 TDPS, User Question 34, Phase 1.
46 Other questions operated as both questions and assertions including ‘Does your name determine who you are or where you’re from?’ TDPS, User Question 11, Phase 1, ‘Why do some people think that the colour of your skin makes you a bad person? TDPS, User Question 38, Phase 1, ‘Why is it so hard for this government to accept boat people? And once they have been accepted by the government why is it so hard for the Australian people to accept them?’ TDPS, User Question 49, Phase 1, ‘Is it OK to make a joke about someone’s skin colour or accent? Who gets to decide if the joke is racist?’ TDPS, User Question 85, Phase 2, ‘What is the best thing about living in a multicultural country?’ TDPS, User Question 98, Phase 2.
47 Reese and Asher, “Biased Questions, Intonation, and Discourse”.
48 In one instance, this was the product of a workshop participant intervening during the collaborative
logic of these questions, as we shall see in the analysis of responses below, they presented more than a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer.

Some questions, while linguistically open, limited the scope of responses by asking for the identification of specific phenomena or characteristics rather than more open-ended reflection. Examples of these questions included: ‘what is the best thing about living in a multicultural country like Australia?’\(^{49}\) and ‘use three words to describe yourself’.\(^{50}\) Others invited longer-form responses more conducive in their structure to the expression of critical reflection and personal narrative. As discussed in Chapter Three, many of these focused on the personal identity of the respondent. For the purposes of this chapter, I focus below on the ways in which the Studio enabled and constrained dialogue in relation to contentious public debates rather than in relation to processes of identification. Responses to issues of multiculturalism and racism, and refugees and asylum seekers demonstrate moments at which participants produced conflicting perspectives and illustrate the extent to which the Studio encouraged understanding of these differences.

**Multiculturalism and Racism**

Multiculturalism and racism were recurrent themes in content created in Talking Difference. Questions on this topic were generally ‘open’ in their phrasing but tended to privilege a cosmopolitan outlook. Questions included, for example, ‘do you think it is an asset to have different languages spoken in your community? Why do you feel this way?’\(^{51}\) which clearly implies a preference for diversity, particularly through the use of the word ‘asset’. Perhaps not surprisingly, most responses to this question echoed this preference. For example, a respondent in the Melbourne outer suburb of Frankston said:

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\(^{49}\) TDPS, User Question 98, Phase 2.
\(^{50}\) TDPS, User Question 1, Phase 1.
\(^{51}\) TDPS, User Question 128, Phase 2.
Definitely. It allows you to learn more about other cultures and learning additional languages is very useful. Cultural diversity is always good.\textsuperscript{52} Another response created in nearby Carrum Downs reflected on the impact that linguistic diversity has on social bridging and community building:

I reckon that different languages should be in our community, first off it brings people together to learn each other’s languages and cultures … You should choose how you wanna be and do the language you wanna do.\textsuperscript{53}

The statements that ‘cultural diversity is always good’ and ‘you should choose how you wanna be’ are representative of most responses to questions of multiculturalism and cultural diversity in the Studio. Similar responses included the following response to the question ‘what’s the first thing that comes to mind when you meet a person who’s different to you?’: ‘wow, what can I learn about this person, their culture, their life. It is exciting and the opportunities are fantastic’.\textsuperscript{54} Another participant added a comment to this response: ‘Exactly! Meeting people with different backgrounds and experiences is an excellent learning opportunity – embrace them!’\textsuperscript{55}

In some instances, the lack of depth in responses impoverished the dialogue documented in the Studio. The majority of respondents to ‘Have you ever wished that you could change [your skin colour]?’\textsuperscript{56} made minimal reference to the socio-historical context of race and racism, or apparent critical reflection. This was particularly the case in responses created by participants with fair skin. Many of these responses, whether consciously or unconsciously, appeared to ignore the notion of race altogether. For example, a respondent in Shepparton answered ‘it would be nice to get a tan’.\textsuperscript{57}

This response is demonstrative of the privilege of considering one’s skin colour to be a merely aesthetic matter rather than an aspect of your body that is indelibly intertwined with discourses of race.\textsuperscript{58} In other responses, participants who gestured towards more critical understandings of race

\textsuperscript{52} TDPS, User Response 624, 18 May 2015, Frankston Library.
\textsuperscript{53} TDPS, User Response 619, 11 May 2015, Carrum Downs Library.
\textsuperscript{54} TDPS, User Response 1338773454787, 4 June 2012, Horsham Library.
\textsuperscript{55} TDPS, User Comment 1338776432710, 4 June 2012, Horsham Library.
\textsuperscript{56} TDPS, User Question 17, Phase 1.
\textsuperscript{57} TDPS, User Response 1332139067585, 19 March 2012, Shepparton Library.
\textsuperscript{58} McIntosh, \textit{White Privilege and Male Privilege}; Moreton-Robinson, “I Still Call Australia Home: Indigenous Belonging and Place in a White Postcolonising Society”.
produced a similarly superficial reading of skin colour. At the Immigration Museum, two participants, one of whom was wearing an Islamic headscarf created the following response:

Participant 1: We're super happy to be white.
Participant 2: Hey, I'm not super happy to be white.
P1: No we're not that white.
P2: I would love to have dark coloured skin, and that's the beauty of living in Australia, everyone's got different coloured skin and, I don't have dark skin which is unfortunate, but yeah, I'm very proud of my colour even though I'm not dark skinned.
P1: Yeah.59

Had these participants been encouraged to engage one another further about the suggestions that they are ‘super happy to be white’, or ‘not that white’, this exchange may have elicited a more critical engages with the role of skin colour in discourses of race, however the unstructured nature of the dialogue encouraged a shorter and more playful exchange. Where respondents to this question participants did consider race and racism, a form of liberal anti-racism dominated. The following provides a representative example created in Mildura:

The colour of someone's skin is irrelevant. They're just like any other person and racism in our society is so big that we've got to stop it now, before it gets out of hand. So, my point of view is that it doesn't matter what the colour of your skin is you should still feel free to have your rights and be free.60

This is a strong, inclusive statement about racism, particularly when considered in the context of discriminatory discourses of discrimination in some communities and the media.61 At the same time, as I discuss further below, casting racism exclusively as a matter between individuals with wrongheaded beliefs limits the capability of anti-racist praxis to offer potentially more transformative structural critique.

59 TDPS, User Response 1320716455478, 8 November 2011, Immigration Museum.
60 TDPS, User Response 1342496664688, 17 July 2012, Mildura Library.
In these responses, participants echoed a version of liberal multiculturalism critiqued by many post-multicultural scholars such as Ien Ang, who underline a lack of complexity in Australian multicultural discourse, including the lack of acknowledgement of ‘less harmonious reverberations’ such as racism, Indigenous dispossession, and inequality. While these themes are absent from many responses in the Studio, there is at least rhetorical power in the re-articulation of a support for cultural diversity across such a broad range of locations and participants. At a time when many in Australia, and around the world, claim that various versions of multiculturalism are irreparably ‘broken’, it is valuable to highlight a form of talking about difference that at least accepts and affirms the existence of those differences, and the value of bringing them together, even if that is all it does.

However, when these responses are presented without reference to the socio-historical context and discourses of race that enable racist perspectives about skin colour, the result is that the dialogue produced invites little critical insight beyond the notion that ‘racism is bad’. While participants may have had the ability to provide more insight and context regarding racialising discourses surrounding skin colour, the Studio itself did not guide or encourage the documentation of these critical perspectives. In this instance, then, while the project provided a context for a range of

62 Ien Ang, On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2005), 139.

opinions, the lack of structure or guidance in the Studio (beyond the invitation to create a question or response) constrained the extent to which users created informed and critical perspectives.

While it limited the extent to which it drew participants into sustained dialogue, this lack of facilitation clearly encouraged participants to share experiences of racism as victims, bystanders, and perpetrators. More specific than the ‘we are all different, but we are all the same’ messaging of participants’ contributions about diversity and racism as abstract concepts, these sometimes very personal stories carried an affective weight, inviting empathetic engagement with the experience of others.  

As was the case in the responses about skin colour above, these responses were generally prompted by specific questions about race, which themselves were generally created by culturally and linguistically diverse participants. For example, in response to the question ‘have you ever experienced or witnessed racism? What happened and what did you do? How did it make you feel?’ a young woman described being mocked for her appearance and use of Mandarin. In one instance, she experienced a subtle sense that her Mandarin language was not welcome:

I have experienced racism. It was in a school library. A friend and I were talking in Mandarin and a staff member walked past … and he was like ‘hey, you two pick up the books and put them in the library shelves’ … so all we did was just picking up the books and putting on the shelves. And it


65 TDPS, User Question 69, Phase 2.
made me feel as though, ‘I’m Chinese and I’m your fricken servant’. It made me feel like ‘mate, come on, it's not fair’.\(^{66}\)

In another response she described an experience of what might be called traditional racism:

> I have experienced racism. When I was in the school yard, a bunch of people said to me ‘Hey, đũ mà’\(^{67}\) in a heavy accent. And I turned around and I ignored them. Just had a brief look at them and went back. And I was like, ‘what is wrong with you, man’, we Asians actually have different titles, like some of us speak Mandarin, some of us speak Cantonese and some of us speak Viet or Thai. Hey, come on, if you actually classify all of us as ‘đũ mà’ … It's not cool. Just clear it up, clarify it if you have to.\(^{68}\)

Phrases, like ‘it’s not cool’ and ‘come on, man’ create an open and relaxed tone, which invites the audience to identify with the narrator and share an empathetic understanding of the impact of racist abuse. Here the speaker echoes the tone of response the Museum selected to guide workshop conversations, where the participant deployed an equally cutting combination of humour and disdain in response to the question ‘have you ever been asked where you’re from?’\(^{69}\) saying:

> They expect you to say, ‘Oh hey, I’m from some place in Africa’, when really, I'm from the same place you are from, we are all from Australia, right?

The most affecting responses exhibited both critical insight and communicated the personal experiences of the speaker. A response to the question noted above about skin colour created by a young man in the outer-suburban suburb of Sunshine, drew reference to the discursive construction of race by identifying the different meanings applied to skin colour in different contexts:

> Well, yes, I was proud of my colour as long as I was in my place of birth, which is Bangladesh. But then, when I came in Australia in 2010, my daily experiences in the community has compelled me to think that, well, there's something wrong with this colour. So the pride on being myself has gradually evaporated. And then a set of frustrations and some weird wishes that I could change my colour has taken those places.

> Because sometimes, some people, not all of them, some people take the color, the whiteness of the skin as a proxy of the worth of the person … So I feel sometimes frustrated that I can't mix with the mainstream as an anonymous person here. I'm being branded as made in XYZ country because

\(^{66}\) TDPS, User Response 408, 10 April 2014 Altona North Community Library.

\(^{67}\) ‘Đũ mà’ is a Vietnamese curse word.

\(^{68}\) TDPS, User Response 409, 10 April 2014, Altona North Community Library.

\(^{69}\) TDPS, User Question 145, Phase 2.
of the colour which I have to carry all the time. I can't be like anybody here. If I do something … people will tell that, well, a person of that colour has done this.\textsuperscript{70}

This response builds on the offer of the original question by weaving a complex narrative based both on personal experience and on an identification of the discursive construction of race in different contexts. The idea that lived experience in Australia ‘compelled’ him to reconsider his understanding of skin colour evokes the notion championed by Stuart Hall and others that skin colour and other ‘racial’ markers have no inherent meaning. Rather, meaning is assigned within specific discourses and contexts.\textsuperscript{71} In this account, Australian discourses of race identified the speaker as a racial other and precluded him from mixing ‘with the mainstream as an anonymous person’. The identification of whiteness as normative in Australia is particularly affecting here because the speaker locates this sense of otherness in his personal experience. That this response was prompted by a relatively limiting polar question suggests that, while the grammatical form of questions may establish a frame for responses, participants maintain agency to provide both critical reflection and affective personal narrative.

Many of these participants recount experiences of racism by presenting themselves as agents, clear in their understanding of what individuals should do to counter racist assumptions and beliefs: for example, saying ‘just clear it up, clarify it if you have to’. This sharing of knowledge by people who have experienced racism is one of the strengths of the project. Responses explicitly recounting experiences of racism played an instructional role in Talking Difference, creating a kind of ‘tool-kit’ for the practice of anti-racism in lived experience. To be clear, the sort of ‘anti-racism’ on offer in the Studio generally functions as the interpersonal level. With a few notable exceptions, including the response created by the man from Bangladesh above, these stories rarely demonstrated the sort of structural and material critique that would amount to the transformative anti-racist agenda articulated by leading thinkers dealing with anti-racism.\textsuperscript{72} Nevertheless, there is

\textsuperscript{70} TDPS, User Response 1315380945728, 7 September 2011, Sunshine Library.


evidence in the content produced in the Portable Studio of an intent to build solidarity and nurture the skills necessary to challenge racism at an interpersonal level.

The speaking position of those who tell stories of racism in the Studio has a bearing on its effectiveness as a ‘toolkit’ for anti-racism. In the examples above, participants shared their own experiences of and responses to racism in a way that was instructive both for others in the same position and in broader sense for potential perpetrators of racist abuse: ‘this is how it feels when you say this’. In other responses, participants framed themselves as bystanders to address the skills they have deployed to challenge racism. In many of these, participants appeared to express solidarity with people experiencing racist abuse, within a reasoned, liberal framework. For example, in response to the question ‘what do you do when you see someone being racist?’, an older male user said: ‘try to discuss what the problem is with them so that we can improve it’. Another wrote: ‘I try to point out the reasons why what they are saying is not true and if it is true why it is important to be rational about a negative event associated with a certain race or ethnic group’.

Respondents to the question ‘have you ever challenged someone on something they did or said to somebody else?’ and ‘how can we help to stop racism in society?’ took a similarly reasoned, liberal perspective saying:

I always challenge people on their racist views to make sure they at least are articulate when doing so. Arabic is a language not a race, and Muslim is a religion it is not a race either.

We can stop paying attention to differences and pay more attention to what we have in common.

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73 TDPS, User Question 41, Phase 2.
74 TDPS, User Response 359, Swan Hill Library, 14 February 2014.
75 TDPS, User Response 367, Swan Hill Library, 24 February 2014.
76 TDPS, User Question 28, Phase 1.
77 TDPS, User Question 108, Phase 2.
78 TDPS, User Response 1326501724270, Immigration Museum, 14 January 2012.
79 TDPS, User Response 578, 10 March 2015, Yackandandah Library.
Like the affirmations of the value of ‘cultural diversity’ above, these responses affirm a vision of liberal cosmopolitanism grounded in individual choices and experience. Other responses to these questions relied on a normative evocation of an inclusive Australian society opposed to racism:

Yes, I have challenged others about their attitude to others in my place of employ because if we don’t challenge people about, say a racist comment, then people will just continue with such behaviour. They need to be told that it’s not normal or acceptable in our society.  

In each instance, while they function as a form of anti-racist advocacy, these responses do not to deliver a structural critique of racism that acknowledges the presence of racist systemic and discursive structures in Australian social life. Instead, once again racism appears as a failure of thinking, or of bad behaviour on the part of individuals.

There are two significant exceptions to this interpretation. Firstly, participants discussing racism in the media offered a more structurally-minded critique. In many responses, participants demonstrated a high degree of critical literacy in their identification of the discursive construction of race and the racialisation of migrants in Australian media discourse. A series of questions concerning the media and stereotypes emerged across the second phase of the program, particularly given that ‘the media’ was one of the themes the Museum encouraged workshop participants to consider in their framing of questions. These included ‘do you think the media represents all people living in Australia equally? Are migrants portrayed differently to other

80 TDPS, User Response 1342144940900, 13 July 2012, Mildura Library.
81 The Building on Our Strengths report produced for the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation provides a concrete analysis of the structural and systemic role of racism in contemporary Australia. The report provided a framework of responses to ‘race-based discrimination’ at individual, organisational, community, and societal levels. The framework advocated for ‘societal’ interventions that recognised ‘institutional, media, cultural and political support for, or weak sanctions against, discrimination; limited connections between people from different groups; impacts of colonisation; inequitable distribution of material, informational and symbolic resources; a national identity that excludes certain groups; leadership that supports, fails to recognise or has weak sanctions against discrimination or does not value diversity’. The report was based on a rigorous assessment of extant empirical research including anti-racist works such as those by Pedersen et al., which specifically recognised material disadvantage between ethno-specific groups, and competition for material resources as a source for racism. Paradies et al., “Building on Our Strengths”; Pedersen et al., “How to Cook Rice: A Review of Ingredients for Teaching Anti-Prejudice”; Pedersen, Walker, and Wise, “‘Talk Does Not Cook Rice’: Beyond Anti-Racism Rhetoric to Strategies for Social Action”.

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Australians?’, 82 and ‘do you think media influences perceptions of race and colour?’ 83 The bulk of responding participants agreed that migrants were treated unfairly in media reports. Some respondents suggested this was a product of the media reflecting a broader Australian culture of discrimination, for example in the following response created in Avondale Heights in Melbourne’s western suburbs:

Migrants are treated differently because our current culture doesn’t show them the respect that they need and want. They barely get any aid from Australians in our time because they are portrayed differently from the media. 84

Another participant framed this as a consequence of a profit-based media industry:

The media does not represent all people living in Australia equally, because they put more emphasis on ratings and making profit at the experience of others. Migrants are targeted viciously and most of the time aren’t given a fair go. 85

These responses offer a window into a more critical dialogue about racism, one cognisant of the discriminatory nature of public discourse about race, rather than grounded in the attitudes of individuals. Given that these are responses to questions the Museum encouraged about the media, it follows that the Studio could have better nurtured examination of other systemic and structural aspects of racism in Australia such as discrimination in housing and employment markets, the lack of representation of people cast as cultural others in politics and other areas of public life, and the enduring impacts of colonisation and Australia’s historically discriminatory migration program. 86

Instead, perhaps as a product of the lack of structured interaction and synthesis of responses, the analysis of media was one of the few instances of more systemic critique emerging in relation to racism in the Studio.

The second exception to the interpretation that the Studio hosted mostly individualistic rejections of interpersonal racism is that a minority of responses did not follow this dominant line. Rather,

82 TDPS, User Question 148, Phase 2.
83 TDPS, User Question 10, Phase 2.
84 TDPS, User Response 724, 21 March 2016, Avondale Heights Library.
85 TDPS, User Response 694, 9 March 2016, Sam Merrifield Library.
86 For analysis of the enduring cultural impacts of the White Australia Policy and other instances of historical racism on the contemporary cultural landscape for people of ‘East Asian appearance’ in Australia, see Ang, On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West, 135. For a discussion of empirical literature related to racism in housing, employment, and leadership in contemporary Australia see the Introduction p. 17.
as we saw in the previous chapter, some respondents demonstrated a clear resistance to the inclusive precepts that drove the project. In a very small minority of instances this took the form of abusive language. In response to the question ‘do you think it is an asset to have different languages spoken in your community? Why do you feel this way?’, a respondent from the suburb of Frankston said: ‘you’re in Australia, you speak English, mother fucker’.88

This response sat alongside the more conciliatory responses noted above, with no sense of synthesis between the different perspectives represented. Rather than a dialogue, responses like these can be considered in terms of what Ghassan Hage has described in reference to ‘debate’ about Australian multiculturalism as ‘the parallel presentation of differing points of view’.89 This parallel presentation does not encourage a stronger understanding of why diversity should be protected on the one hand, or why someone might want new migrants to ‘assimilate’ on the other. There is little evidence here of the ‘negotiated, conciliatory, exploratory’ approach to racism and bigotry for which Ien Ang has called. Ang has reflected that analysis of resistance to cultural diversity and multiculturalism should pay attention to people who, in the context of globalised neoliberalism, may:

> find themselves decentred, devalued and marginalised from a national culture in which ‘Australian identity’ can no longer be securely anchored in a safely secluded, British-derived, white homogeneity.90

There is a possibility that a participant abusively demanding that new migrants speak English emerges from a sense of nationalism and conservatism grounded in these circumstances of alienation. However, the Studio does not encourage or enable a conciliatory and nuanced reading of this respondent’s perspective. Standing alone as a piece of media alongside others, this contribution invites little understanding of the context within which these attitudes might develop and communicates little more than a sense of aggression.

Migration and Asylum Seekers

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87 TDPS, User Question 128, Phase 2.
89 Hage, Against Paranoid Nationalism, 66.
90 Ang, On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West, 154.
In a similar manner, contributions relating to refugees and asylum seekers rarely demonstrated engagement with, or negotiation between, different ‘sides’ of this highly polarised issue. Rather, they tended to prompt users to reiterate fixed notions common in popular discourse. As was the case in responses related to multiculturalism and racism, despite fraught public debate in Australia about the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers by boat, most participants who referred to asylum seekers and refugees produced responses generally supportive of ‘acceptance’ and ‘understanding’. There was only one question created across the life of the program that specifically addressed asylum seekers and refugees. It was created in the rural town of Mildura by a man of a refugee background originally from Afghanistan. He asked, ‘Why is it so hard for this government to accept boat people, and once they have been accepted by the government why is it so hard for the Australian people to accept them?’

As was the case in the phrasing of the questions above, this example takes the form of both a question and an assertion, and responses tended to follow its tone and advocate for greater acceptance of asylum seekers and refugees. For example, a respondent from Mildura said:

Personally, I don't understand why we have trouble accepting boat people once they're in Australia, because once they're in Australia they're as Australian as I am, I have no right to judge them because we're all one people, despite all the cultural backgrounds that may differ from person to person.

Another respondent in Mildura took an approach similarly guided by a sense of humanism:

Because people are full of fear, and they need to accept the ways things are, they need to accept love, love is the answer.

These perspectives align with the notions of acceptance popularised in left-leaning political discourse surrounding refugees and asylum seekers. Notably, these respondents speak in broad
terms without engaging with common critiques of this perspective, such as the risk of arriving in
Australia by boat, the impact of Australia’s humanitarian program on the region, and the possibility
of there being limits to Australia’s sustainable humanitarian intake.95 The first speaker excludes
these considerations by specifically addressing ‘boat people once they’re in Australia’.

On the other hand, a minority of respondents posited asylum seekers arriving by boat in contrast
to others who arrived ‘the right way’.96 They pressed for conditional acceptance based on the
common notion in Australian political discourse that asylum seekers who arrive by boat are less
entitled to protection than those who arrive by plane, particularly those who are resettled in
Australia through the offshore humanitarian resettlement program. This is the case in the
following response to the question ‘do you think Australia is a welcoming place for new arrivals
to settle? Why or why not?’97:

It’s a welcoming place for new arrivals to settle if they can get in. And to get in, you gotta come
through the front door. None of this jumping on a boat paying people smugglers, so if you come
the right way, we’re very welcoming and we’re happy to have you here. You come the right way
you line up, and we’re happy to have ya.98

95 For example, the 2014 report published by the think-tank Australia21 argued that the Australian
government should aim to ‘retain appropriate order and control over the immigration program by
tackling the problem of people smuggling and preventing deaths caused by unsafe journeys at sea; to be
sensitive to the regional implications of our policy choices; and to manage the cross-border movement of
people in a way that respects the human rights of asylum seekers and is consistent with international
legal obligations towards refugees and others at risk of harm’. Bob Douglas et al., “Beyond the Boats:
Building an Asylum and Refugee Policy for the Long Term – Report Following High-Level Roundtable”
(Weston, Australian Capital Territory: Australia21, 2014), 14, accessed 1 September 2018 available from
concerns about asylum seekers and refugees are rarely expressed in such sober and pragmatic terms, and
frequently reflect a xenophobic or ‘paranoid’ nationalism. In a 2012 study, Fiona McKay et al. found that
the main concerns regarding asylum seekers among their research cohort were that they would ‘exploit
Australia’s democratic systems and processes; threaten Australia’s values and culture; and threaten
the security of individuals, communities and the nation’. By inviting comparison between these arguments
and the more cosmopolitan perspectives featured elsewhere in the installation, the Studio may better
have drawn out the nuance and complexity of Australia’s refugee debate. Fiona H. McKay, Samantha L.
Thomas, and Susan Kneebone, “It Would Be Okay If They Came through the Proper Channels:
Community Perceptions and Attitudes toward Asylum Seekers in Australia”, Journal of Refugee Studies,
97 TDPS, User Question 131, Phase 2.
98 TDPS, User Response 642, Frankston Library, 25 May 2015. This is the same respondent as from 635
Another respondent to the question ‘what's the big deal about immigration and why are some people so upset about it?’ presented a similar perspective adding the notion of limited housing stock with its implication of population pressure:

There's a right way to come, which is through immigration … and it should be done the right way, not just anyone should be able to turn up and expect to get in, we have a lot of people here and we're frequently giving up space for more houses when we shouldn't really need to be doing that.  

In their evocation of an ‘orderly line’ in which asylum seekers should wait their turn for resettlement in Australia, these respondents align themselves with common discourses in conservative Australian media and among advocates of offshore processing from both major parties in Australian federal politics. In both responses, participants take the question’s broad offer to engage with ‘immigration’ or ‘arrivals’ by specifically addressing asylum seekers arriving by boat. This elision may reflect the higher profile the issue of asylum seekers and refugees has in the landscape of Australian immigration discourse despite people seeking asylum making up only a small proportion of Australia’s immigration program. In general, then, Studio responses addressing the resettlement of asylum seekers and refugees tended to reiterate discourses prevalent in mainstream discourse. The Studio did not provide a formal structure enabling these users to work through some of the more complex aspects of their various perspectives. Rather, the Studio presented a form of multivocality, which, while it was not dissimilar to the spectrum of opinion available in mainstream media, provided little structure by which this polarised debate might be altered through participation in dialogue. The task of reflection on the underlying discourses that inform popular opinion on these issues was left to participants. For example, one respondent to

above.


101 Once again, responses in this vein were unusual in the Studio. A more representative response to this question was created in Geelong. The following response to the question ‘what's the big deal about immigration and why are some people so upset about it?’ balanced a number of socio-economic considerations. ‘Ok honestly I don't actually know what would be wrong with people about immigration because actually, well I think there is nothing wrong with it, since people come and they maybe help with jobs, and they help the society with the environment economy, everything. And the more people we have the more taxes we get which we can use to well improve the whole economy and country’. TDPS, User Response 388, 17 March 2014, Geelong Regional Library.
the question about why it is ‘so hard’ for the government and people of Australia to accept ‘boat people’ reflected on a crisis of leadership, and without casting judgement presented a considered perspective on the assumptions that underlie popular opinion on this issue:

This country functions as a democracy and as such unless you have strong leaders in government it is unlikely that government will differ from the opinions of the majority or say what they believe in rather than molly-coddle the public. Don’t get me wrong, I prefer democracy to any other form of government, but it is my belief that any form of government will only function effectively with strong leaders at the helm. As for the Australian public, it is more of a fear of the unknown and a feeling that people are trying to jump the queue by not going through the proper processes of immigration.102

The response is more conciliatory in its tone than those above, recognising both the ‘fear of the unknown’ and the adherence to a perception of ‘the proper process’.103 However, like those above it, the response is not so much in dialogue with different perspectives but rather, offers a summary of popular discourse with a sense of resignation. This is, of course, a product of the Portable Studio interface, rather than necessarily an indication of resistance to complex dialogue on difficult issues among participants. The Studio provided limited time for participants to respond, and they responded as individuals, rather than undertaking sustained exchanges among a range of participants. As a result, it was rare for participants to genuinely engage with the differences between their opinions about the politics of asylum in Australia. Rather, the Studio played host to a multivocal, cacophonous range of opinions, between which there was little synthesis or engagement.

Dialogue and the potential for transformation

The Museum enabled a particular form of content creation in Talking Difference through the structure of the workshops and the design of the Portable Studio. In these interventions the Museum simultaneously engendered different types of dialogue. On the one hand, the vision of

102 TDPS, User Response 1342063374795, 12 July 2012, Mildura Library.
103 Elsewhere, this participant shared reflections both on the value of cultural difference and acceptance as well as his own experiences of arriving in Australia as a migrant. In response to the question, ‘why should Aboriginal people have to change to suit mainstream Australia?’, this participants said ‘the best society is one that tolerates and accepts the differences of others and other cultures, it is my belief that the Indigenous people should continue as they have for thousands of years and live their life as they deem fit’ TDPS, User Response 1342062518789, 12 July 2012, Mildura Library.
furthering an anti-racist agenda through robust exchange on contentious issues, such as race and diversity, carries the appeal to reason and good-natured disagreement at the heart of a Habermasean conception of dialogue.\textsuperscript{104} On the other, the notion that sharing experiences face-to-face with the ‘other’ might challenge prejudice resonates with a much more personalised and affective version of dialogue more in line with the work of Emmanuel Levinas.\textsuperscript{105} While Levinas questioned the importance of empathy, such a process could also rely on the building of empathic connection.\textsuperscript{106} Of course, there are no hard and fast boundaries between reasoned and affective exchanges. As the Australian museum scholars Kirsten Wehner and Matthew Trinca have argued in reference to museum displays:

\begin{quote}
When museums present their objects in ways that allow them to communicate not only cognitively, but affectively – that allow objects to be ‘felt’ as well as ‘read’ – they draw visitors to the conceptual and analytical via the sensory and experienced.\textsuperscript{107}
\end{quote}

Appropriate attention to the facilitation, curation and presentation of media produced in dialogue projects could enable both cognitive (or reasoned) and affective communication. But how effective was Talking Difference at encouraging these reasoned and affective communication?

Firstly, as I suggested in my analysis of the interventions above, the extent to which Talking Difference engendered reasoned exchange grounded in critical reflection and guided towards a mutually agreed outcome was limited by the structure of program. As discussed in Chapter One, Habermas argued that in public deliberation participants should come to a shared understanding of the validity claims by which statements can be assessed to be appropriate (or comprehensible), true, right, and sincere. In this process, Habermas argued, ‘everyone [should be] required to take

\textsuperscript{104} Habermas, “Reconciliation Through the Public Use of Reason”.
\textsuperscript{105} Levinas, of course, would take issue with such an instrumentalist notion of dialogue. He argues instead that face-to-face dialogue with the other requires openness to insoluble problems. Such an exchange may be ‘capable of degenerating into hatred, (but provides) a chance for what we must – perhaps with prudence – call love’. However, the spirit of maintaining openness to the other in face-to-face to exchanges aligns with much of Levinas thinking. Emmanuel Lévinas, \textit{Of God Who Comes to Mind}, trans. Bettina Bergo, Meridian, Crossing Aesthetics (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 147. Michael Gardiner, “Alterity and Ethics: A Dialogical Perspective”, \textit{Theory, Culture and Society} 13, no. 2 (May 1, 1996): 151.
\textsuperscript{106} Levinas also questioned the value of ‘empathy’ as he was concerned that an empathetic outlook risks dissolving one’s sense of self into the ‘other’ Gardiner, “Alterity and Ethics”, 131.
\textsuperscript{107} Wehner and Trinca, “Pluralism and Exhibition Practice at the National Museum of Australia”.

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the perspective of everyone else, and thus project herself into the understandings of self and world of all others. In this argument, even in the absence of a universally valid view of the world, a democratic process of intersubjective argumentation under non-coercive conditions should result in the ‘force of the better argument’ asserting itself, and disparate parties reconciling their differences and deciding to peacefully coexist. This is clearly an ambitious vision for dialogue, particularly the notion that a reasoned exchange should be depersonalised when dealing with deeply personal and difficult concepts such as identity and racism. However, museums are well placed to provide the facilitative and pedagogical structure to support a reasoned and analytical engagement with these complex ideas. Indeed, at the same time that Talking Difference was being developed, the Immigration Museum was developing its Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours exhibition which, while it appealed to personal narratives, also provided empirical evidence of the socio-historical emergence of racist systems to give context to contemporary contexts. A working draft of the exhibition’s aims was forthright in their support for an anti-racist approach. The exhibition aimed:

- To position the Immigration Museum as a key site for counteracting racism and promoting social cohesion.
- To create a historic context for notions of race and identity, to help visitors better understand their own and others’ attitudes.
- To provide an uplifting, informative exhibition that nonetheless addresses difficult social issues.
- To be a forum for educating about cultural sensitivities.
- To create a fearless and sometimes confronting exhibition which provides community discussion and supports positive social change, and contributes to personal learning.

108 Habermas, “Reconciliation Through the Public Use of Reason”, 117.
110 Charles and Fuentes-Rohwer, “Habermas, the Public Sphere, and the Creation of a Racial Counterpublic”, 2.
111 Quoted in Kylie Message, Museums and Racism, Museums in Focus (New York: Routledge, 2018), 87.
The exhibition, which has been ably documented as a work of anti-racism by Australian museum scholar Kylie Message, featured personal narratives and recreations of racist experiences, as well as a more traditional timeline and displays documenting racist discourses in Australian media, advertising, institutions, and politics (both historical and contemporary). As Message argued, ‘the exhibition exists as a political project … an “anti-racist” praxis influences and permeates all elements of (its) design and content’. In 2012, the lead curator on the exhibition, Moya McFadzean wrote persuasively about the role of curatorial expertise in the delivery of anti-racist praxis in museums:

> Museums are uniquely placed to construct and present histories and engage in contemporary social and political issues within the public realm in ways in which few other cultural agencies and producers can.

If the Museum had built on the intentions of this exhibition to provide a more informative framework within which dialogue could take place in Talking Difference, the ‘issues-based’ dialogues in the Studio may have better engaged with the different understandings and interpretations of reality upon which the contributions were based. The presentation of relevant historical narratives in a ‘resources’ section, for example, may have offered stronger context for engagement with contemporary discourses of multiculturalism and identity.

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114 As discussed above, while contributions created in the Portable Studio while it was in residence at the Immigration Museum appeared to be more clearly grounded in an appreciation of liberal cosmopolitan values, this may reflect of the different demographic profile of Immigration Museum visitors, rather than a clear result of the context provided by the Museum’s exhibitions. Either way, if the Studio itself had provided historical interpretive material this could have been available in each of its touring locations.

Museums that deal closely with immigration have a strong record of providing historical context as a means of encouraging intercultural understanding. In my experience of program development, the Immigration Museum in Melbourne leads its programs and exhibitions with the historical notion that all non-Indigenous Australians have an immigration story in their family. Elsewhere, the Museum of Migration and Diversity at 19 Princelet Street in London uses artful renditions of historical experiences of migration to provide, in the words of journalist Sebastian Harcombe, ‘a framework for … broader conclusions especially related to the construction of identity, the meaning of ‘intercultural dialogue’.

provision of key statistics related to refugees and asylum seekers may have supported participants to position concerns about ‘boat people’ in relation to the broader context of Australia’s immigration program.\textsuperscript{115}

These changes would have had an impact on the extent to which Talking Difference facilitated an open dialogue guided by participants. However, as we have seen over the past two chapters, Talking Difference was not a ‘co-created’ program giving a platform to the ‘organic’ emergence of voices and issues from each community it visited.\textsuperscript{116} The Museum guided the facilitation of dialogue through the selection of workshop participants, the structure of workshops, the selection of ‘seed’ questions, the design of the interface – allowing as it did only 90 seconds to respond – and the temporary nature of each residency, which limited the extent to which participants could return and build upon the dialogue they had begun. Without further compromising the participatory nature of the program, the addition of a more structured approach to facilitation and interaction design that encouraged participants to support their statements with evidence could have engendered a more critical analysis of the issues raised. In addition to these efforts to encourage reasoned exchange in the creation of responses, the Museum could have drawn attention to responses that were substantiated with accurate evidence in their selection and dissemination of content. Such an approach need not have censored opposing perspectives. Rather, it could have been guided by traditional curatorial practices to highlight moments of reasoned exchange. This approach would have been particularly effective in the presentation of dialogues in which the majority of participants were not speaking from personal experience, such as the dialogues above related to the Australian government’s treatment of refugees and asylum seekers.

\textsuperscript{115} Such an approach would support the notion common in anti-racism literature that in certain circumstances the provision of accurate information can be an effective technique for challenging prejudice. Pedersen, Walker, and Wise, “‘Talk Does Not Cook Rice’: Beyond Anti-Racism Rhetoric to Strategies for Social Action”; Pedersen et al., “How to Cook Rice: A Review of Ingredients for Teaching Anti-Prejudice”.

\textsuperscript{116} Nina Simon, The Participatory Museum (Santa Cruz, California: Museum 2.0, 2010); Lynch, “Whose Cake Is It Anyway?”.
However, as scholars across many disciplines have argued, the mere presentation of ‘facts’ – interested, fallible and biased as they often are – is not enough to engender learning or engagement with complex ideas.\textsuperscript{117} The philosopher of dialogue David Bohm suggests that in many small-scale dialogues:

> People will come … from somewhat different cultures or sub-cultures, with different assumptions and opinions. And they may not realise it, but they have some tendency to defend their assumptions and opinions reactively against evidence that they are not right.\textsuperscript{118}

This consideration suggests that dialogue programs need to do more than simply present a range of empirically grounded arguments and hope that the resultant dialogue will facilitate complex understandings of the issues under consideration and work to oppose to discrimination and support of social justice. In addition to encouraging reasoned arguments supported by evidence, dialogue needs to be facilitated and presented in such a way as to build affective and empathetic connections between participants.\textsuperscript{119} This would align with Stephen Weil’s 1997 assessment of the ‘museums of the future’ as institutions that deploy ‘profound expertise at telling stories, at eliciting emotion, at triggering memories, at stirring imagination, at prompting discovery’.\textsuperscript{120}

One appeal of a strong dialogic practice is that it allows participants to challenge their own assumptions in a supportive environment.\textsuperscript{121} While, as I have suggested, the Talking Difference


\textsuperscript{118} Bohm and Nichol, \textit{On Dialogue}, 11.


\textsuperscript{120} Weil was referring specifically to work with objects in this assessment, but the sentiment is true of all museum work. Stephen E. Weil, “The Museum and the Public”, \textit{Museum Management & Curatorship} 16, no. 3 (September 1997): 260.

\textsuperscript{121} This notion is central to Viv Golding’s notion of feminist-hermeneutics, where “meaning” or sense is made in a process of dialogical exchange, which is akin to deep respectful conversation. To engage in such dialogue the ‘partners’ in the exchange need to regard each other as equals … which demands a recognition of individual “prejudices” or prejudgements that inevitably arise from specific histories or
workshops tapped into local networks and often attracted participants with a pre-existing relationship, the workshops and Studio program were ill-suited to the development of open-ended dialogue and long-term relationships. The time participants spent with one another was too brief for them to develop the sort of friendships at the heart of successful long-term dialogue programs.122

However, there are other means by which the creation of content can build connections between people. The analysis of content in these last two chapters has demonstrated that Talking Difference offered a platform for participants to share affective, narrative-based experiences of identity, diversity, racism, and their own anti-racist practice. This was particularly affecting in instances where participants spoke from personal experience. Rather than the Studio facilitating dialogic connections between participants, the affective connection encouraged here is more akin to the performance of identity by ‘multicultural subjects’, which scholars of community-based media such as Daniella Trimboldi have recognised in digital story-telling projects and social media.123 Trimboldi cites leading cultural critic Elizabeth Povinelli in her argument that digital story-telling projects offer an opportunity for multicultural or subaltern subjects to speak to a more complex and ambivalent multiculturalism, rather than replicating the simplistic liberalism of governmental ‘diversity’ programs.

The evidence presented in this and the previous chapters suggests that in some instances Talking Difference positioned participants to play a similar role: sharing authentic experiences of identity and racism in such a way as to expose ambivalent rather than celebratory experiences of intercultural encounter. This exposure of ambivalent and complex experiences may hold potential for building empathetic understanding among a non-participating audience, especially when seen in the light of contemporary writing about affect and empathy in museum displays, which highlights the importance of these personal and authentic voices.124 In the Bakhtinian sense, these


124 Papastergiadis, “The Sensory Museum”; Witcomb, “Understanding the Role of Affect in Producing a
texts are also dialogic to the extent that they are created in consideration of a broader audience and therefore are part of a dialogic chain of communication between content-creators and audiences. Indeed, research with museum visitors, designed to gauge the anti-racist potential of encountering cultural difference in museum displays, has affirmed the importance of this kind of empathetic and affective bond.125

Nevertheless, as valuable as the empathetic connections built between audiences and the testimony documented in digital content may be, my interest is in the effectiveness of Talking Difference as a means of facilitating, documenting and presenting dialogue between participants. The offer of a formal opportunity for participants to engage with one another is the crucial difference between Talking Difference and the many other museological interventions variously dedicated to the subaltern, ‘voices from below’, and digital storytelling.126 As discussed in Chapter Four, while Talking Difference certainly created an opportunity for a diverse range of participants to speak, the opportunity to facilitate and present dialogue between participants is what sets the Studio apart.

From the creation of questions in workshops, to the engendering of responses during each residency, the Museum’s approach to this task was overwhelmingly dominated by the creation of media, rather than physical face-to-face exchanges. The absence of a clear curatorial structure in the Studio allowed these many representations to co-exist in a cacophonous entanglement of perspectives. In this way, Talking Difference is reminiscent of Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia. At its best, the representation of public discourse in Talking Difference, as in Bakhtinian dialogism, is ‘multivoiced and irreducibly plural in meanings and values (allowing for) diversified


styles and viewpoints’ to emerge. By offering participants the opportunity to perform within the installation, Talking Difference added a degree of complexity to the brand of multivocality generally presented in static museum displays. As Kirsten Wehner and Matthew Trinca have suggested, in their interaction with museum displays audiences generally perform difference – as active participants in the co-construction of meaning – rather than simply absorbing didactic information from static panels. Through its video camera and touch screen, Talking Difference documents these performances and folds them into a contingent and temporary representation of dialogic heteroglossia.

As I argued in Chapter One, Bakhtin’s writing about heteroglossia invites another reading: that the Museum could have applied a higher degree of curatorial oversight in a similar manner to Bakhtin’s ideal author. Here, the Museum could be the ‘biased third party’ who maintains an effort to respectfully bring together many voices in dialogue. In editing content the Museum could have better drawn responses together. As noted above, the approach to engendering these responses could have nurtured more reasoned argumentation and encouraged more lasting face-to-face encounters. An approach to interaction design that encouraged engagement with the responses of others may have supported this process. Without this structure, much of the dialogue the project facilitated about cultural difference, racism, and asylum seekers lacked both

127 Mary Strine, “When Is Communication Intercultural? Bakhtin, Staged Performance, and Civic Dialogue”, in Dialogue: Theorizing Difference in Communication Studies, ed. Rob Anderson, Leslie A. Baxter, and Kenneth N. Cissna (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2004), 227. In its careful framing and structuring of the themes included in the program the Museum plays a role in this multivocality similar role to that which Bakhtin assigns to the author. The author is distanced ‘from this common language, he [sic] steps back and objectifies it, forcing his own intentions to refract and diffuse themselves through the medium of this common view that has become embedded in language’. Likewise, the museum allowed participants to speak in many voices, and hoped to have the overriding message of support for cultural diversity and opposition to racism, refracted through these many voices. Bakhtin, “Heteroglossia in the Novel”, 197.

128 Wehner and Trinca, “Pluralism and Exhibition Practice at the National Museum of Australia”.

129 This idea resonates with museum and communications scholar Angelina Russo’s suggestion that museum programs encouraging digital interaction ‘could employ an intercultural communication approach to analyze how narratives are transformed and re-interpreted by contemporary global audiences’. ‘In doing so’, Russo argues, ‘they could bring a multi-perspective approach to a common subject and explore the mechanisms by which audience participation and user stories contribute to the agency and exchange of culture’. Angelina Russo, “Transformations in Cultural Communication: Social Media, Cultural Exchange, and Creative Connections”, Curator 54, no. 3 (July 2011): 334, doi.org/10.1111/j.2151-6952.2011.00095.x.
critical complexity, and affective weight. Most participants spoke in general terms and were relieved of the burden of presenting their perspectives in reference to their social or historical context. When discussing the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers especially, participants were enabled to uncritically rehearse the dominant discourses of the mainstream media. At its worst, the lack of structure for participating in Talking Difference enabled participants to present assimilationist perspectives unchallenged.

In short, Talking Difference was successful as a means of presenting a cacophonous representation of many voices, and offered opportunities for participants to relay authentic and affecting personal experiences. However, the project would have benefited from a facilitative structure and curatorial approach more carefully planned to engender, document, and present complex interpersonal dialogue between participants guided by the intention of supporting social justice.

Conclusion

The Museum put in place a range of mechanisms to facilitate dialogue. The workshops were intended to bring participants together across cultural boundaries and to spark dialogue, both within sessions and through the Portable Studio. In workshops the Museum established a frame for these dialogues by providing seed questions and allotting set time for face-to-face conversations. The workshops produced a range of questions that varied in style, each enabling and constraining different forms of response. In the Studio the performance of responding (speaking) appears to have become the central activity rather than listening. This was particularly the case for dialogue about difficult social issues such as multiculturalism, racism, and the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees.

A consistent theme across the program was that the Studio did not provide the socio-historical context and facilitative structure that could have enabled a critical practice (time to listen, time to argue, synthesis of arguments, resolution to act), or guide a dialogue informed by rational, critical insight. Exchanges in the Studio rarely addressed the differences in values and assumptions that

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130 As discussed in the Chapter 1, I am referring here to the notion of dialogue undertaken through the application of reason, in particular the work of Jürgen Habermas. Jürgen Habermas, “Reconciliation Through the Public Use of Reason: Remarks on John Rawls’s Political Liberalism”, The Journal of Philosophy, no. 3 (1995): 109–31; Walseth and Schei, “Effecting Change through Dialogue”, 81–90.
lead people to have divergent views. That said, Talking Difference was clearly an effective means of shifting the speaking voice from the Museum to participants and some of the content created was critically complex and conveyed affecting personal experiences. I remain critical of the nature of the exchanges the project engendered between participants but maintain that Talking Difference offered a valuable form of content creation, which contributed to the pursuit of the Museum and its anti-racist agenda.

As the primary case study of this thesis, Talking Difference has offered a means of understanding how museums working within the paradigm of participatory engagement might better facilitate and present informed and engaging dialogue about identity, cultural diversity, and racism. In a socio-economic environment in which museums and their funders are pressured to produce evidence of success, this analysis offers a rare opportunity to take stock of some of the limitations of a program that was clearly successful in a variety of ways (for example, attracting relatively high participation rates, and engendering a range of contributions across a variety of locations). The analysis of dialogue in Talking Difference suggests that museums should embrace their role in shaping dialogue, particularly if their intention is to promote social justice. In these efforts, governmental programs like Talking Difference, designed as they are within the reformatory logic of challenging discriminatory attitudes and celebrating cultural diversity, should be developed in cognisance that focusing on individual behaviour rather than systemic critique limits the scope of dialogue. While clearly dialogue has the potential to occasion more critical exchange and systemic analysis (and in some instances Talking Difference delivered on this potential), without curatorial oversight, synthesis of responses, and interpretation, the creation of content rarely moves beyond a relatively schematic casting of racism at the interpersonal level. Likewise, if museums are to effectively build connections across differences in experience and understanding, they must build structures for sustained engagement between participants, rather than simply co-presenting a range of contending perspectives.

I was drawn to interrogating the kinds of dialogue Talking Difference facilitated primarily because of my personal connection to the project as a staff member. In addition, the project was worthy of scholarly attention as a recent example of a large cultural institution attempting to put into practice the participatory, dialogic and social justice-oriented practices for which museum scholars have been advocating for decades. In the final chapter of this thesis, however, I address the challenge
of facilitating dialogue about race and diversity from a different perspective. I shift focus to a participatory artwork instigated by a group of African American artists in the United States called Question Bridge. The project echoes the question and answer structure of Talking Difference but emerges from very different traditions of activism and socially engaged art. Undertaking such a drastic contextual shift at this stage of the thesis offers a means of better understanding at least two absences in Talking Difference. The first is the absence of curatorial oversight, which has been a consistent theme throughout my analysis. The second is the absence of a formal means by which people who have experienced racism and discrimination can take a role in the planning and implementation of dialogic practice, a key element of the decolonisation of museum practice. While it emerges amid vastly different discourses of race and identity, and in dialogue with different traditions of engagement and presentation, Question Bridge offers a way of thinking through these absences in Talking Difference and conceiving of alternative means by which participatory intercultural dialogue can take form in museums.
Chapter 6: Question Bridge, Intra-cultural Dialogue, Coherency and Synthesis

Introduction

Does being black mean I have to be one thing that fits in a box?¹

There are certain aspects of me that you can see. I’m a man, I’m Black but outside of that you don’t know anything about me. … I can’t jump really high, I don’t eat that much watermelon … there’s no box ... There might be a glass ceiling for damn sure, but there’s definitely not a box.²

The Exploratorium in San Francisco is not the first place you might expect to find a project for quiet dialogue. However, in 2014, among a clutter of scientific displays that beep, swing, roll, and encourage hands-on experimentation by hordes of children, I came across ‘Question Bridge: Black Males in America’. The project was ensconced in a black timber monolith, where five screens each featured a video of a man viewed from the waist up. These participants spoke one at a time, the others appearing to listen intently. I sat on a wooden bench in the darkness and listened. They shared questions and answers on a range of topics from masculinity to personal identity and the impact of role models on their lives. The stories they told were affecting, sometimes funny, and presented with apparent honesty and openness. More striking was that while they spoke from different screens, apparently in face-to-face dialogue with one another, the speakers’ comments and stories were sequenced thematically, and while one person spoke the others appeared to nod their head or look towards the speaker. In combination, the many voices worked together to address the richness and complexity of one another’s ideas. This was a dialogue of peers presented

¹ Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 29. Due to copyright concerns the Question Bridge artists were unable to supply a digital copy of the installation for the purposes of this research. I observed the installation while it was installed at the Exploratorium: Museum of Art, Science and Human Perception, San Francisco, USA on 16 June 2014. Given the challenge of transcribing speakers verbatim in the installation, I built on my notes by referring to transcripts published in the exhibition’s companion text and the digital content published online. For each quote in this chapter I provide reference to both the installation and the text from which I sourced the full quote. Chris Johnson, Deborah Willis, and Natasha Logan, eds., Question Bridge: Black Males in America (New York: Aperture, 2015); Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question Bridge Website, accessed June 29, 2017 available from http://questionbridge.com/.

² Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 29, Answer 1048.
with the seamlessness of a documentary. After working for years on Talking Difference, Question Bridge shed light on different approaches to the facilitation, documentation, and presentation of dialogue in museum spaces.

In previous chapters, my analysis of Talking Difference revealed that while it created a platform for the expression of diverse identities and experiences of racism, the program sat uncomfortably between two potentially transformative forms of intercultural dialogue without fully embracing either. On one hand, the program lacked the structure, facilitation, and synthesis that may have led to a more reasoned exchange of values and assumptions. On the other, the program’s short-term nature limited the extent to which participants took part in open-ended dialogue, which may have encouraged the development of longer term relationships across the boundaries of cultural difference. In this chapter I locate Talking Difference in relation to another project applying similar methods of intercultural dialogue in museums. The resulting analysis presents evidence of approaches to exchange in a museum context that have resulted in meaningful, complex and potentially transformative intercultural dialogue.

*Question Bridge: Black Males in America* is a video-based dialogue work whose facilitators worked with a specific ‘demographic’ – defined broadly as ‘Black males’3 in the United States – and prioritised a thematically coherent experience for the non-participating user. Question Bridge is a work of art, rather than a museum engagement project. This installation presented video questions and answers created by Black males and toured to a broad range of museums and galleries across the United States from 2012 onwards (including the Exploratorium). The project was conceived and implemented by a small group of African American artists, Chris Johnson, Hank Willis Thomas, Bayeté Ross Smith, and Kamal Sinclair. As a work of art, the project emerges from a different aesthetic tradition to Talking Difference, drawing more comfortable comparisons with socially engaged art, participatory art, and video art, than with the governmental tradition of community engagement in social museums.4 I do not include the project in this thesis

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3 ‘Black male’ is the descriptor used by the artists to identify project participants. The artists chose to use ‘males’ as opposed to ‘men’ in acknowledgement that some of the project’s participants were children. Bayeté Ross Smith, Interview, 20 September 2016.

to suggest that it is commensurate with Talking Difference in its aspirations, methodology, context, or the aesthetic traditions to which it speaks. Rather, the project offers a different vantage point from which to view the challenges faced by Talking Difference. While its core structure of participants creating video questions and answers in response to one another appears similar to Talking Difference, Question Bridge ultimately produced a dialogue of diverse voices with a structure and coherency that evinced sharper exchanges of racism and identity than is apparent in Talking Difference. Thus, Questions Bridges provides evidence to support the central argument of the thesis: intercultural dialogue in museums benefits from curatorial vision and synthesis, which draws attention to moments of reasoned exchange, as well as highlighting affecting, transformative encounters.

I present my analysis of Question Bridge in three sections. Firstly, I describe the project’s context and the process by which the artists encouraged participants to create questions and answers. Through analysis of interviews with the artists and related published material, I uncover the nuanced approach to engagement and documentation that the artists undertook. In the second section of the chapter I focus on the ways in which the artists presented content with a particular focus on the physical installation. This leads to the final section focusing on themes emergent in the content. Here I follow a method similar to that of earlier chapters, undertaking a textual analysis of the videos produced and drawing out key themes using methods inherited from grounded theory.

Like earlier chapters, this chapter does not make central the ethnographic project of documenting ‘the perspectives’ of participants. This is partly the result of the focus of this thesis on the facilitation and presentation of dialogue, but it acknowledges also that this research cannot begin to reflect the complexity of the many Black American histories and ways of identifying to which participants referred. Instead, as is the case for the thesis as a whole, I am guided in my analysis by my goal of establishing how museums can better facilitate and present dialogue through participatory practice.

Process

Question Bridge was initiated in 1996 by American artist Chris Johnson. In an interview for this thesis Johnson explained that the project emerged from his desire to draw attention to the eloquence and complexity of everyday dialogue among Black Americans. In doing so, he was building on ideas from an earlier socially engaged, site-specific theatre work he developed with the artist Suzanne Lace called *The Roof is on Fire* (1994). *The Roof is on Fire* invited audiences to roam between cars in a parking lot in Oakland, California, listening to unscripted conversations between groups of Black and Hispanic young people on a range of topics including ‘family, sexuality, drugs, music, neighborhoods, and the future’. Ushers wore badges that read ‘shut up and listen’, creating an ‘audience of eavesdroppers’. Johnson noted that the young people:

> have such complex conversations when they’re in a setting that they feel safe, they talk very freely about things that would be a big surprise to people who are used to thinking of these young kids as being hoodlums.

The project inspired Johnson to seek other means of documenting dialogue, leading to the first Question Bridge project, *Question Bridge: The Black Community* (1996). The project took the form of an analogue video installation, which presented questions and answers recorded by Black Americans representing diverse class, gender, and geographical speaking positions. While the project aimed to disseminate representations of Black people that challenged stereotypes perpetuated in the mainstream media, it also aimed to articulate previously underrepresented tensions within Black communities as a means of challenging racism and developing *intra*-cultural understanding. Johnson suggested that the way to ‘the most meaningful conceptual understanding

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5 Chris Johnson, Interview, 16 June 2014.
6 Johnson, Interview, 16 June 2014.
8 Chris Johnson, Interview, 16 June 2014.
9 *The Roof is on Fire* emerged from media literacy classes Johnson and Lacey delivered for young people of Black and Hispanic backgrounds. Johnson, Interview, 16 June 2014.
of what racism is … is not to look between demographics but within them’. He referred to his own life experiences to explain this thinking.

Johnson grew up in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighbourhood of Brooklyn, New York in the 1950s and 1960s. As a result of discriminatory housing practices and legislation, which limited where Black residents could live, the area was home to a majority Black population. While poverty was endemic in the neighbourhood, in Johnson’s memory ‘Bed-Stuy’ was also socially diverse with doctors and lawyers living alongside workers who had not had access to formal education. This began to change with the legislative reforms of the civil rights era, particularly the Civil Rights Act of 1968, sometimes known as the Fair Housing Act. According to the sociologist Douglas Massey, the Act ‘banned many of the public actions and private practices that had evolved over the years’ to deny African American people access to housing. The result, in Johnson’s recollection, was that ‘as soon as it was possible for African American people who had the means and the admission to leave the “hood”, they did’. Johnson argues this was a ‘dramatic and

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10 Johnson, Interview, 16 June 2014.
12 The historian Tom Davies argues that this was partly a result of the race-based zoning practices codified by the Home Owners Loan Corporation, which had been established in 1933 under the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Tom Adam Davies, “Black Power in Action: The Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, Robert F. Kennedy, and the Politics of the Urban Crisis”, Journal of American History 100, no. 3 (December 2013): 744. Others, such as the sociologist Douglas Massey, have traced the historical emergence of the ‘ghetto’ over the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries to the ‘deliberate actions taken by white Americans to isolate African Americans spatially, and thus marginalise them socially, economically, and politically’. Douglas S. Massey, “The Legacy of the 1968 Fair Housing Act”, Sociological Forum 30 (2 June 2015): 571, doi.org/10.1111/socf.12178.
14 Johnson, Interview, 16 June 2014.
16 Johnson, Interview, 16 June 2014. Despite this, Massey argues that while there have been advances in desegregation since the Fair Housing Act ‘the pace of desegregation has been quite uneven, and 46 years after the passage of the Fair Housing Act, many metropolitan areas remain just as segregated as they were in 1968’. Massey, “The Legacy of the 1968 Fair Housing Act”, 581.
troubling experience’, especially for those who remained in neighbourhoods like Bedford-Stuyvesant and that it deepened class divides across the Black community, a process that continued over the decades.\textsuperscript{17} By the 1990s, he had become ‘vividly aware of how separate these two factions of the greater African American community had become’.\textsuperscript{18}

In addition, Johnson recognised that ‘my most immediate experience of racism came not between myself and other white people, it came between myself and other black people’.\textsuperscript{19} When considering the impact of his experiences on the Question Bridge project, Johnson explained:

in order to create something that offered a different perspective of what racism is, how it operates experientially, having a black face and a white face immediately would imprint people’s notions of what these various people had to say. But if you see two black faces, and you listen carefully to what they say and you recognise that what they’re doing is projecting racist notions on each other, you have to step back and think differently about how racism operates on an individual level.\textsuperscript{20}

To tease out these tensions, Johnson sought Black participants from a range of cultural and class backgrounds in San Diego, California. He visited participants in their homes and other places where they ‘felt safe’. He set up a camera and offered the following prompt: ‘imagine that you’re looking at someone whose lifestyle is very different from your own … what question might you ask this person?’\textsuperscript{21}

Johnson recorded a middle-class person asking, ‘have you given any thought to where the money for welfare comes from and do you even care?’ He then took that question to a ‘welfare mother’, who responded:

Yes, I know where the money comes from, it comes from taxpayers. But have you ever tried to live and raise three children on what they give you? And why do they give immigrants special favours?\textsuperscript{22}

Johnson offers this exchange as an example of the unexpected directions in which the dialogue moved thematically and the rich and personal nature of the responses.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{18} Johnson, “Introduction”, 19.
\textsuperscript{19} Johnson, Interview, 16 June 2014.
\textsuperscript{20} Johnson, Interview, 16 June 2014.
\textsuperscript{21} Johnson, Interview, 16 June 2014.
\textsuperscript{22} Johnson, Interview, 16 June 2014.
\textsuperscript{23} Johnson, Interview, 16 June 2014.
In 2006 an artist and former student of Johnson’s, Hank Willis Thomas, approached Johnson about re-launching the project as a website, mobile application, and multimedia installation. They assembled a team with the artists Bayeté Ross Smith and Kamal Sinclair to seek funding and implement a more ambitious incarnation of the project called Question Bridge: Black Males in America. This new project aimed to facilitate ‘a dialogue between Black men from diverse and contending backgrounds and create a platform for them to represent and redefine black male identity in America’.

Together the artists expanded the geographical scope of the project to include participants from across the United States and tightened the focus to Black males. The group chose this focus in recognition of the fact that the ‘African American male’ had been misrepresented in popular culture by associations with violence and criminality, which in the view of Hank Willis Thomas drowned out ‘multifaceted … and self-determined’ representations. In addition, the artists presented the project in opposition to material manifestations of inequality, arguing in published material accompanying the exhibition that:

during the same period that Barack Obama was twice elected president, black men remain severely overrepresented in rates of incarceration, homicide, police brutality, high school dropouts, and various preventable health risks.

By 2012, when the project was formally launched at the Brooklyn Art Museum, violence against Black men and racism in the justice system had a high profile in the United States. This was particularly apparent after the shooting of the unarmed Trayvon Martin in Florida, the acquittal of his killer, and subsequent public protests. The artists made direct parallels with contemporary

24 Johnson, Interview, 16 June 2014. The website and application provide opportunities for users to add video questions and answers to the project. The project also consists of educational material and what Johnson refers to as a ‘Street Team’ based in Los Angeles in which ‘young men with Question Bridge T-Shirts … go to other black men and say, “do you have a question … you’d like to contribute?”’


27 Willis Thomas, “Reflecting B(l)ack”, 237.

28 In reference to media attention related to Trayvon Martin’s death, United States media scholar Safiya Umoja Noble argues that ‘media spectacle was used to bring about news ratings, increased advertising, and social media traffic at the expense of a national conversation about racial justice, ending racial violence, and stopping gun proliferation’. Safiya Umoja Noble, “Teaching Trayvon: Race, Media, and the
events, such as the Black Lives Matter movement. Their Artist Statement argued that the over-representation of Black men in prison does not ‘correlate with their behaviour … Black males are not more violent, more criminal, or more disruptive than their White male peers’, but that rates of imprisonment are compounded by racial bias. They aimed to challenge stereotypes regarding Black men arguing that ‘being exposed to more complex, multi-faceted, and whole images and narratives of Black males’ offers an effective means of ‘overcoming our negative bias about Black males’. Likewise, Rashid Shabazz, the Chief Operating Officer of the Campaign for Black Male Achievement (a project funder) positioned the project as ‘addressing how implicit bias impacts the life chances of black men and boys’. To this end, as was the case in The Roof is on Fire (1994) and Question Bridge: The Black Community (1996), the artists in Question Bridge: Black Males in America aimed to facilitate dialogue between a diverse range of participants on one hand, and to present this dialogue to a broad audience beyond the participant group on the other. In attempting this, they were responsive to the broader context of public discourse about race, identity, and Black men in the United States.

In the search for participants the artists cast a wide net including and beyond their personal networks. They approached community development centres, mentoring organisations, schools, universities, and prisons for contacts. They approached strangers in cafes and on planes. They sought people from different class backgrounds, ethnicities and age groups, as well as participants with high public profiles such as the actor Jesse Williams, the rapper Michael ‘Killer Mike’ Render, and the former Ambassador to the United Nations Andrew Young. While they sought this diversity, the artists worked to ensure participants felt they were part of an intracultural dialogue among Black males who shared at least these two points of identification. Only self-identifying

29 Question Bridge Artists, “Artist Statement”.
30 Question Bridge Artists, “Artist Statement”.
33 Ross Smith, Interview, 20 September 2016.
Black males were permitted as crew while recording took place.\textsuperscript{34} In creating spaces exclusively for Black males Ross Smith suggested the artists:

wanted to create a situation where all the subjects felt comfortable and they felt open, and free to be candid ... One of the reasons why we were able to get such profound, thoughtful statements from everyone, was that in this situation everyone felt like an expert.\textsuperscript{35}

Once they had agreed to be part of the project, the artists arranged to meet participants, sat them in front of a monitor and offered a concise description of the aims of the project. They then played a selection of questions the artists thought would be ‘popular in [each participant’s] specific demographic’.\textsuperscript{36} The artists asked participants to ‘look into the camera as if you're talking to the man who asked the question and respond’.\textsuperscript{37} In addition, they encouraged participants to record a question for ‘another black man that you feel different or estranged from’.\textsuperscript{38}

An important distinction between this process and the process by which the Immigration Museum facilitated questions in Talking Difference is the lack of a group workshop. Rather than the careful process by which the facilitator led participants to ‘effective’ question construction in Talking Difference (see Chapter Five), participants in Question Bridge were encouraged to envision the recording as a face-to-face conversation between individuals. While questions were generally recorded by individuals in Talking Difference, the language was succinct and gave the viewer little understanding of the context or values by which it was informed. By contrast, the tone of questions conceived by individuals in Question Bridge created the appearance of immediacy and intimacy between participants. In their choice of phrasing participants appeared to speak directly to an individual respondent, for example by beginning their question with ‘So, here’s one, Black man’.\textsuperscript{39} Others provided context for their questions. For example, when asking for advice about how to tell if a romantic relationship will last, one participant said:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{34} The only female artist in the collective, Kamal Sinclair, was not present at these sessions. Ross Smith, Interview, 20 September 2016.
  \item \textsuperscript{35} Ross Smith, Interview, 20 September 2016.
  \item \textsuperscript{36} Ross Smith, Interview, 20 September 2016.
  \item \textsuperscript{37} Ross Smith, Interview, 20 September 2016.
  \item \textsuperscript{38} Ross Smith, Interview, 20 September 2016.
  \item \textsuperscript{39} Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 136.
\end{itemize}
the reason I’m asking is, I’ve been dating a young woman for about a year or so and I feel that she could be the one for me, but I just don’t know what that feels like.\textsuperscript{40}

In these questions there is evidence that participants felt as though they were part of a conversation, which goes some way to serving Chris Johnson’s vision that Question Bridge should function as a ‘simulated conversation between these two people who might never meet face-to-face’.\textsuperscript{41} In this vernacular space, the participants were positioned as individuals whose knowledge, expertise and experiences were valued.

The artists’ invitation for participants to feel like experts is a way into understanding Question Bridge as a project of self-determination. As was the case in Talking Difference, the artists made central the views of participants rather than those of researchers or curators. However, unlike Talking Difference the shared identification with ‘Blackness’ and ‘maleness’ was intended to create a sense of commonality among participants. Importantly, the artists considered ‘Blackness’ primarily to be a construction rather than some inherent or natural signifier of difference.\textsuperscript{42} In an interview for this thesis, Ross Smith said:

\begin{quote}
What Black people have in common is … having this idea of ‘Black’ being forced upon you. It's the idea of being ‘other’ I guess … It's ironic that it can also be something that brings people together.\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

Hank Willis Thomas cast the discursive construction of race in relation to slavery, arguing that ‘Blackness’ was invented by ‘Europeans with a commercial interest in creating a subhuman type of person that could be traded as a commodity’.\textsuperscript{44} The artists sought to provide a platform so that participants could subvert these ‘opaque categories’ of constructed ‘Blackness’ and ‘maleness’ by expressing the nuance of their various identifications.\textsuperscript{45} Supporting the agency and self-determination of participants was crucial to this process. As we will see in the analysis of Question Bridge content below, while ‘Blackness’ may have provided a sense of commonality between participants, the participants just as often questioned what it means to be Black. On the one hand,

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\textsuperscript{40} Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 39.
\textsuperscript{41} Johnson, “Introduction”, 19.
\textsuperscript{42} Ross Smith, Interview, 20 September 2016.
\textsuperscript{43} Ross Smith, Interview, 20 September 2016.
\textsuperscript{44} Willis Thomas, “Reflecting B(l)Ack”, 239.
\textsuperscript{45} Willis Thomas, “Reflecting B(l)Ack”, 240.
\end{flushleft}
then, the artists sought mutual recognition between participants which was grounded in Blackness, and on the other, they sought to broaden audience and participant understandings of Blackness beyond characterisations routinely projected from outside the community. Thus, the project operated through multiple and at times competing processes of self-determination, inviting participants and audiences to negotiate the tensions between collective identification defined in terms of ‘Blackness’, other ways of identifying, and a sense of individual agency.

Presentation

The artists brought these dialogues together in a physical display, website, mobile application and a printed volume. For the non-participating audiences of these many platforms, Question Bridge was meant to be about listening. The choices the artists made in presenting the dialogue contrasted starkly to those made by the Immigration Museum in Talking Difference. The physical Talking Difference installation – the Portable Studio – displayed questions at random and participants selected from responses arranged by date rather than their thematic relevance or quality. The Talking Difference website then presented a small selection of these questions with responses published under thematic headings. The Question Bridge project reversed these functions. While the physical installation took a different form in each of the host museums, the artists always edited content to present a thematically coherent selection of questions and responses. In some host museums audiences were invited to contribute content to the project, however this participatory element was generally kept separate from the installation itself, supporting the sense that the video display was a space for listening.46 On the other hand, the website and mobile application presented every video contribution in full, and invited user contributions. The attention given to conventions of curatorship and museum display in its physical installations positioned Question Bridge to present a more cohesive and affecting experience for the non-participating user than was apparent in Talking Difference. By locating the contributory elements of the project in separate physical spaces and online, the project remained responsive and participatory without compromising the commitment to listening at the heart of the museum installation.

46 Rene De Guzman, Interview, 20 August 2016.
After first encountering Question Bridge as a black timber monolith at the Exploratorium in San Francisco I discovered that this was only one of many approaches taken to presenting the video content in physical space. Since 2012, the exhibition has toured to over fifty museums across the United States. Most of the host institutions have been art galleries, such as the Brooklyn Museum, the Milwaukee Art Museum, and the Cleveland Museum of Art. However, the exhibition has also toured to a number of cultural institutions that blur the boundaries between art, socio-cultural documentation, and historical interpretation. Many of these institutions have a specific focus on African American culture and history, such as the Amistad Center for Art and Culture in Connecticut, the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts and Culture in North Carolina, the California African American Museum, and the DuSable Museum of African American History in Chicago. Others provide generalist spaces for the interpretation of both art and history such as the Oakland Museum of California. In addition to these sites, Question Bridge has been adapted to a single screen for presentation at a number of film and photography festivals including the Blackstar Film Festival in Philadelphia, Photoville in New York, and the Sheffield Documentary Festival in the United Kingdom. Question Bridge functions as a work of art, and can thereby be located within an established discourse of art criticism, gallery design, and participatory art. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I focus instead on the work as a participatory intercultural dialogue project.

In their artist statement, the artists described Question Bridge as a transmedia project, evoking the format of story-telling across a range of media platforms theorised by the American media scholar Henry Jenkins. Audiences could encounter content from Question Bridge in the museum

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47 Question Bridge Artists, “About”, Question Bridge Website.
48 Question Bridge Artists, “About”, Question Bridge Website.
49 See for example Lisa Arrastía’s analysis of Chris Johnson’s broader body of work, including Question Bridge. Lisa Arrastía, “The Bridge Back to Blackness: Chris Johnson and the Art of Social Engagement”, Exposure, 47, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 4–17. Or Claire Bishop’s criticism of participatory, or socially engaged art. Bishop, Artificial Hells. As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, I recognise that art criticism offers an alternative approach to the content under analysis in this thesis. I have located the projects in reference museum studies, social museums and dialogic theory as a means of giving time to the discursive function of the texts produced by participants, rather than over burdening the analysis with a discussion of aesthetics.
50 While Henry Jenkins’ early use of ‘transmedia’ referred specifically to fictional storytelling, Australian media scholars Susan Kerrigan and J. T. Velikovsky argue that Jenkins’ principles of transmedia
exhibitions, through a website, through an application for mobile devices and through a variety of public programs including public seminars and education packs for schools. One result of this multi-platform approach is that it is difficult to define and analyse ‘the user (or audience) experience’ in Question Bridge. This is also one of the strengths of the project. A common assessment of multi-platform approaches is that audiences can choose to engage with the narratives of a project in a form that integrates into their daily lives, which may include a visit to a museum but may equally involve creating a video using a mobile phone on a bus. The design choices made across the various platforms used in Question Bridge add two crucial elements to the video-based dialogues presented in the museum installation. Firstly, the website and mobile application demonstrate a commitment to encouraging user-generated participation, which complements the formal studio shoots that make up the museum displays. Secondly, the public seminars and education programs demonstrate a commitment to facilitating real-time dialogue between participants sharing physical space, a role similar to the Talking Difference workshops. As was storytelling can equally be applied to non-fiction projects. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: NYU Press, 2006); Susan Kerrigan and J. T. Velikovsky, “Examining Documentary Transmedia Narratives through The Living History of Fort Scratchley Project”, *Convergence: The Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 22, no. 3 (June 2016): 250–68, doi.org/10.1177/1354856514567053.

51 These forms evoke Jenkins’ principles that transmedia projects should allow users to perform, as well as encouraging immersion on one hand, and extractability (or viewing later) on the other. Kerrigan and Velikovsky, “Examining Documentary”; Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*.

52 In public programming separate to the installation, the project encouraged more immediate physical face-to-face dialogue. Seminars called Question Bridge Blueprint Roundtables took place in a number of the host museums. These public events featured local African American males taking part in a live and facilitated dialogue in front of a broad audience. One of these were filmed and published online. At the Question Bridge Blueprint Roundtable at Oakland Museum of California on 11 February 2012, after an introduction from Chris Johnson, a panel of prominent Black men and Black boys took part in a semi-structured inter-generational dialogue. This structure allowed for the real-time exchanges not presented in the installation, for example, when a participant asked a young questioner ‘Why did you ask that question?’ rather than answering immediately. The structure also allowed for a highly localised dialogue potentially conducive to the recognition of structural constraints and longer-term community building. For example, when a young participant mentioned that he had been failing at maths, one of the adult participants asked what his support network was, and the child said ‘they cut the counsellors’ from his school. The adult repeated this phrase and said, ‘You are very clear of the kinds of obstacles that you are up against’. Another adult said, ‘Before we leave this room today, you need to have a math tutor, there’s someone in this room who can teach you math’. This approach to public support evokes the principles of assets-based community development, by demonstrating local solutions to structural constraints.

Oakland Museum of California, *California Futures Forum - Question Bridge: Black Males Blueprint*
the case with Talking Difference, this program of workshops provided one of the few sites of physical face-to-face dialogue in the project. For the most part, Question Bridge dialogues were mediated by a screen. This was most clearly the case in the gallery installations.

In some galleries, screens were suspended from the ceiling and audiences could walk behind and between them. In others, they were arranged along a curved wall in front of stools or benches. Generally, the five screens were positioned in an arc, creating the impression that the audience was sitting in a circle among people taking part in a dialogue. According to Chris Johnson, the arc represents the idea ‘that you can be invisible (and) without any consequences, witness … what these men are really thinking and feeling’. Bayeté Ross Smith suggested that the artists considered five screens to be ‘large enough to be a substantial group, but not to be like a crowd’. Rene De Guzman, who was Senior Art Curator at the Oakland Museum of California when it hosted the Question Bridge installation in 2012, described the physical installation as taking on ‘the kind of spiritual format of a chapel’. He felt this impression was accentuated by the wooden bench seats, and even the flat screens which had a ‘stained-glass effect’. In this space, however, rather than witnessing a ‘heroic conversation … happening in heaven’, the screens depicted ‘personal, intimate conversations that you were a special guest for’. According to De Guzman, the human scale of the videos affirmed this sense, inviting a ‘one-on-one connection’ with the speakers on each screen.

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53 De Guzman, Interview, 20 August 2016; Johnson, Interview, 16 June 2014.
54 Johnson, Interview, 16 June 2014.
57 De Guzman, Interview, 20 August 2016.
58 De Guzman, Interview, 20 August 2016.
59 De Guzman, Interview, 20 August 2016.
This effect was heightened by the theatrical conceit of cutting videos together to give the appearance of participants responding to one another in real time. In the Question Bridge installation, while one screen was dedicated to a question or a response, participants faded on and off the other screens appearing to silently listen. At times, they turned to the questioner and nodded, or began to respond before the question was finished creating the impression of cross talk in a real time exchange. In fact, as discussed above, each video was recorded separately, and these moments were captured while participants were waiting for filming to begin or listening to questions being played back. Ross Smith suggested this approach was a means of reflecting in the installation the degree of consideration the participants put into their responses.

Even though they aren’t directly responding with one another … we felt that was a good fit in terms of creating the feel for a conversation, and … paying service to the fact that these men weren’t just chatting rapid-fire at one another. They were listening closely and thoughtfully and processing information and coming up with articulate, in-depth responses.\textsuperscript{60}

Chris Johnson also appreciated the distinction between real world interaction and the synthetic dialogue recreated between the screens. In Johnson’s view, working at a remove from literal face-to-face exchanges through the medium of video created a ‘zone of no consequences’ for participants and audiences alike.\textsuperscript{61} For participants, Johnson hoped that speaking to a camera rather than to an individual would allow for the expression of questions participants usually may have been too fearful to ask of someone who might immediately respond.\textsuperscript{62} In addition, as discussed above, Johnson hoped the physical absence during recording of a non-Black and non-male audience would create a safer space for dialogue. Such arrangements also allowed audiences to attend to these exchanges and to focus on listening rather than feeling impelled to respond.

This approach enabled some forms of dialogue in Question Bridge and constrained others. Johnson is attuned to the interdependence between questioner and respondent. In his interview for this thesis, he spoke elegantly about the nature of questioning, suggesting that to ask something of

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\textsuperscript{60} Ross Smith, Interview, 20 September 2016.
\textsuperscript{61} Johnson quoted in Arrastía, “The Bridge Back to Blackness”, 17.
\textsuperscript{62} This approach to dialogue can be seen as a response of sorts to the philosopher David Bohm’s notion that giving participants in a dialogue time to reflect on their thought process allows them to suspend immediate judgement. In many so called dialogues, he argued, ‘the people who take part are not really open to questioning their fundamental assumptions’. David Bohm and Lee Nichol, \textit{On Dialogue} (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 7.
\end{flushright}
another is to recognise ‘a lack that I want to fulfill through the act of asking a question’. According to Johnson, this acknowledgement of a ‘lack’ – itself a kind of vulnerability – encourages the questioner to become ‘an active listener if (they) really believe that an answer can be evinced by this process’. However, in the Question Bridge installation, the opportunity to address a lack through active listening takes place at some remove. As was the case in Talking Difference, the format constrained the facilitation of the kind of mutual responsibility between interlocutors that, for example, Emmanuel Levinas envisions in the immediacy of a physical face-to-face encounter. While all responses are eventually posted online in Question Bridge, and some are used in the physical installation, these mechanisms create a lag between questioners and respondents which may produce more considered responses as Ross Smith suggests, but limits the extent to which the project invites participants to attend to the answers their questions provoke. In addition, while the design of the recording process encouraged the sense that participants spoke within a group of Black males, they also spoke in the knowledge they were being recorded for display in a public space. Participants spoke with apparent intimacy and gave the impression of shared identification with their interlocutors; however, the public nature of the project adds a degree of artifice and theatre to this process. Some participants must surely have considered an audience beyond their Black male interlocutors in the formulation and presentation of their responses. This complicates the notion that non-Black audiences were silent witnesses to the dialogue created.

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63 Johnson, Interview, 16 June 2014.
64 I use ‘responsibility’ in this context in recognition of Levinas’ conception of face-to-face dialogue as a ‘call to responsibility of the ego by the face [of the other] which summons it, which demands it and claims it’. Emmanuel Levinas, “Peace and Proximity”, in Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings, ed. Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi, Studies in Continental Thought (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 167.
65 Both Talking Difference and Question Bridge ostensibly created spaces for participants to speak to other individuals while, at the same time, generating content to be viewed by a broad audience. In Talking Difference, the tone and content of responses often reflected an expectation of spectatorship. This was particularly the case among younger users who mimicked of elements of social media culture (‘please leave a comment’, ‘I hope you liked my response’). As was intended by the artists, Question Bridge more often reflected the rarefied tone of a documentary than the off-the-cuff irreverence of a social media exchange. However, in both instances participants reflected a degree of attentiveness to the notion of a third-party witness to the dialogue. In a sense, this consciousness of a broader allows both projects to be read in terms of Levinas’ idea of ‘the Third’. ‘The Third’ is an imagined presence in dialogue that invites consideration of and ‘impersonal attentiveness’ towards those ‘not empirically at the table of conversation’. While this notion functions as a philosophical conceit in Levinas’ writing to explain the
Despite, or even because of, these constraints Question Bridge enables heightened and theatrical contexts for both the documentation and the presentation of dialogue. The practice of filming participants under direction is likely to have contributed to the creation of more considered responses, particularly given the safe space encouraged by the artists having something in common with the participants. This is in stark contrast to the generally unstaffed Talking Difference Portable Studio. This sense of consideration is borne out in the responses presented below.

In interviews conducted for this thesis Ross Smith explained that the artists aimed to create a ‘narrative arc’ by editing responses together with care and consideration.\(^66\) The physical installation and its accompanying publication presents content grouped under six themes: ‘identity’, ‘education, community and family’, ‘relationships’, ‘history and politics’, ‘representation and media’, and ‘last word’.\(^67\) Within each theme the artists decided on the sequence of responses based on a range of factors. Firstly, they worked through the questions to identify those they felt were most ‘profound’.\(^68\) They tried to represent a range of ages, as well as ‘lifestyles and situations’, and considered the various contending perspectives among respondents. In this process, they hoped to throw moments of disagreement into relief. One sequence in particular illustrates this approach. The artists edited responses to the question ‘why am I considered a traitor … because I choose to date outside my race?’\(^69\) in such a way that the dialogue developed from those adamantly opposed to the idea, to those presenting a conciliatory perspective, to those adamantly in support. The first respondents said ‘I’d accuse you of ignorance … to historical events that have transpired and are still going on today’ and ‘I believe our women deserve the best that we have to offer’.\(^70\) This was followed by a respondent saying ‘That’s your process by which ethical considerations enter into dialogue, something similar takes place literally in the dialogue facilitated by these projects. The work participants undertake in their responses is not only to convince or understand the individual asking the question, but to contribute to a broader discourse on each topic for project participants and non-participating users alike. Ronald C. Arnett, “Beyond Dialogue: Levinas and Otherwise than the I–Thou”, Language & Dialogue 2, no. 1 (March 2012): 140–55.

\(^66\) Ross Smith, Interview, 20 September 2016.

\(^67\) These titles are used as chapter names in the publication but are not named in the installation.

\(^68\) Ross Smith, Interview, 20 September 2016.

\(^69\) Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 337.

\(^70\) Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Johnson et al., Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 115.
choice … if you can live with it’. These responses were followed by a respondent saying ‘we don’t want to go down the road of saying you can only date one kind of person’, but suggesting Black men should reflect on the political process by which ‘people outside the black race are offered as more attractive, as more of a great kind of relationship’. Following this a participant said resistance to interracial relationships is based on ‘a narrow view of what love should look like … love who you love, and that’s how things are supposed to be’. Across these responses the artists engineered a transition from the most resistant response to the most supportive using the conciliatory responses as a kind of bridge.

This sequence finished with a participant telling a story about having a white female teacher in the 1970s who would kiss her students on the cheek.

One day I got the bright idea that when she came to kiss me on the cheek I would turn my face and kiss her on the lips. So as a little boy I was kissing white women!

This respondent laughs, and the installation moves on to the next question. The inclusion of this final response is evidence of another approach the artists took to sequencing content. In addition to presenting a narrative arc between responses, the artists sought moments of levity to break up the tone of the piece. They were concerned that a monotonous tone of ‘emotional’ material might be less interesting for audiences. They were also aware that responses that were ‘seemingly lighthearted can also lead to profound and in-depth insights’. There are examples of this process of seemingly lighthearted exchanges leading to more critically nuanced dialogue in the closer analysis of content below.

Once the artists had edited responses after each question, they sequenced the questions with the intention that responses would ‘build on each other narratively within each section, then all

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71 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Johnson et al., Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 116–17.
72 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Johnson et al., Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 116–17.
73 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Johnson et al., Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 119.
74 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Johnson et al., Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 119.
75 Ross Smith, Interview, 20 September 2016.
76 Ross Smith, Interview, 20 September 2016.
together as a larger piece’. There is no apparent formula by which the artists approached this project. In some instances, they cut questions presenting contrasting contentions or assumptions next to one another. In the section on education, community and family, for example, the order of questions constructed a loosely alternating exchange between opposing experiences of class and education. The first question was directed to ‘brothers that go to school, that have been to college, have degrees, possibly have well-paying jobs … what makes you better?’ This was followed by a question from a university-level teacher directed towards ‘young Black males’ asking ‘why are you afraid to be smart?’ Later in this sequence, another participant in a prison uniform asked ‘how has your financial or educational success compromised who you feel that you are?’ This was followed by a question for the ‘young men of Black America’: ‘why do you have the “take” mentality?’ The artists leveraged this structure to simulate contact between people of different class backgrounds and levels of education. Rather than creating a conventional linear narrative, these editing choices furthered the artists’ project of highlighting points of disagreement and contrast.

In these moments of disagreement participants provided context and reasoned responses, sometimes speaking in gentle opposition to the assumptions beneath the questions. For example, in a response to the question about the ‘take mentality’, one participant said: ‘I think I have a “take” mentality because everything that I ever worked for and what my ancestors worked for was taken from them’. Another response referred to the ‘crack generation’ suggesting:

you have a generation of young men who are have-nots. You live as a have-not for long enough, you notice that no one’s giving, or no one’s given a shit about you, so you start to take.

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77 Ross Smith, Interview, 20 September 2016.
78 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 75.
79 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 128.
80 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 355.
81 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 140.
82 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 140, Answer 707.
83 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists,
Other responses disrupted the clear boundaries of class and education implied by the questions. The question ‘what makes you better?’ is delivered with seriousness and a degree of bitterness by a participant in a prison uniform. In response, John Hope Bryant – a well-known entrepreneur pictured in a pin-stripe suit – says ‘nothing makes me better’, he focused on the importance of stable family and also affirming the questioner:

I bet you’re just as smart, if not smarter, than me. Because if you are surviving in America without all the traditional attributes and the education and the credentials, you are one solid hustler.84

Such editing of content complicates reductive or essentialist notions of ‘Black identity’ by throwing into relief moments of disagreement and misunderstanding. Thus, while the installation carries some of the multivocal characteristics evident in Talking Difference, in Question Bridge the artists have a stronger role in shaping the combined effect of these many voices.85 In the Talking Difference installation the Immigration Museum presented a cacophonous field of responses connected to one another only by virtue of the time and place at which they were created. In the Question Bridge installation, as contingent and unordered as the stream of dialogue appears, the artists’ intention to contrast opposing perspectives and represent diverse demographics drives the selection of content. Without succumbing to the reductive notion that such a complex dialogue can or should reach a resolution, the artists give shape to participants’ contributions. The structure of the installation invites audiences to understand the contending assumptions, values, and feelings that emerged among the many hundreds of Black men who were part of the project. In this way, the installation invited audiences to listen and to understand complexity in dialogue.

Content

“Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 140, Answer 706.
84 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 75, Answer 603. While all Question Bridge participants consented to having their full names displayed with their responses on the Question Bridge website, I have elected only to name those who are well known in the United States. As I argue below, this is partly because the status of some participants has an influence on the nature of the dialogue facilitated in Question Bridge.
While many contending themes emerged in the content, to illustrate the complexity Question Bridge was able to foster I will highlight two themes in particular. Firstly, as was intended by the artists, in the content they produced the participants addressed common stereotypes about Black males and articulated intersectional identifications within ‘the Black community’. Here ‘Blackness’ was sometimes presented as one among many ways of identifying. Secondly, the content repeatedly evoked historical narratives, particularly regarding slavery and the civil rights movement. This created the impression of a shared historical context, which was less apparent in the Talking Difference project.

As discussed above, by framing the project as an intracultural dialogue among Black males, the artists hoped participants would challenge stereotypes by presenting a range of ways of identifying as a Black male. To this end in some of the videos questioners and respondents directly addressed relatively superficial cultural stereotypes common in public discourse about ‘African American culture’. For example, one questioner asked, ‘this may seem like a silly question, but I want to know am I the only one who has a problem eating chicken or watermelon in front of White people?’ In response one participant said, ‘I don’t know if you’re the only one, but it is not a problem for me to eat whatever I want to eat in front of anybody’. Another respondent laughed and said:

No, to be honest with you, I don’t even eat watermelon because of the connotation that it has around Black people … I understand where you’re coming from because you always want to try to hamper or dampen your Blackness when you’re around White people, we always feel like we have to do that.

In this case and many others created in the project, the participants named stereotypes about Black people and exposed them to be constructions. As the artists intended, responses like these both challenged standard clichés and provided a forum in which the participants could reflect on the impact stereotyping has on their own sense of identity. Phrases like ‘I understand where you’re coming from’ and ‘we always feel like we have to do that’ communicate more than the facile notion that ‘Black people don’t all eat watermelon’. They communicate that discourses projected onto Black people ‘hamper and dampen’ the performance of identity and create circumstances in

86 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 22, Answer 84.
87 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 22, Answer 88.
which Black men remain vigilant against the threat of racism. These reflections bolster the assessments of sociologists and scholars of racism who have recognised the emotional labour of People of Colour, Indigenous people and members of other minority groups made to feel ‘other’ through everyday racism and the experience of microaggressions. In these responses, as we saw in Talking Difference, we see evidence that the project not only challenged stereotypes, but created spaces in which participants felt safe to engage in dialogue about the personal impact of these stereotypes.

While being Black and male provided an enduring frame within which these dialogues took place, the participants did not always make these ways of identifying central to their responses. Participants challenged some of the most egregious stereotypes about Black men simply by presenting authentic and whole articulations of personal identity. As was the case for some participants in Talking Difference, by presenting themselves as complex, gentle and multifaceted, participants challenged representations of Black men as ‘more violent, more criminal, or more disruptive than their White male peers’. For example a user asked, ‘when one is profoundly despairing, how does one seek help without scaring others?’ In response to this question, a young participant said:

If there is a circle of individuals that you are comfortable with – that really know you – then you don’t necessarily have to seek that help, they recognise already that you’re dealing with something, that you’re struggling with something.


89 Question Bridge Artists, “Artist Statement”.

90 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 110, Answer 388.
Another said, ‘I have to really open up and let [people know] I need help’. These performances of Black male identity are characterised by a sense of vulnerability, which contrasts starkly with the grotesque, violent caricatures the artists identify in mainstream representations of Black men. This may seem to be such an obvious contrast that presenting it as an achievement of Question Bridge could be unnecessary at best, and at worst risks legitimising the stereotypes the project seeks to challenge. However, as numerous scholars of media bias in the United States, and the artists themselves have identified, media representations of Black men have been so routinely one dimensional and dehumanising that the articulation of that which should be obvious – that Black men can feel vulnerable and seek support from their peers – offers a significant point of contrast. The fact of the project providing a space exclusively for Black males to speak created a situation where their Blackness and maleness were given, which facilitated a wealth of representations focusing on other elements of their identity thereby challenging these one-dimensional stereotypes.

Other participants presented intersectional forms of identification which further challenged essentialist, stereotypical discourses of race and gender. Scholars of racism in the United States such as Athena Mutua have used the term ‘Blackmaleness’ to describe the interlocking racialised and gendered constructions that combine in popular discourses to represent Black men. In opposition to these constructions Mutua highlights the broad range of processes by which Black

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91 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 110, Answer 389. Question Bridge responses are not limited to reflection on the impact of racial stereotypes at a superficial level. For example in response to the question ‘Does being Black mean I have to be one thing that fits in a box?’ another user responded by saying ‘Black people like any other people in the world are different from each other but I also believe that as a people we need to develop political systems and economic systems that will empower us to reach our goal as a people, we must be united in these areas politically and economically’. Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 29, Answer 1027.


men represent themselves at the intersection of ‘persistent social hierarchies’ constructed not only around race and gender, but also sexuality and class.\textsuperscript{94} For Mutua, the identification of, and opposition to, these oppressive social hierarchies is the basis of the project she calls ‘progressive black masculinity’.\textsuperscript{95} In alignment with this vision, in many instances Question Bridge participants appeared to take the fact of communicating among Black males as a given and focus on other ways of defining their experiences including sexuality, class and political persuasion.\textsuperscript{96}

As was the case in the examples given above, this was sometimes the product of participants defining a specific group of respondents for their questions, something that rarely happened in Talking Difference. This was the case in the following question:

So, this question is for all the black gay men that are out there, and I’m not talking about the ones on the DL [down low], or the ones that don’t identify, but the ones that are open and honest about their sexuality. How do you really feel about yourself? Are you frightened about living openly in this country? What do you do in order to survive as a full human being?\textsuperscript{97}

Respondents to this question generally took a self-affirming approach. For example, some said ‘I love myself, you know, me being a gay Black man’ or ‘I’m not frightened living in this country. I feel confidence in myself. I’m who I wanna be’.\textsuperscript{98} While they present multiple elements of their identities, these respondents do not speak explicitly about the possibility that the challenges they face may be compounded by intersecting normative structures around race, gender, and sexuality.\textsuperscript{99} Rather, they present their experiences within a liberal framework prioritising an individual sense of confidence, openness and honesty. This was also the case where participants drew together other forms of difference in their responses:

I came out, or came out to a lot of people when I was, I guess, in my teen years or twenties. And there’s all different ways of coming out. You come out as same-gender-loving, you come out as loving within racial lines, and loving across party lines … I’m involved with another man of color, an African American man. Right now, we’ve been together for fourteen years, and he’s a

\textsuperscript{94} Mutua, “The Multidimensional Turn”, 81.
\textsuperscript{95} Mutua, “The Multidimensional Turn”, 88.
\textsuperscript{96} Mutua, “The Multidimensional Turn”, 80; Brooms and Perry, “It’s Simply Because We’re Black Men””, 168.
\textsuperscript{97} Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Johnson et al., Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 125.
\textsuperscript{98} Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Johnson et al., Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 126-128.
\textsuperscript{99} Mutua, “The Multidimensional Turn”, 81.
Republican … talk about cross-cultural combinations! … Being involved with someone who … supports people who I think, ‘Oh my God, that person should be the enemy!’ is a challenge, and I don’t really talk that much about it. … Does it feel liberating? I think that the liberating experience starts with self-acceptance and self-love.\textsuperscript{100}

Here, the framing of the question and the broader context of the project position the participant to present an intersectional identity in the sense that the speaker describes multiple aspects of his identity simultaneously, including both tensions and points of similarity with his partner. The question appears to draw focus to normative structures of dominance and violence leveraged against Black gay men in the United States by asking ‘are you frightened about living openly in this country?’ However, this response diverges from the critique of social hierarchy Mutua describes at the heart of ‘progressive black masculinity’ instead describing multi-faceted differences and tensions at an individual level encouraging ‘self-acceptance’ and ‘self-love’.\textsuperscript{101} In this way, as was the case where participants engaged directly with common stereotypes, the response presents an intersectional identification to serve an anti-essentialist narrative about Black men without necessarily making an explicit structural critique.

Question Bridge not only presents evidence to a non-Black audience of the straightforward idea that ‘Black men are more diverse and complex than you may have known’, it provides a space in which participants can negotiate some of these complexities through the mediated format of the screen. These responses are created within, and in response to, a different set of racial and cultural discourses and experiences to the Talking Difference project. However, both projects demonstrate the capability for dialogue projects to engender responses from participants that challenge common stereotypes about marginalised groups. In both projects, this outcome appears to have been facilitated by an invitation to participants to develop questions and responses, which created space for the articulation of nuanced and relatively self-determined engagement with the notion of stereotypes and presentation of identities characterised by a degree of intersectionality. The examples I have provided here generally focus on the role of individuals challenging stereotypes rather than opposing structures of dominance built on race, gender, and sexuality. In other

\textsuperscript{100} Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge; Black Males in America, 2014; Johnson et al., Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 129.

\textsuperscript{101} Mutua, “The Multidimensional Turn”, 82.
responses, however, Question Bridge participants demonstrated more nuanced structural critique, particularly in reference to historical experiences.

One of the shortcomings of the Talking Difference project was the impoverished engagement with historical context apparent in the content. In Chapter Five, I argued that if the Immigration Museum had more effectively worked historical narratives into program facilitation or presentation it may have bolstered reasoned dialogue by assisting participants to frame their contributions or interpretation of content in reference to historical context. This lack of historical context contributed to a sense that participant contributions formed a cacophony of wide-ranging opinions and assertions, rather than a nuanced and informed dialogue.

The content in Question Bridge suggests that framing the participant group can effectively support participants to engage with historical context in participatory dialogue programs. As was the case in Talking Difference, Question Bridge participants were given minimal preparatory material to inform the creation of questions or responses. In fact, by not providing a workshop and group conversation preceding the creation of questions, Question Bridge provided less structure and guidance to participants than Talking Difference. But the decision to frame the program specifically within the demographic of Black males and the inclusion of well-known scholars and activists had the result that the enduring impact of historical experiences on the formation of Black identities – particularly slavery and the movement towards civil rights – became enduring themes. This gave a degree of coherency to the content produced.

This was borne out by responses to the question: ‘what is common to all of us that we can say makes us who we are? … What is that one essence, what is that thread?’ Perhaps not surprisingly, respondents to this question tended to identify skin colour as a primary point of commonality, and further to this, the meaning culturally and historically ascribed to skin colour. Reverend C. Herbert Oliver, well-known for his 1960s civil rights activism in Birmingham, Alabama, responded to the question saying:

There is one thing that African American men all have in common, and that is the perception of them by the White community. That perception is that you are not a man, you are less than a man,

at most you are three fifths of a man, and you are not to be fully respected and you have no rights that are to be respected in the dominant white society. 103

Reverend Oliver suggested that rather than ‘absorb[ing]’ these dehumanising perceptions, Black people need to have a sense of their history to know ‘who negroes were and what they had done’. He drew reference to the civil rights movement as a period of struggle against racism in which activists were cognisant of ‘negro history’ and through this historical consciousness ‘reached a point in their life where they could not accept being treated as less than human’. 104 Other participants identified commonality in the struggle against racism saying ‘in our blackness we have struggles that parallel one another’s’ and ‘it’s not to say that no one else has, but I think we’ve had a very specific struggle that I think we can all identify with’. 105 One respondent said ‘for centuries, the Black man has been used to being beat down. But it keeps rising, keeps coming back strong. It's like a superhero in a comic book’. 106 Participants developed this theme of struggle by linking historical experiences of slavery with resistance to racism as unifying experiences for Black people in the United States.

In some cases, these historical narratives were apparently deployed to bolster a sense of pride and shared identification. This was particularly the case for narratives about the civil rights movement. The inclusion of high profile participants such as the civil rights activist and former Ambassador to the United Nations Andrew Young offered a particularly strong sense of authority and authenticity to this process. Like many of the respondents, Ambassador Young wove together historical and personal narratives. For example, in response to the question in which a young man sought romantic advice asking, ‘how did you know that she was the one for you?’, Ambassador Young told a story about moving to Georgia to run a voter registration drive with his wife in the 1950s. Fearful of being attacked by the Ku Klux Klan, Young proposed that his wife aim a gun at a Klansman if they visited their home. He recalled that she said ‘what are you talking about? … I’ll never point a gun at a human being … if you don’t believe this Christian stuff you’re talking,

103 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Johnson et al., Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 28.
104 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 196, Answer 308.
105 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Johnson et al., Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 28.
106 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Johnson et al., Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 28.
you need to quit right now’. As a result, Young approached the White business community and the mayor of the town. After they met, these local leaders:

decided that they were going to speak out against the Klan. They would let the Klan have the rally, but they would not let the Klan parade through the black community and intimidate those that were trying to be registered voters. And so, she not only protected me from the Klan, she protected me from myself and taught me one of the first living lessons in the power of nonviolence. We not only had a good voter registration drive, but we maintained a good relationship between black and white … when you find a woman like that, you will be glad to spend the rest of your life with her.107

This example is relatively conciliatory in its identification of a moment of nonviolent cooperation between Black activists, the White business community and local government. It demonstrates the extent to which personal and historical narratives were intertwined by participants, particularly those with high profiles. Without necessarily striking such a conciliatory tone, other participants drew reference to historical struggles against racism and discrimination as a means of advocating for progressive change in the present.

Scholar of African American history and culture Howard Dodson, for example, traced a history of African American resistance to oppression to support a vision of social activism and structural change in the present. Dodson responded to a question addressed to ‘older people’, which asked ‘why didn’t y’all leave us the blueprint?’108 Most respondents interpreted this question as a call for guidance from those who were part of the movement towards civil rights. In his response Dodson suggested that previous generations ‘came into the world with a blueprint prepared’ by the generations before them.109 Before the Civil War, Black people in America had a ‘simple and clear agenda to … get out of this institution of slavery’. Those born into subsequent generations had an agenda to become ‘full-fledged citizens able to practice their rights as citizens of the United States in this country’. However, according to Dodson, after the legislative successes of the civil rights era including the passing of the Voting Rights Act (1965) and Civil Rights Act (1964), Black people found themselves ‘split and scattered’ without a ‘uniform sense of purpose … the question

107 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Johnson et al., Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 112.
108 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 342.
109 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 342, Answer 942.
before us was ‘what are we struggling for?’”. On the basis of this historical narrative, Dodson argued:

we collectively need to find ways of grabbing hold of the apparatuses that maintain this particular social order and transform them into something qualitatively different … if the priorities of the black community are moved to the centre of the national agenda, the problems of the black community will be solved: A. But B, the society itself will begin to reflect the ideal and principles articulated in its founding documents in a more profound way than has ever been the case before.110

Here we see evidence of the impact of framing on the degree of historical detail and complexity presented in the project’s content. Not only did the focus on Black males create clear parameters within which an intergenerational dialogue could take place in reference to Black history, the choice of approaching experts supported the presentation of structural critique grounded in historical context.

Andrew Young and Howard Dodson each presented progressive perspectives on the movement towards Black civil rights and transformation of the current ‘social order’. In their appeal to non-violent resistance and negotiation, and the ‘founding documents’ of the United States, these responses appear to have been driven by an optimistic historicism typical of liberal thinking about social justice. In this view, historical narratives are treated as signposts on a linear path towards tolerance and anti-racism.111 Another respondent to the question ‘why didn’t ya’ll leave us the blueprint?’ took a less optimistic perspective. David Lemieux, a former Black Panther,112 said:

110 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 342, Answer 942.
111 This approach to history has much in common with the positivist historicism Karl Popper critiqued in The Poverty of Historicism. Popper questioned a historicist approach to the social sciences that assumes ‘historical prediction is their principal aim, and which assumes that this aim is attainable by discovering the ‘rhythms’ or the ‘patterns’, the ‘laws’ or the ‘trends’ that underlie the evolution of history’. Such a historicism tends to write out some of the complexities of the past as well as its relationship to the present. For example, writing from the perspective of Black Power studies, Peniel E. Joseph argues that an over-emphasis on the civil rights movement has framed popular understanding of the 1960s in terms of a liberal movement towards the inclusion of Black Americans within a stable mainstream, to the detriment of an understanding of the Black Power movement, which ‘addressed issues of race, war, democracy, and the possibility for social transformation that was both inclusive of, and at times went beyond, liberal democratic capitalism at the local, national, and international levels’. Karl Popper, The Poverty of Historicism, Routledge Classics (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2008), 3; Peniel E. Joseph, “The New Black Power History: A Souls Special Issue”, Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture & Society 9, no. 4 (October 2007): 277.
112 See Alyssa Rosenberg, "What We Can Learn from the Black Panthers about How to Survive Trump", 
I suppose some of us, myself included, feel like we did leave a blueprint. [After] the euphoria we felt during the 60s … I thought there would be a continuum. … I thought that we were progressing. I underestimated the seriousness of our enemies. I underestimated that so much time and effort would be spent in dismantling those things that brought about self-esteem, that brought about self-love, that brought about respect for one another. A great deal of time and energy was spent dismantling that by our enemies, and it is our fault that we did not see that for what it was and combat it more thoroughly.\footnote{Question Bridge Artists, \textit{Question Bridge: Black Males in America}, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 342, Answer 945.}

By documenting a sense of that which had been lost since the 1960s, this contribution challenged the teleological approach common in liberal, progressive historical narratives. When considered in combination with Howard Dodson’s transformative vision of a re-imagined social order, this response demonstrates Questions Bridge’s capacity to prompt critical complexity in its interpretation of historical narratives. This degree of critical complexity was rarely on display in Talking Difference, where racism and discrimination were more often framed in terms of a lack of tolerance at an individual level, rather than as a consequence of historical and systemic injustice. In these examples, the facilitation of responses from scholars and activists added critical depth and socio-historical context to the content produced.

Moreover, critically-informed historical insight was not limited to scholars and activists in Question Bridge. In their negotiation of the enduring legacy of the civil rights movement, participants – including those who were well-known and those who were less so – drew on shared historical terminology and critical frameworks. For example, one questioner asked: ‘when you look yourself in the eyes, in the mirror, would you consider yourself a field nigga or a house nigga?’\footnote{I have used the spelling ‘nigga’ preferred by the project artists in their transcription of this video and others in the companion text to the exhibition. In an oft-quoted speech from January 1963 at Michigan State University, Malcolm X argued that there were two ‘kinds’ of ‘negro’ during slavery. The ‘house negro’ lived with the master and identified himself in relation to the master, protected the master, and if there was a fire at the house ‘would fight harder to put the master’s house out than the master himself would’. The ‘field negro’ on the other hand hated the master, and if there were a fire the ‘field negro’} The question drew reference to the notion of ‘field negroes’ and ‘house negroes’, which is associated with Malcom X.\footnote{Question Bridge Artists, \textit{Question Bridge: Black Males in America}, 2014; Johnson et al., \textit{Question Bridge: Black Males in America}, 149.} Each of the responses to this question applied a shared historical...
framework and terminology to negotiate both the enduring impact of slavery and the tension between resistance to establishment power on the one hand, and participation in conventional processes of governance and representation on the other.

Firstly, a number of participants avoided the word ‘nigga’ with one suggesting that ‘it’s denigrating and disrespectful for me to repeat something else that someone used to describe me’ and another preferring to use the word ‘negro’.¹¹⁶ This response to the use of the word ‘nigga’ and its variants was common in Question Bridge content particularly among older participants. Aside from making that distinction, most participants identified with the idea of resistance against establishment power rather than cooperation. One participant said: ‘in Malcom’s terms, I would be in the field. I would be the one who was wishing that the house would burn down or that a breeze comes along and hurries the fire along’.¹¹⁷ The rapper Mike ‘Killer Mike’ Render, said:

when I look in the mirror, I don’t see a house or field nigger. I see a nigger trying to survive. And based on that, whether I’m in the house or the field, my objective is to kill the master, burn down the house, and get to freedom.¹¹⁸

Without explicitly advocating for structural change in the present, both participants demonstrated conviction in notions of resistance inherited from the historical experiences of slavery and the civil rights movement. Others appealed to a sense of dialogue between adversarial and conciliatory approaches:

I can identify with each at some point in my life. I’m a hybrid right now, the go-between, the one that’s the ambassador back and forth from the field to the house and working to keep the connection between the two … realizing that we have a common issue that we’re dealing with. Not just that being in the house is better than being in the field, but instead that we’re both in a predicament’.¹¹⁹


¹¹⁸ Question Bridge Artists, *Question Bridge: Black Males in America*, 2014; Johnson et al., *Question Bridge: Black Males in America*, 151. Here I am using the spelling ‘nigger’ used in the artists’ transcription of this response.

Without forcing a resolution of the tension between the ‘house’ and the ‘field’ – or resistance and conciliation – in each of these responses participants drew reference to shared history and terminology to negotiate political positions along a spectrum.

Other participants were critical of the extent to which Black males associate their identification in the present with the historical injustices of slavery. For example, one participant, Julian T. Roberts, responded to the question about the ‘house’ and the ‘field’ with the proviso that the association of ‘our history, our origin, our present being with the slave period … is part of the indoctrination we received’. In other responses Roberts provides context to this idea saying ‘your history is like a rear view mirror, you need a rear view mirror when you’re going forward so that you can make the right turns and the right moves’ but through the US-centric teaching of history:

We’ve been led to isolate ourselves from the other Black men in the world to help keep us divided … they want us to think that our history started when we were brought here to America as slaves. Roberts also presented an attitude to freedom grounded in individual experience saying ‘freedom is a state of consciousness to start with and I think that we are in this world as we act’. Another respondent echoed this sentiment, presenting skepticism about an over reliance on history as an explanation of contemporary Black American experiences. In response to the question ‘As a Black man in America do you feel free?’, one participant suggested:

People often talk about what they can’t do because they’re black, or because they’re poor, or because they don’t come from the right family, or because they don’t live in the right place … I think we really have no excuse but to own a sense of freedom, own a sense of possibility, to own our future … So, I think it’s also important to be free from thinking too much about the past or thinking too much about the future. But thinking in this moment as you sit here and you watch

120 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Johnson et al., Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 151.
121 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 342, Answer 949.
122 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 26, Answer 105.
123 Question Bridge Artists, Question Bridge: Black Males in America, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 26, Answer 105.
this, as you listen, as you think about your dreams, what are you doing in the moment to actualise? And I think if you do that consistently, then you’ll be able to experience great freedom.\textsuperscript{125}

On the one hand this reflection can be read as representative of a theme of individualism and liberalism that runs through much of the content. As discussed above, a range of participants spoke to the notion of personal responsibility and choices rather than focusing on what might be termed collective struggles against oppressive structures of dominance. The notion of not ‘thinking too much about the past’ sits uncomfortably with the idea that the historical injustices of slavery frame and underpin contemporary inequalities in American society. However, that is not to say that these responses speak in opposition to an appreciation of Black American history and struggle.\textsuperscript{126}

What is apparent from these responses is that participants do not appear to engage with historical reference points and language exclusively to teach audiences outside the Black community about Black History, or to present a shared vision of ‘the Black identity’. Instead, Question Bridge provides a platform in which participants take part in a carefully framed and edited dialogue reflecting on the role of historical experience and understanding for contemporary Black American males. In this way, the project contrasts with the more open Talking Difference program where a shared historical framework was less apparent. Rather, in their negotiation of the ways in which historical narratives and terminology apply – or not – to their contemporary lives, these participants engage with one another in an \textit{intracultural} dialogue. Audiences are invited to listen to this dialogue from outside but the project maintains a clear boundary between participants and audiences – or rather, between Black males and others. In this dialogic space where historical

\textsuperscript{125} Question Bridge Artists, \textit{Question Bridge: Black Males in America}, 2014; Question Bridge Artists, “Question Bridge Online Archive”, Question 26, Answer 110.

\textsuperscript{126} Another way to think about these contributions is to locate the language of self-actualisation, and the conception of freedom as a ‘state of consciousness’, in relation to African American writing about self-care as a political act of resistance. For example, writing in the context of her experience of cancer, the African American, queer, feminist scholar and activist Audre Lorde wrote ‘caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare’. In popular media, commentators have noted the ways in which this quote has been appropriated to support consumeristic and individualistic lifestyle choices at odds with the more radical agenda encapsulated in Lorde’s idea that ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’. Audre Lorde, \textit{A Burst of Light: Essays}, Black Thought and Culture (Ithaca, New York: Firebrand Books, 1988), 131; Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”, in \textit{This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color} (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1983), 94–101; Jordan Kisner, “The Politics of Conspicuous Displays of Self-Care”, \textit{The New Yorker}, 14 March 2017, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-politics-of-selfcare.
narratives are evoked, they are examined as a basis for contemporary understandings of what it means to be a Black male. In combination, many of these contributions appear to support Mutua’s notion of progressive black masculinities grounded in part ‘in black men’s racial justice sentiments and in their historical engagement in anti-racist and other struggles against domination on behalf of black communities’.

Conclusion

I began this chapter with the suggestion that alternative approaches to facilitation and program design in Talking Difference may have led to more nuanced and reasoned dialogues, and the development of stronger relationships between participants. The analysis of Question Bridge goes some way to support this suggestion, but also provides other insights regarding the facilitation and presentation of dialogue in museum spaces. In its mode of presentation Question Bridge provided more structure and synthesis than Talking Difference. This led to the project highlighting reasoned exchanges of values and assumptions particularly among participants with established public profiles, without compromising the creation of affecting exchanges grounded in personal storytelling. While the project did not create spaces for long term relationship building, the theatrical conceit of editing responses to create the impression of real time-dialogue guided audiences towards an empathetic understanding of the content. Through this theatricality the project encouraged audiences to connect with participants.

In their selection of participants, their approach to facilitating questions and responses, and the decisions made in editing and presenting content, the artists behind Question Bridge enabled particular forms of dialogue and constrained others. By providing platforms for contending voices to present opposing points of view, Question Bridge enabled a degree of multivocality which worked against a conventional linear narrative. The project had this in common with Talking Difference. Talking Difference encouraged a more diverse range of participants than Question Bridge, and took a more haphazard approach to organizing its content. The result was that the Australian project struggled to address specific systems and discourses that underpin racism and that may inform participants’ various identifications. While many Question Bridge participants

\[127\] Mutua, “The Multidimensional Turn”, 89.
maintained a liberal individualist outlook, the project also created opportunities for more structural or systemic analysis. By approaching a more specific target group, creating conditions for focused dialogue, drawing out contending perspectives, and presenting these in opposition to one another, the Question Bridge artists created a space in which participants often drew reference to specific histories, socio-economic structures and discourses about race and identity in the United States. In addition, in its multivocal representation of a diverse field of identities the project presented a coherent vision of diversity among Black males in opposition to the grotesque caricature of African American men apparent in some media representations.

As an outsider who is neither Black nor American, there is a degree of translation – and the potential for mistranslation – involved in my drawing interpretations from this dialogue. However, the focus of this thesis is on approaches to dialogic practice, rather than the ethnographic interpretation of perspectives. In a sense, my feeling of being an outsider to Question Bridge – of listening to a dialogue rather than being part of it – is a product of the central conceit of the project. At the same time, the project challenges the simplistic liberal multicultural idea that simply viewing and sharing difference is enough to challenge injustice. The enduring systemic impacts of historical and contemporary injustice do not somehow evaporate through their presentation in Question Bridge. They endure regardless of audiences’ ‘intercultural understanding’ or ‘tolerance’.

Question Bridge also offers a different way of understanding self-determination in dialogue projects. The level of control wielded by artists (rather than museum curators), representing people often underrepresented in cultural institutions carries, its own transformative potential.128 As Bernadette Lynch and Samuel Alberti have argued, participatory practice in museums has struggled to unburden itself of a legacy of racism and colonialism.129 In Question Bridge, the various host museums offered spaces, promotion, and ready access to audiences, but the control of the project remained with the artists. As I have argued, the framing of the project within the demographic of Black males also appears to have created a sense of ownership and connection

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between participants as they spoke to shared historical and social discourses. While Talking Difference enabled a shift in speaking voice from the institution to a range of participants (including many participants representing traditionally underrepresented demographics), the Museum maintained control over project design and implementation. The Museum controlled the frame within which dialogue could take place. Question Bridge offers a means to consider participatory intercultural dialogue as co-creative, rather than purely contributory.130

I do not make this observation to suggest that the only means by which museums can successfully facilitate dialogue is to limit their activities to specific demographics, or to work exclusively with independent artists. As many museum scholars have argued, Australian museums in particular have a history of structuring participation according to ethnic identifiers, which has previously resulted in culturally essentialist representations.131 There is a strong argument for maintaining intercultural work in museums and despite the artists’ resolute intracultural framing, Question Bridge offers a means of understanding self-determination in intercultural dialogue in museums more broadly. Firstly, the project demonstrates that the curatorial oversight for which I advocated in the previous chapter need not be controlled by traditional museum curators. The Question Bridge artists’ success in editing content to reveal the affective and critical nuance of racism for presentation invites the conclusion that people with personal experience of being discriminated against in racist systems are best positioned to give shape to anti-racist dialogues. This was not the case in Talking Difference. Question Bridge offers an example of the value of a diverse team working towards an anti-racist outcome in the curation of participatory content. In addition, while this was not the case in Question Bridge, contemporary social museums seeking to promote self-

determination through dialogue programs are well positioned to build community-guided content selection into their curatorial processes.\(^\text{132}\)

Secondly, just as Question Bridge’s framing of the project within the demographic of Black males appeared to enable a degree of connection and ownership among participants, projects like Talking Difference, which operate in an intercultural environment, would benefit from dwelling on other foci that promote connection between participants. For example, had Talking Difference spent more time operating within each community, deepening its efforts to localise the process of producing and curating content, a more consistent sense of connection and ownership may have emerged in the content. These local connections would, of course, have been qualitatively different to the connection Question Bridge participants forged on the basis of their shared gender and racial identities. However, the idea of local dialogues takes from Question Bridge the sense that points of connection among participants brings a degree of intimacy to the content produced.

By reframing the process by which dialogue can be conceived, documented, and presented, Question Bridge has offered an alternative means of considering the central arguments of this thesis. The analysis of Question Bridge supports the notion that curatorial oversight adds affective power and critical complexity to the presentation of dialogue. In addition, the project suggests that dialogue should be a self-determinative process, through which marginalised people drive the process of advocating for social justice. This requires museums to draw on the expertise of people who can speak with authenticity on the experience of racism, as staff, as artists, and as participants.

Conclusion: The Moment of Dialogue

The seeds of this thesis were sown in 2009, when I began work at the Immigration Museum. I now know that while we searched for ways to take advantage of participatory digital media to bring people into dialogue, our work was part of a broader movement towards dialogue in a range of museums and other government institutions around the world. In 2008, the Council of Europe had released a White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, *Living Together as Equals in Dignity*. The paper defined intercultural dialogue as:

> an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect.¹

Here dialogue offered a central means by which governments could respond to the increased mobility of cultures, ideas and people and offered an alternative to previous cultural policies of assimilation and multiculturalism. The former was framed as being overly nationalistic and repressive of difference, and the latter as operating through a false dichotomy of majority and minority communities, thereby endorsing separatism. Dialogue in this configuration was figured as a means of bringing together the ‘best of both’ policies because ‘it takes from assimilation the focus on the individual; it takes from multiculturalism the recognition of cultural diversity’.²

The paper used the language of inclusivity, cooperation and peace to advocate for increased intercultural dialogue programs across government and cultural sectors and civil society more generally. But of course, such language also implicitly identified the existence of exclusion, isolation and conflict. The White Paper expressed concern about ‘a climate conducive to the emergence, and the exploitation by some, of extremism and indeed terrorism’ and identified ‘intercultural dialogue … [as] indispensable between neighbours’.³ Deploying post 9/11 security

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discourse, then, the Council of Europe recognised the utility of intercultural dialogue as a
governmental tool for ‘managing cultural diversity’.\(^4\)

The idea that dialogic practice can be deployed as a means of addressing social ‘problems’ related
to increasing cultural diversity was – and continues to be – highly influential, particularly in the
cultural sector. The White Paper, and subsequent \textit{Sharing Diversity} report for the European
Commission against Racism and Intolerance,\(^5\) both advocated for the creative and participatory
application of intercultural dialogue in museums. Around the same time, the European
Commission funded the Museums as Places for Intercultural Dialogue program, which consisted
of thirty museum intercultural dialogue projects across Europe between 2007 and 2009. The
program funded projects applying a broad conception of ‘dialogue’ and ‘cultural difference’.
These included such diverse activities as a community-based exhibition of graffiti art in Budapest
(representing a dialogue between the ‘high’ culture of the museum and the ‘low’ culture of graffiti
artists), an exhibition juxtaposing ancient objects with biographical objects from the lives of
refugees in Turin (representing a dialogue both across eras and between the ‘scientific’ curatorial
language of the institution and the narrative-driven language of community-members), and a
touring multimedia installation in the Netherlands combining videos, images and text compiled by
young people of migrant heritage to represent their personal migration narratives (representing a
dialogue across cultural difference, space, and between amateur artists and their audiences).\(^6\)

Writing about these projects in 2010, museum scholars Simona Bodo, Kirsten Gibbs and
Margherita Sani celebrated the capacity of museums to create dialogue-based environments where
participants acknowledged ‘the necessity of questioning themselves and their points of view’ and
brought ‘to the surface intimate and sometimes problematic aspects of their own personal story’.\(^7\)

\(^5\) Council of Europe, \textit{“White Paper on International Dialogue”}, 33; European Institute for Comparative
Cultural Research, \textit{Sharing Diversity – National Approaches to Intercultural Dialogue in Europe}, (Strasbourg:
Council of Europe, 2008), 8.
\(^6\) Evelyn Raat, \textit{“Intercultural Dialogue in the Netherlands: Image, Identity and Culture”}, in \textit{Museums as
Places for Intercultural Dialogue: Selected Practices from Europe}, ed. Simona Bodo et al. (Map for ID Group,
\(^7\) Simona Bodo, Kirsten Gibbs, and Margherita Sani, \textit{“Introduction,”} in \textit{Museums as Places for Intercultural
Dialogue: Selected Practices from Europe}, ed. Simona Bodo, Kirsten Gibbs, and Margherita Sani (Map for ID
Clearly, Talking Difference emerged and came to fruition during a very particular ‘moment of
dialogue’: a period when many in government and across the cultural sector embraced its
potential. While there is arguably much to celebrate in the application of dialogic practice, this
thesis has outlined how the results of dialogue projects in museums can be cacophonous and
uneven. Likewise, the nature of the dialogue that formal programs present, and the role of
institutions in its facilitation, has been under-examined.

This thesis examined the emergence, practice, and social meaning of museum digital media
projects that facilitated, documented, and presented intercultural dialogue. As noted in the
Introduction, my analysis was predicated on the notion that museums tackling cultural diversity,
identity and racism should be dedicated to fighting for social justice, drawing on a wealth of
writing that has argued museums must advocate for social change (rather than attempting to
‘objectively’ present cultural difference). Scholars of interculturalism and racism alike influenced

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8 As discussed in Chapter Two, this embrace of dialogue was also apparent in Australia as evidenced by
the emergence of government-funded and dialogue-based interventions in community settings and the
cultural sector. Anne Pedersen, Iain Walker, and Mike Wise, “‘Talk Does Not Cook Rice’: Beyond Anti-
VicHealth, “Promoting Diversity Through the Arts, Funding Guidelines – Community Arts Grants”
(Melbourne: VicHealth, February 2009), provided in hardcopy by Jim Rimmer, VicHealth, 22 May 2015;
Joseph A. Camilleri, Michális S. Michael, and Janelle Cairns, “Northern Interfaith Intercultural Network
Project: Building an Interfaith and Intercultural Network for Melbourne’s Northern Suburbs”
(Melbourne: Centre for Dialogue, La Trobe University, 2008); Australian Attorney General’s Department,

Peter Pigott, Museums in Australia 1975: Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National
Collections Including the Report of the Planning Committee on the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia (Canberra:
Australian Government Publishing Service, 1975); Elaine Heumann Gurian, Civilizing the Museum: The
Collected Writings of Elaine Heumann Gurian (London & New York: Routledge, 2006); Richard Sandell,
Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference (London & New York: Routledge, 2007); Andrea
Witcomb, Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum, Museum Meanings (London and New York:
in Museums and Migration: History, Memory and Politics, ed. Laurence Gouriévidis, Museum Meanings
Discussion Paper” (London: Museums Association (UK), 2012), accessed 25 August 2018 available from
my framing of social justice as an opposition not only to interpersonal prejudice but exposure of, and resistance to, structures of dominance and inequality.10 A central argument for this thesis, then – drawn from my experience of working on, and researching, Talking Difference – has been that a social justice-oriented approach to museum work requires more than story-telling focused at the individual and interpersonal level: it requires exposition and analysis of the social contexts that produce prejudice and inequality, both historically and in the present.

In making this argument I have noted that museums carry institutional baggage into this project. Museums have traditionally dominated the presentation of narratives about difference and over many decades museum scholars have exposed the legacies of colonialism, imperialism, and racism in museum practice.11 In response, participatory programming – particularly invitations for participants to engage in dialogue in the museum – here represented an effort to democratisate the production of knowledge and shift the speaking position of museum programming, with visitors encouraged to become content producers. In this way, dialogue projects are an example of museums’ efforts to work as advocates for social justice through both content and process. By


inviting participants to learn from one another through stories and opinions about identity, cultural diversity and racism, museums hope to educate visitors and users in the liberal cosmopolitan tradition of respect for difference. Nevertheless, this thesis has sought to underline that, in the pursuit of social justice, participatory intercultural dialogue projects need to negotiate the tension between these two imperatives, both decentering the voice of the institution by inviting many voices to present contending perspectives in dialogue with one another, and advocating for the acceptance of cultural difference and challenging structures of domination.

As suggested in the Introduction, these two imperatives may sit well with one another in some instances, but they are not analogous. An environment where all participants are provided an equal platform will not necessarily provide effective advocacy for social justice, and a work of advocacy primarily driven by museum curators will not necessarily create a context for dialogue and participation. While museum scholars and practitioners rarely present these dual imperatives in an unequivocally binary mode, museum studies discourse has lacked a coherent conceptual basis for navigating the tension in participatory intercultural dialogue projects between advocating on the one hand, and ‘letting go’ of institutional authority on the other.\textsuperscript{12} By focusing on the emergence, facilitation, presentation and outcomes of Talking Difference this thesis has sought to address this gap and to suggest both how moves towards intercultural dialogue alter the governmental role of museums in contemporary pluralistic societies, and how museums might better facilitate and present informed dialogue about identity, cultural diversity and racism.

In Chapter One: Understanding Dialogue, I drew out three threads from dialogic theory to develop a picture of what dialogue in museums could achieve. Dialogue programs in museums should balance, I argued, reasoned argumentation with openness to unreasoned encounters across difference that may have unpredictable consequences. In seeking this balance, I argued that museums cannot consider their role as being neutral forums in which dialogue ‘organically’ takes place. Rather, museums should both temper and nurture contributions from participants, listening to participants, and shaping the dissemination of content produced in dialogues around their intention to advocate for social justice. This argument relies on museums’ long history of devising exhibitions and programs around the principles of social justice, particularly those that have aimed to build respect and understanding of cultural diversity.

In Chapter Two: Governments, Museums, and Intercultural Dialogue, I surveyed secondary literature and primary material from VicHealth and the Immigration Museum to position the Talking Difference project in relation to Australian multicultural and intercultural practice, and provide evidence of the governmental aspirations of Talking Difference. I argued that Talking Difference, and projects like it, extend rather than challenge the governmental role of museums to build ‘citizenly competence’. Instead of pursuing a more ideological argument exposing the power disparity between museums and visitors in this process, as others have done, I outlined an alignment of interests between the Immigration Museum and its funder VicHealth, which produced conditions appropriate for Talking Difference to advocate for social justice. I argued that museums will continue to play a reformatory, governmental role in public discourse, and that careful consideration of the role the museum plays in facilitating dialogue can position these institutions to pursue social justice, and participation, within such a governmental framework.

These chapters set the context for the analysis of Talking Difference. In Chapter Three: The Talking Difference Portable Studio, I used primary documentation from the Immigration Museum, and interviews with staff members, to outline the processes by which Talking Difference came into existence and detail the mechanisms the Museum put in place to facilitate dialogue. This included analysis of project planning, the design process for the Portable Studio, and the workshops dedicated to producing questions. This analysis exposed the limitations the Museum

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placed on dialogue through workshops and project design, but also made clear the Museum's preference for a relatively ‘open’ platform for the dissemination of this content, which would display many contributions without synthesis, summary or curatorial oversight.

This lack of curatorial oversight in the Portable Studio created both opportunities and limitations for the pursuit of social justice in Talking Difference. I examined the results of these decisions in the fourth and fifth chapters through an analysis of project workshops and participant-generated digital content. In Chapter Four: Identity in Talking Difference, I argued that the Museum’s invitation for participants to create content relating to cultural identity resulted in a broad field of representations. I highlighted moments at which participants aligned themselves with relatively fixed, collective identities such as ethno-cultural assemblages, or the nation state, and moments at which participants articulated more hybrid and fluid forms of identification. I argued that this messy field of representations created space for an understanding of the complex and contingent nature of identification. In this way, the project challenged the static approximation of identities more common in museum practice dedicated to ‘celebrating cultural diversity’. At the same time, the absence of an interpretive framework limited the extent to which the content explained the social and historical context behind these representations. As a result, the content exposed multiple and at times competing modes of identification without exposing the structural biases and inequalities that support prejudice and limit the pursuit of social justice.

I built on this theme in Chapter Five: Dialogue in Talking Difference. In this chapter I examined the forms of dialogue Talking Difference enabled and constrained. I argued that the workshops could have nurtured more nuanced dialogue between participants by creating extended opportunities for face-to-face exchange in real time. While the questions participants created took a range of grammatical forms, I noted that under the guidance of Museum staff they tended to coalesce around a series of central themes including the Australian media, stereotypes, experiences of racism and Australian national identity. While these questions brought a degree of focus to the project, I argued that without a strong facilitative structure respondents appeared to have little encouragement to explain the context and assumptions that underpinned their opinions. While the narratives of individuals sometimes demonstrated critical nuance and sometimes conveyed the affective weight and authenticity of personal experience, rather than an informed and complex dialogue, the project produced a cacophonous field of responses. Another consequence of the lack
of curatorial oversight, synthesis of responses, and interpretation, was that Studio content tended to cast key issues, such as racism and the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees, at the interpersonal level. This limited the extent to which the project used dialogue to advocate for notions of social justice driven by structural analysis.

The final chapter of the thesis offered an opportunity to consider these insights from a different perspective. While there were similarities between Talking Difference and Question Bridge there were also instructive differences. Examination of Question Bridge, a project produced by a small group of African American artists in the United States, allowed the thesis to consider key absences from the Australian project. The first was the absence of curatorial oversight, outlined extensively in Chapter Four and Chapter Five. I argued that the theatrical conceit of editing responses to create the impression of a real-time dialogue between Question Bridge participants, and threading these along a series of narrative arcs, brought coherence and intimacy to the project’s content and presentation. While the content was diverse and uneven, shared identification appeared to position participants to engage with shared historical, cultural and socio-economic structures relevant to their diverse experiences. This brought depth and nuance to the dialogues facilitated by the project.

Another absence from Talking Difference was the lack of a meaningful process through which participants could shape the selection and sequencing of content. Question Bridge offered an example of curatorial oversight initiated and implemented by African American artists. When considered in relation to Australian participatory practice, Question Bridge challenges the notion that curatorial oversight necessarily limits the extent to which dialogic projects empower previously underrepresented people. Question Bridge, I argued, offers an approach to facilitating, documenting and disseminating dialogue that challenges the domination of previously underrepresented people, and presents dialogic exchanges with curatorial oversight.

These chapters offered opportunities to respond to the thesis’ two main questions by establishing how participatory intercultural dialogue projects alter the governmental role of museums, and how museums might better facilitate and present informed dialogue about identity, cultural diversity, and racism. In sum, I have argued that despite a participatory approach, which aims to decentre the voice of the museum, participatory intercultural dialogue projects can clearly support a governmental role for museums. This was certainly the case in Talking Difference, which aimed to encourage the celebration of diversity and challenge prejudice among individuals. I have argued
that, in the pursuit of social justice, projects like Talking Difference should be executed with the intention not only of representing the diverse perspectives and experiences of individuals, but also of exposing the contemporary and historical structures of dominance that underpin prejudice.

This broad argument has three parts. Firstly, I found that intercultural dialogue projects such as Talking Difference allow museums to adapt their governmental role to contemporary contexts where engagement with institutions is characterised by reflexivity and participation. The relatively open nature of the Talking Difference project’s invitation to participate created opportunities for (relatively) self-determined voices to present contending perspectives, moments of affecting personal disclosure, and the performance of multiple ways of identifying. This broad field of representations allowed Talking Difference to present an impression of the irreconcilable nature of dialogue, and the limits to institutions’ control over the production of knowledge. In turn, this exposure created opportunities for engagement with difference, which may be part of a broader picture of challenging prejudice at an interpersonal level.

Secondly, I found that the more complex project of exposing the overlapping social and historical contexts that underpin racist systems and structures requires more curatorial oversight and interpretation than is afforded by a model predominantly grounded in personal disclosure. While every project cannot be expected to achieve every desired outcome, the distillation of complex ideas is a fundamental curatorial skill, which positions museums particularly well to provide this context. Perhaps partly as a consequence of its attempt to decentre the voice of the institution, I found that Talking Difference facilitated the proliferation of a cacophony of voices without taking advantage of the storytelling and possibility of synthesis that make museums unique. This was embodied in the user experience, which offered few opportunities for participants to engage in nuanced dialogue with one another and presented uneven and unstructured content to non-participating users.

Finally, I found that if museums are to pursue social justice through intercultural dialogue, they should apply methods of participatory practice that involve people whose narratives are presented. In particular, participants could play a role in the selection, synthesis, and dissemination of content. This approach would not only facilitate sustained interaction between participants, but also challenge the dominance of the museum over the process. As other museum scholars have argued before me, such a co-creative approach should be executed in cognisance of museums’ legacies of
racism and the risk of dominance imposed in the guise of ‘curatorial objectivity’. As I flagged in the Introduction, these efforts should be part of a broader project of decolonising museum practice, including through efforts to diversify staff. This broader body of work has not been a focus of this thesis.

Talking Difference Beyond this Case Study

This thesis does not intend to provide a formulaic set of recommendations for ‘successful’ intercultural dialogue projects. Nevertheless, I would like to draw out some implications from my research in the hope that practitioners of such projects may rethink aspects of their work. These implications relate to each stage of the delivery of intercultural dialogue projects: planning, facilitating, and dissemination.

It is clear from existing scholarly work that during the planning of participatory programs museums would be well advised to invite early participation from the communities they hope to engage. This means that museums would listen to the needs of participants and work with them

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14 Vivien Golding, for example, has argued that through mutually respectful collaboration with communities, curators will be better positioned ‘not only to promote an understanding of cultural diversity and the often shameful histories of museums, but also to forge a contemporary connection with the lived experiences of present-day audiences’, and ‘most importantly to progress critical thinking and point to collaborative action that we can take as responsible communities on matters of contemporary concern, such as white supremacism’. Vivien Golding, “Collaborative Museums: Curators, Communities, Collections”, in Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections and Collaboration, ed. Vivien Golding and Wayne Modest (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 14. See also Lynch and Alberti, “Legacies of Prejudice”; Vivien Golding, Learning at the Museum Frontiers: Identity, Race, and Power (Farnham, Surrey, England and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2009).

15 As Kylie Message has suggested, the Immigration Museum has a record of identifying structural and systemic racism in its exhibitionary practice. At the same time, while I have not conducted a quantitative analysis of museum staffing as part of this research, people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds were certainly underrepresented among the staff responsible for Talking Difference during the period under analysis in this thesis. This is, of course, reflective of a broader trend in museums. For example, in 2016 in Chicago a coalition of ‘multi-generational multi-ethnic’ museum professionals produced a statement arguing that ‘the persistent and pervasive presence of structural racism in our institutions … is at the heart of the museum field’s failure to diversify its boards, staffs, collections, members, and visitors, despite over a generation of effort in this area’. Kylie Message, Museums and Racism, Museums in Focus (New York: Routledge, 2018), 22–26.; Daryl Fischer, Swarupa Anila, and Porchia Moore, “Coming Together to Address Systemic Racism in Museums”, Curator 60, no. 1 (January 2017): 23, doi.org/10.1111/cur.12191.

to frame and plan dialogue-based interventions. While there is a wealth of literature on the transformative potential of projects led by community members, the analysis in this thesis demonstrated that, beyond the invitation to contribute in workshops and the Portable Studio, Talking Difference offered few opportunities for community members to participate. While Question Bridge was led by artists who identified with the target participant group, such a participatory approach need not always be limited to people who identify with minority or marginalised communities. A more collaborative or co-creative planning approach would be open to as diverse a group of participants as possible. This means a culturally diverse participant group, including ‘White working class’ representatives, a demographic Ien Ang argues are generally excluded from discourses in support of diversity (and who may carry resentment towards diversity partly as a product of having limited social and economic opportunities). While the research presented in this thesis offers no easy method for executing this task, existing scholarly work on participation and collaboration suggests that museums seeking to engage with communities should collaborate in the development of project objectives and design, including those effected by discrimination, as well as those less predisposed to anti-racist messaging.

These opportunities for co-design in the planning stages could offer beginning points for dialogue, which could in turn impact upon the facilitation of programs. In addition to bringing people

Frontiers; Bodo, “Museums as Intercultural Spaces”, 181–92.


together physically to plan, museums could offer resources for local facilitators to conduct face-to-face dialogue sessions in preparation for the arrival of an installation like the Portable Studio. Being led by local organisations with an ongoing commitment to the host area, these opportunities for dialogue would have more chance of creating space for longer term relationships between participants than short-lived programs like the Talking Difference workshops. These face-to-face dialogue sessions would ideally be dedicated to open-ended interpersonal dialogue. In acknowledgment of the tendency identified in this thesis for unstructured dialogue to relieve participants of the obligation to provide evidence for their claims and call one another to account, museums could provide resources for facilitators to support not only affecting and intimate interactions, but also provide social and historical context where necessary.

In the delivery of digital programs that aim to both facilitate and document dialogues, the analysis in this thesis demonstrated that a relatively open-ended invitation to participate can encourage a range of representations and perspectives. Future museum programs could benefit if participants were encouraged to support their perspectives with evidence and spend time with the differences between their perspectives. As I have suggested throughout this thesis, this would require a degree of curatorial oversight in the creation of participatory interfaces as well as the selection and sequencing of content. This should be driven by a commitment not only to exposing moments of disagreement – allowing non-participating users to compare differing perspectives – but also by a commitment to expose the structures that underpin prejudice. At times, reference to these structures and systems may emerge in the content participants produce, as was frequently apparent in the content presented in Question Bridge. However, while participants’ shared points of identification and historical context may have supported their identification of structures and systems in Question Bridge, projects like Talking Difference can create different opportunities for museums to encourage structural analysis. For example, as suggested above in relation to community-based facilitators, museums could provide interpretive resources within digital programs to which participants might refer in support of their claims.

The suggestion of such a structure for participatory intercultural dialogue projects provides an opportunity for museums to address the tension between ‘letting go’ of institutional authority on the one hand and advocating for social justice on the other. While the selection and sequencing of content offers a means of producing a more concise and potentially more effective piece of
advocacy, without careful consideration it could also represent an unrestrained instance of institutional control over dialogue. At this stage, too, it is important for museums to adopt co-creative models which involve diverse groups of local participants like those proposed in relation to planning above. This could include traditional participatory approaches such as collaborating with a local editing panel consisting of people who have an interest in supporting local community dialogue. Such a panel could be tasked with reviewing and recommending contributions, deciding through a deliberative process which should be profiled and co-presented to best draw out nuanced and critical responses. One way in which this could be achieved would be by building an online platform through which the groups tag content by subject, discuss the merits of various contributions, and vote on the most appropriate comparisons. In such a context, as discussed in Chapter One, the museum may attempt to instill Habermasean deliberative processes, through which participants collectively identify truth claims. However, a group of individuals is just as likely to make decisions based on unreasoned, affective, or playful sentiments. This might allow the selection and sequencing of content to maintain some of the haphazardness that can make participatory projects special. By maintaining an openness to the unpredictable and irresolvable elements of dialogue in the planning, facilitation, and curation of content, museums might be positioned to advocate for social justice at the same time as addressing their fears of ‘letting go’.

**Talking Differently into the Future: Directions for Further Research**

Participatory intercultural dialogue projects are by their nature unfinished and unwieldy. The representation of multiple contending perspectives invites multiple scholarly approaches, only some of which I have applied in this thesis. For example, while there is a wealth of literature to support the analysis of participation in the tradition of socially-engaged art, including analysis from within and beyond art galleries, I have elected to focus on dialogue as an intervention in social museums.²⁰ Future research could fruitfully draw learnings from artists and art critics into this discourse. A visitor studies approach dedicated to determining the ‘impact’ of Talking Difference on participants may also have proven fruitful. The discipline of visitor studies clearly produces insightful analysis, but I took up the opportunity to examine mostly unseen digital content

from a museum interactive and found this to be so rich as to sustain an in-depth examination. I brought together a variety of methods of data collection including interviews with staff and participant observation, but my central methodological approach was a textual analysis of participant responses created in the digital user-generated environment of the Portable Studio, and in the more rarefied environment of the Question Bridge filming sessions. The consequence was that the thesis has captured moments in time, rather than processes of change.

Further research could work towards establishing the longer-term impact participatory programs like Talking Difference have on participants’ developing understanding of identity, diversity, and racism. Given that participatory projects will only ever be one small contribution to the broader discourses that shape participants’ perspectives, I remain sceptical of the notion that surveys and pre- and post-participation interviews alone can determine the attitudinal ‘impact’ of a project. However, longitudinal ethnographic methodologies dedicated to understanding the overlapping discourses in which visitors decode messages from museums (such as that recently undertaken with high school students visiting the Immigration Museum by Philip Schorch and his colleagues at Deakin University) offers a model of how further analysis of participatory practice could build on the research presented in this thesis.21 Follow up interviews with participants would also position future researchers to undertake robust demographic analysis with participants on the basis of class, location, gender and cultural identifiers. This could form a qualitative analysis of participants’ contributions but would also allow researchers to understand barriers to access in participatory programs. Working with the limited contextual data available from the Portable Studio – and focusing on digital content as a record of moments of exchange – the extent to which I could draw these conclusions in this thesis was limited. A dialogue between analyses of content (as presented in this thesis), analyses of participant interviews and surveys, and theoretical interventions would offer a means of building on the findings presented here. Such an approach

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may expose the many ways in which participatory intercultural dialogue projects can better oppose prejudice and advocate for social justice.

As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, given the large amount of responses compiled in many contributory digital participation projects, another avenue for future study could be to apply techniques of quantitative analysis more common in the analysis of online data, particularly social media. While I worked with over a thousand digital responses, I was drawn to the qualitative nature of dialogic encounters, rather than a quantitative analysis. As museums continue to produce large amounts of data through participatory projects, and researchers in the digital humanities continue to develop new methodological approaches, there will continue to be opportunities to build on the insights presented in this thesis. Future research projects may work to trace networks forged over time through digital participation, to map the distribution of themes across demographics and locations, or to draw comparisons between projects working in physical space and online. These investigations have been outside my focus but may enrich the study of participatory intercultural dialogue projects in museums.

Creating Spaces to think and feel: A Continuing Conversation

In this thesis I have examined a specific project, in which I was personally invested, to develop conceptual understandings of the emergence, practice and social meaning of participatory intercultural dialogue in museums. I have explored theoretical literature related to the nature of dialogue and the social role of museums, historical literature related to the emergence of intercultural museum practice and undertaken primary analysis of digital content that may otherwise have remained unseen. Thanks to this process I have come to understand and appreciate the governmental role of museums in diverse societies, and to suggest alternative means by which they can facilitate reasoned and affecting intercultural dialogue.

Nevertheless, I began researching this thesis with a sense that museums should let go of the process of facilitating dialogue so that participants might engage one another in fruitful, impassioned, combative, and respectful exchanges. I had assumed that the institution of the museum always and necessarily functioned as a hindrance to the naturally deliberative quality of communities.
While I remain inspired by the chaotic and unpredictable elements of dialogue and intercultural exchange, over the course of my research I have found that I have developed a perhaps unfashionable appreciation of museums’ agency in participatory contexts. I am optimistic about museums’ ability to create structures and put in place limitations that might allow them to genuinely provide ‘safe places for unsafe ideas’.\footnote{Gurian, Civilizing the Museum: The Collected Writings of Elaine Heumann Gurian, 99.} I have outlined some of the ways museums can play this role, highlighting opportunities to advocate for social justice.

The most inspiring and powerful moments of dialogue I encountered in this research occurred when participants (and facilitators) balanced affecting self-disclosure with informed and critical analysis. When a participant in a workshop in rural Victoria described comments she had received about her red hair, it was inspiring and powerful that the facilitator gently drew attention to the broader social context of racial prejudice by locating her experience in contrast to the weekly racial abuse of a Sikh colleague (see Chapter Four). In Question Bridge, it was inspiring and powerful to see a range of responses to a young man’s video request for a ‘blueprint’ for the post-Civil Rights era. These included a former Black Panther lamenting the forces still resistant to social justice, and a University Professor extolling the need to ‘collectively … find ways of grabbing hold of the apparatuses that maintain this particular social order and transform them into something qualitatively different’ (see Chapter Six). I use the terms ‘inspiring’ and ‘powerful’ here to demonstrate the value of Talking Difference and Question Bridge (and indeed of thinking and writing about projects like these) for future museum practice – as part of a continuing conversation. I hope this thesis inspires and empowers museum scholars and practitioners to be brave in their embrace of the principles of social justice, to continue their conversations with one another and with their participants, and to create spaces for dialogue that make thinking and feeling central. In this way I hope museums can inspire their participants to find powerful new ways of talking difference.
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Mauri, Tatiana. Interview. Audio Recording, 10 July 2014.


Participant Observation
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Digital copies of multimedia content produced in the Talking Difference Portable Studio as well as associated metadata, interface design, and instructional content produced by the Immigration Museum, Museum Victoria.


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Question Bridge: Black Males in America (2012).


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Lynch, Bernadette T. “Whose Cake Is It Anyway? A Collaborative Investigation into Engagement and Participation in 12 Museums and Galleries in the UK”. Summary


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Appendix A: Talking Difference Portable Studio Touring and Workshop Schedule

Portable Studio Residencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 August – 15 September 2011</td>
<td>Sunshine Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 October – 24 October 2011</td>
<td>Sydenham Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 October – 10 November 2011</td>
<td>Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours, Immigration Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 November – 27 November 2011</td>
<td>Deer Park Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 November 2011 – 22 February 2012</td>
<td>Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours, Immigration Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 February – 16 April 2012</td>
<td>Shepparton Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 April – 22 April 2012</td>
<td>Shepparton Art Museum (banners and computer only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 April – 27 April?? 2012</td>
<td>Cobram High School (banners and computer only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 May – 14 May 2012</td>
<td>Bairnsdale Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 May – 27 May 2012</td>
<td>Lakes Entrance Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 June – 8 June 2012</td>
<td>Horsham Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 July – 19 July 2012</td>
<td>Mildura Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 – 25 February 2014</td>
<td>Swan Hill Regional Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – 16 March 2014</td>
<td>Geelong Regional Library Corio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 – 31 March 2014</td>
<td>Geelong Regional Library Belmont</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – 24 April 2014</td>
<td>Altona North Community Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 April – 19 May 2014</td>
<td>Laverton Hub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 May – 8 June 2014</td>
<td>Williamston Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 27 June 2014</td>
<td>Altona Meadows Library Learning Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 February – 16 March 2015</td>
<td>Yackandandah Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 March – 6 April 2015</td>
<td>Wodonga Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 April – 27 April 2015</td>
<td>Wangaratta Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – 17 May 2015</td>
<td>Carrum Downs Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 – 31 May 2015</td>
<td>Frankston Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 August – 23 November 2015</td>
<td>Yarra Ranges Regional Museum</td>
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<td>23 November – 11 December 2015</td>
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<td>7 – 16 March 2016</td>
<td>Sam Merrifield Library, Moonee Ponds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 – 22 March 2016</td>
<td>Avondale Heights Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 July – 1 August 2016</td>
<td>Glen Waverly Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – 22 August 2016</td>
<td>Clayton Library</td>
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* This residency was included in the original schedule on 13 July 2011 but abandoned due to the amount of time it took to reassemble the Studio at Sunshine Library.
## Talking Difference Workshop Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26 May 2011</td>
<td>Visy Cares Hub, Sunshine</td>
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<td>9 June 2011</td>
<td>Visy Cares Hub, Sunshine</td>
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<td>Horsham Library</td>
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<td>3 July 2012</td>
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<td>3 March 2014</td>
<td>Corio</td>
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<td>Belmont</td>
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<tr>
<td>7-8 April 2014</td>
<td>Altona North Community Library</td>
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<td>23-24 April 2014</td>
<td>Laverton Hub</td>
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<td>4-5 June 2014</td>
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<td>22 March 2016</td>
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## Appendix B: Talking Difference Portable Studio Questions

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<th>Touring Phase</th>
<th>Question No.</th>
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<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
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<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>If someone asked you to use three words to describe yourself, which words would you use?</td>
<td>July - August 2011</td>
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<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Do you feel like you can easily express yourself without being judged?</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Has your identity changed from time to time?</td>
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<td>Are you free to live the life you want, or do you have certain pressures and limitations stopping you from having that life?</td>
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<td>Where in the world do you belong, and are you happy?</td>
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<td>Does your community, or other people around you know you for who you are, or what you’re trying to be?</td>
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<td>Does what you wear influence what you think, your behaviours, or how other people think of you?</td>
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<td>Are you happy and proud about your colour? Do you wish you could change your skin colour?</td>
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<td>What is normal? Are you normal?</td>
<td>July - August 2011</td>
<td>Talking Difference Champions Workshops, Brimbank</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>What does your community look like to you?</td>
<td>July - August 2011</td>
<td>Talking Difference Champions Workshops, Brimbank</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>What languages do you speak?</td>
<td>July - August 2011</td>
<td>Talking Difference Champions Workshops, Brimbank</td>
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<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>What was it like growing up in Australia?</td>
<td>July - August 2011</td>
<td>Talking Difference Champions Workshops, Brimbank</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Do you like sport? Why?</td>
<td>July - August 2011</td>
<td>Talking Difference Champions Workshops, Brimbank</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>How is who you are today shaping your future?</td>
<td>July - August 2011</td>
<td>Talking Difference Champions Workshops, Brimbank</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Can you remember a time when you treated someone differently? How did you feel after?</td>
<td>July - August 2011</td>
<td>Talking Difference Champions Workshops, Brimbank</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Do you remember a time you were treated differently because of the way you spoke, or how you looked?</td>
<td>July - August 2011</td>
<td>Talking Difference Champions Workshops, Brimbank</td>
<td>42</td>
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<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Have you ever challenged someone on something they did or said to somebody else?</td>
<td>July - August 2011</td>
<td>Talking Difference Champions Workshops, Brimbank</td>
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<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Do you remember a time when you were treated differently because of the way you spoke or how you looked?</td>
<td>July - August 2011</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>What do you like about Melbourne City and why?</td>
<td>July - August 2011</td>
<td>Talking Difference Champions Workshops, Brimbank</td>
<td>53</td>
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<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Should all people accept an Australian way of life, including laws, the way you dress, and the way you behave?</td>
<td>28 February 2012</td>
<td>Shepparton Library, Shepparton</td>
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<td>Question No.</td>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Date Recorded</td>
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<td>What was your reason for moving to Australia?</td>
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<td>Shepparton Library, Shepparton</td>
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<td>Phase 1</td>
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<td>How do you see Australia in 10 years?</td>
<td>28 February 2012</td>
<td>Shepparton Library, Shepparton</td>
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<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Why does Indigenous Australia have to change to suit mainstream Australia?</td>
<td>2 May 2012</td>
<td>Bairnsdale Library, Bairnsdale</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Why do you consider yourself lucky to live in Australia?</td>
<td>2 May 2012</td>
<td>Bairnsdale Library, Bairnsdale</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>Can we save the world by working together?</td>
<td>2 May 2012</td>
<td>Bairnsdale Library, Bairnsdale</td>
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<td>37</td>
<td>Why does Hitler hate all the Jews? Why did he kill them all?</td>
<td>2 May 2012</td>
<td>Bairnsdale Library, Bairnsdale</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>Why do some people think that the colour of your skin makes you a bad person?</td>
<td>2 May 2012</td>
<td>Bairnsdale Library, Bairnsdale</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>What does Australia Day mean to you? What are you celebrating on Australia Day?</td>
<td>17 May 2012</td>
<td>Lakes Entrance Library, Lakes Entrance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>What does an Aboriginal person look like?</td>
<td>17 May 2012</td>
<td>Lakes Entrance Library, Lakes Entrance</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>I’m very clear on my Aboriginal cultural history, my background, it is my identity, it is who I am as a person, it shapes my values, and I’m very clear on my history with my laws and rules for everything living and on-living, and I have very strong values. But I was wondering, what’s your culture? What are your values?</td>
<td>17 May 2012</td>
<td>Lakes Entrance Library, Lakes Entrance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>What’s the first thing that comes to mind when you meet a person who’s different to you?</td>
<td>1 June 2012</td>
<td>Horsham Library, Horsham</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Do you see me as equal to you in every way?</td>
<td>1 June 2012</td>
<td>Horsham Library, Horsham</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>What would you do if someone bullying you?</td>
<td>3 July 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Is music life to you?</td>
<td>3 July 2012</td>
<td>Mildura Library, Mildura</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>If someone is racist to you, does music make you feel better?</td>
<td>3 July 2012</td>
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<td>What does living in a culturally diverse community mean to you?</td>
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<td>What causes racism?</td>
<td>3 July 2012</td>
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<td>Date Recorded</td>
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<td>Phase 1</td>
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<td>Why is it so hard for this government to accept boat people? And once they have been accepted by the government why is it so hard for the Australian people to accept them?</td>
<td>3 July 2012</td>
<td>Mildura Library, Mildura</td>
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<td>Phase 1</td>
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<td>Why is not an easy for new migrant in Australia to integrate into Australian societies?</td>
<td>3 July 2012</td>
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<td>Are you proud of your skin colour?</td>
<td>8 April 2013</td>
<td>Museum Victoria Staff Test</td>
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<td>Are you proud of your skin colour?</td>
<td>8 April 2013</td>
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<td>Are you proud of your skin colour?</td>
<td>8 April 2013</td>
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<td>Have you ever felt different from everyone else?</td>
<td>8 April 2013</td>
<td>Museum Victoria Staff Test</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
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<td>Are you proud to be an Australian?</td>
<td>8 April 2013</td>
<td>Museum Victoria Staff Test</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
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<td>Museum Victoria Staff Test</td>
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<td>9 April 2013</td>
<td>Museum Victoria Staff Test</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Do you think media influences perceptions of race and colour?</td>
<td>2 May 2013</td>
<td>Museum Victoria Staff Test</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>What do you do when someone says something you think is racist?</td>
<td>2 May 2013</td>
<td>Museum Victoria Staff Test</td>
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<td>Is Australia still perceived as a racist country?</td>
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<td>Have you formed strong opinions about someone simply because of their ethnicity without having met them?</td>
<td>2 May 2013</td>
<td>Museum Victoria Staff Test</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Have you ever seen someone targeted on public transport because of the colour of their skin?</td>
<td>2 May 2013</td>
<td>Museum Victoria Staff Test</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Do all Aussies have an Australian accent?</td>
<td>17 May 2013</td>
<td>School Visit to Melbourne Museum</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Are all aussies good at sport?</td>
<td>17 May 2013</td>
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<td>Are some sports just Australian?</td>
<td>17 May 2013</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>How different is it to live in another country compared to Australia?</td>
<td>17 May 2013</td>
<td>School Visit to Melbourne Museum</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Do you think I like Australia?</td>
<td>17 May 2013</td>
<td>School Visit to Melbourne Museum</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>If your nationality was considered lesser than others, would you want to change it?</td>
<td>17 May 2013</td>
<td>School Visit to Melbourne Museum</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td>do you have a accent?</td>
<td>17 May 2013</td>
<td>School Visit to Melbourne Museum</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Would you change your cultural background, and your appearance?</td>
<td>17 May 2013</td>
<td>School Visit to Melbourne Museum</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>would you change your cultural background if you could?</td>
<td>17 May 2013</td>
<td>School Visit to Melbourne Museum</td>
<td>31</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Do all Australians have BBQ?</td>
<td>17 May 2013</td>
<td>School Visit to Melbourne Museum</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Have you been stereotyped, and did it define you?</td>
<td>17 May 2013</td>
<td>School Visit to Melbourne Museum</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>What language do you speak? Do you think it’s good to speak more than one language?</td>
<td>17 May 2013</td>
<td>School Visit to Melbourne Museum</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>What foods do you eat at home?</td>
<td>17 May 2013</td>
<td>School Visit to Melbourne Museum</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Have you ever been ashamed of your cultural background?</td>
<td>17 May 2013</td>
<td>School Visit to Melbourne Museum</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>What does it mean to feel that you belong?</td>
<td>1 August 2013</td>
<td>Talking Difference in Schools #1</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>What does being Australian mean to you?</td>
<td>1 August 2013</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>Give an example of when you’ve been stereotyped and how did that make you feel?</td>
<td>1 August 2013</td>
<td>TD in School #1</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>How do you become part of a community?</td>
<td>1 August 2013</td>
<td>Talking Difference in Schools #1</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Have you ever been stereotyped because of your nationality?</td>
<td>9 September 2013</td>
<td>TD in School #2</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Have you ever been racist towards anyone?</td>
<td>9 September 2013</td>
<td>Talking Difference in Schools #2</td>
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<td>Have you ever felt insecure about your nationality and how did you overcome it?</td>
<td>9 September 2013</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>how did you handle a situation where you’ve been discriminated, based on your cultural background?</td>
<td>9 September 2013</td>
<td>Talking Difference in Schools #2</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Are you proud of your country of origin?</td>
<td>14 October 2013</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Have you ever been seen as a stereotype?</td>
<td>14 October 2013</td>
<td>Talking Difference in Schools #3</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Do you think it’s ok to discriminate?</td>
<td>14 October 2013</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
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<td>Has someone else teased you because of the colour of your skin?</td>
<td>14 October 2013</td>
<td>Talking Difference in Schools #3</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>What do you do when you see someone being racist?</td>
<td>14 October 2013</td>
<td>Talking Difference in Schools #3</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
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<td>Has someone teased you because of your skin colour?</td>
<td>14 October 2013</td>
<td>Talking Difference in Schools #3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Do you feel you belong in Swan Hill?</td>
<td>12 February 2014</td>
<td>Swan Hill Regional Library, Swan Hill</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Have you helped someone from a different cultural background? What did you do? If not, why not?</td>
<td>12 February 2014</td>
<td>Swan Hill Regional Library, Swan Hill</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Have you ever been stereotyped?</td>
<td>12 February 2014</td>
<td>Swan Hill Regional Library, Swan Hill</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Have you ever experienced or seen racism in Swan Hill? What did you do? How did it make you feel?</td>
<td>12 February 2014</td>
<td>Swan Hill Regional Library, Swan Hill</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>What does being an Australian mean to you?</td>
<td>12 February 2014</td>
<td>Swan Hill Regional Library, Swan Hill</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Have you ever had a first impression of someone that turned out to be wrong? Can you tell us about it?</td>
<td>12 February 2014</td>
<td>Swan Hill Regional Library, Swan Hill</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Do you follow a religion? Does it have a place of worship in Swan Hill? If not, would you like to see one created?</td>
<td>12 February 2014</td>
<td>Swan Hill Regional Library, Swan Hill</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>What does it mean to be a new arrival in Swan Hill?</td>
<td>12 February 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Do you follow a religion? Does it have a place of worship in Swan Hill? If not, would you like to see one created?</td>
<td>12 February 2014</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Why are some people labelled as 'bogans'?</td>
<td>3 March 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>How do other people see you? Is this impression right or wrong?</td>
<td>3 March 2014</td>
<td>Geelong Regional Library Corio</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Does the Australian media represent young people fairly?</td>
<td>3 March 2014</td>
<td>Geelong Regional Library Corio</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Have you ever a negative first impression of someone that turned out to be wrong?</td>
<td>3 March 2014</td>
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<td>56</td>
<td>What does being Australian mean to you?</td>
<td>3 March 2014</td>
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<td>Are you proud of your culture and history?</td>
<td>3 March 2014</td>
<td>Geelong Regional Library Corio</td>
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<td>Location</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>In what ways have you engaged with other cultures?</td>
<td>17 March 2014</td>
<td>Geelong Regional Library Belmont</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Do you think Australians treat migrant workers differently to Australian workers?</td>
<td>17 March 2014</td>
<td>Geelong Regional Library Belmont</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>Are your expectations of migrant ability and skills different compared to Australian workers? Why or why not?</td>
<td>17 March 2014</td>
<td>Geelong Regional Library Belmont</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Are expectations different with people of different cultures, compared with their Australian counterparts?</td>
<td>17 March 2014</td>
<td>Geelong Regional Library Belmont</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>What's the big deal about immigration and why are some people so upset about it?</td>
<td>17 March 2014</td>
<td>Geelong Regional Library Belmont</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Just because we can ignore racism, should we? Have you ever seen something racist happen? What did you do?</td>
<td>17 March 2014</td>
<td>Geelong Regional Library Belmont</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Have you ever been racist towards anyone? Why? How did it make you feel afterwards?</td>
<td>7 April 2014</td>
<td>Altona Community Library, Altona</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>What can you do in your everyday life to make Australia a less racist place?</td>
<td>7 April 2014</td>
<td>Altona Community Library, Altona</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Why is your identity important to you? Have you ever wished you could change who you are?</td>
<td>7 April 2014</td>
<td>Altona Community Library, Altona</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>Have you ever taken the time to understand another culture? Tell us about it.</td>
<td>7 April 2014</td>
<td>Altona Community Library, Altona</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Have you ever experienced or witnessed racism? What happened and what did you do? How did it make you feel?</td>
<td>7 April 2014</td>
<td>Altona Community Library, Altona</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Is it OK to make a joke about someone's skin colour or accent? Who gets to decide if the joke is racist?</td>
<td>7 April 2014</td>
<td>Altona Community Library, Altona</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>Can you give some ideas on how Australian culture can change to become more inclusive?</td>
<td>7 or 8 April 2014</td>
<td>Altona Community Library, Altona</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Why is your identity important to you? Have you wished you could change who you are?</td>
<td>8 April 2014</td>
<td>Altona Community Library, Altona</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>Have you experienced or witnessed racism? What</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>What can you do in your everyday life to make Australia a less racist place?</td>
<td>8 April 2014</td>
<td>Altona Community Library, Altona</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Have you ever been racist towards anyone? Why? How did it make you feel afterwards?</td>
<td>8 April 2014</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>Is it ok to make a joke about someone’s skin colour or accent?</td>
<td>8 April 2014</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>Have you ever taken the time to understand another culture? Tell us about it.</td>
<td>8 April 2014</td>
<td>Altona Community Library, Altona</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>Can you give some ideas on how Australian culture can change to become more inclusive?</td>
<td>8 April 2014</td>
<td>Altona Community Library, Altona</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>Have you ever been stereotyped? What happened? How did you react?</td>
<td>29 April 2014</td>
<td>Talking Difference in Schools #4</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>Have you ever had a good or bad first impression of someone that turned out to be wrong? How was it wrong?</td>
<td>29 April 2014</td>
<td>Talking Difference in Schools #4</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>What does it mean to belong?</td>
<td>29 April 2014</td>
<td>Talking Difference in Schools #4</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>Are you proud of your skin colour?</td>
<td>29 April 2014</td>
<td>Talking Difference in Schools #4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>What can you do to stop racism in your everyday life?</td>
<td>29 April 2014</td>
<td>Talking Difference in Schools #4</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>why is it not ok to judge other people based on their race?</td>
<td>29 April 2014</td>
<td>Talking Difference in Schools #4</td>
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<td>85</td>
<td>Is it ok to joke about someone’s race or skin colour? Who gets to decide if the joke is racist?</td>
<td>29 April 2014</td>
<td>Talking Difference in Schools #4</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>Have you ever said anything racist to someone? How do you think it made them feel?</td>
<td>29 April 2014</td>
<td>Talking Difference in Schools #4</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>Have you ever been stereotyped? What happened? How did you react?</td>
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<td>88</td>
<td>Have you ever been stereotyped? What happened? How did you react?</td>
<td>29 April 2014</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>Are you proud of your skin colour?</td>
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<td>Have you ever said anything racist to someone? How do you think it made them feel?</td>
<td>29 April 2014</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>Is it ok to joke about someone’s race or skin colour? Who gets to decide if the joke is racist?</td>
<td>29 April 2014</td>
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<td>92</td>
<td>Have you ever said anything racist to someone? How do you think it made them feel?</td>
<td>29 April 2014</td>
<td>Talking Difference in Schools #4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>Have you ever been stereotyped? What happened? How did it make you feel?</td>
<td>21 May 2014</td>
<td>Williamstown Library, Williamstown</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>How do you identify yourself?</td>
<td>21 May 2014</td>
<td>Williamstown Library, Williamstown</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>Have you ever experienced racism? How did it make you feel?</td>
<td>21 May 2014</td>
<td>Williamstown Library, Williamstown</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>Were you born in another country? How long did it take you to feel like you belonged in Australia?</td>
<td>21 May 2014</td>
<td>Williamstown Library, Williamstown</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>Do you speak English with an accent? How does it change how other people view you?</td>
<td>21 May 2014</td>
<td>Williamstown Library, Williamstown</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>What is the best thing about living in a multicultural country like Australia?</td>
<td>21 May 2014</td>
<td>Williamstown Library, Williamstown</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>Is it ok to tell a joke about someone’s race or skin colour? Who gets to decide if the joke is funny?</td>
<td>11 June 2014</td>
<td>Altona Meadows Library Learning Centre, Altona Meadows</td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>How do you identify yourself?</td>
<td>11 June 2014</td>
<td>Altona Meadows Library Learning Centre, Altona Meadows</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>Have you ever had a first impression of someone that turned out to be wrong? What happened?</td>
<td>11 June 2014</td>
<td>Altona Meadows Library Learning Centre, Altona Meadows</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>Have you ever been stereotyped because of your race or nationality? How did it make you feel?</td>
<td>11 June 2014</td>
<td>Altona Meadows Library Learning Centre, Altona Meadows</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>What is the best thing about living in a multicultural community?</td>
<td>11 June 2014</td>
<td>Altona Meadows Library Learning Centre, Altona Meadows</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>Have you ever stereotyped someone because of their accent? How do you think it made them feel?</td>
<td>24 February 2015</td>
<td>Yackandandah Library (School Group, Yackandandah)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>What do you think 'being Australian' means?</td>
<td>24 February 2015</td>
<td>Yackandandah Library (School Group), Yackandandah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>Have you ever seen something racist happen? What happened? How did you respond?</td>
<td>24 February 2015</td>
<td>Yackandandah Library (School Group), Yackandandah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>How can we help to stop racism in society?</td>
<td>24 February 2015</td>
<td>Yackandandah Library (School Group), Yackandandah</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>What is the best thing about living in a multicultural country?</td>
<td>24 February 2015</td>
<td>Yackandandah Library (School Group), Yackandandah</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>What is the most positive experience you have had with someone different to you?</td>
<td>24 February 2015</td>
<td>Yackandandah Library (School Group), Yackandandah</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>If someone tells a racist joke, what is a good way to respond?</td>
<td>24 February 2015</td>
<td>Yackandandah Library (School Group), Yackandandah</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>Can you describe a first impression of someone that turned out to incorrect?</td>
<td>17 March 2015</td>
<td>Wodonga Library, Wodonga</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>Do you see yourself as an Australian? What does being Australian means to you?</td>
<td>17 March 2015</td>
<td>Wodonga Library, Wodonga</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>Have you ever experienced racism in Wodonga? What happened?</td>
<td>17 March 2015</td>
<td>Wodonga Library, Wodonga</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>Can you name the different communities that live in the Wodonga area?</td>
<td>17 March 2015</td>
<td>Wodonga Library, Wodonga</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>Are you proud of your skin colour? Have you ever wished that you could change it? Why?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wodonga Library or Wangaratta Library*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>How can we encourage the unity and participation of all cultures in Wodonga?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wodonga Library or Wangaratta Library*</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>Is making fun of someone part of Australian culture? At what point does this become harmful?</td>
<td>8 April 2015</td>
<td>Wangaratta Library, Wangaratta</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>How do rural communities and metropolitan areas differ in regards to acceptance of difference?</td>
<td>8 April 2015</td>
<td>Wangaratta Library, Wangaratta</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>What can the community do to help people share their cultural stories and experiences?</td>
<td>8 April 2015</td>
<td>Wangaratta Library, Wangaratta</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>What does it take for someone to be accepted as a 'local'?</td>
<td>8 April 2015</td>
<td>Wangaratta Library, Wangaratta</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>What makes you proud of your cultural identity?</td>
<td>8 April 2015</td>
<td>Wangaratta Library, Wangaratta</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>What is your cultural background? Do you feel that your background is an advantage or disadvantage? Why?</td>
<td>8 April 2015</td>
<td>Wangaratta Library, Wangaratta</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>Have you ever experienced casual racism in your school or community? What happened? How did it make you feel?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wangaratta Library or Carrum Downs Library*</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>How do you feel your community views you? Why?</td>
<td>4 May 2015</td>
<td>Carrum Downs Library, Carrum Downs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>What does being Australian mean to you?</td>
<td>4 May 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>Do you feel discriminated against? What happens that makes you feel this way?</td>
<td>4 May 2015</td>
<td>Carrum Downs Library, Carrum Downs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>Do you think it is an asset to have different languages spoken in your community? Why do you feel this way?</td>
<td>4 May 2015</td>
<td>Carrum Downs Library, Carrum Downs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>Do you feel you belong in your community? Why do you feel this way?</td>
<td>4 May 2015</td>
<td>Carrum Downs Library, Carrum Downs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>Do you have an accent? If so, how do you think it affects how people see you?</td>
<td>4 May 2015</td>
<td>Carrum Downs Library, Carrum Downs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>Do you think Australia is a welcoming place for new arrivals to settle? Why or why not?</td>
<td>20 May 2015</td>
<td>Frankston Library, Frankston</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>How culturally diverse is Frankston?</td>
<td>20 May 2015</td>
<td>Frankston Library, Frankston</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>Do you consider Frankston a 'typical' Australia suburb? Why or why not?</td>
<td>20 May 2015</td>
<td>Frankston Library, Frankston</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>What is something that you have recently learned about your own culture?</td>
<td>20 May 2015</td>
<td>Frankston Library, Frankston</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>Have you ever defended your own culture against racist views or stereotyping? What happened?</td>
<td>20 May 2015</td>
<td>Frankston Library, Frankston</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>What could be done to make Frankston more supportive of different cultures?</td>
<td>20 May 2015</td>
<td>Frankston Library, Frankston</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>How do you identify yourself?</td>
<td>28 August 2015</td>
<td>Yarra Ranges Regional Museum, Lilydale</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>Have you ever felt like you have had to change a part of your identity? Why?</td>
<td>28 August 2015</td>
<td>Yarra Ranges Regional Museum, Lilydale</td>
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<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>How do you feel if someone tells you that they are a different religion to you? Why?</td>
<td>28 August 2015</td>
<td>Yarra Ranges Regional Museum, Lilydale</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>Have you ever felt ashamed of your culture or race? What happened? How did it make you feel?</td>
<td>28 August 2015</td>
<td>Yarra Ranges Regional Museum, Lilydale</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>Have you ever stereotyped someone? How do you think it made them feel?</td>
<td>28 August 2015</td>
<td>Yarra Ranges Regional Museum, Lilydale</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>Have you ever been teased because of who you are? How did it make you feel?</td>
<td>28 August 2015</td>
<td>Yarra Ranges Regional Museum, Lilydale</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>Is it ok to joke about someone’s skin colour or race? Who gets to decide if the joke is funny?</td>
<td>No record in system</td>
<td>Yarra Ranges Regional Museum or Maribyrnong City Council*</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>Have you ever been asked where you are from? How did you respond?</td>
<td>No record in system</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>Have you ever been asked where you are from? How did you respond?</td>
<td>4 December 2015</td>
<td>Maribyrnong City Council, Maribyrnong</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>What is your cultural background?</td>
<td>7 March 2016</td>
<td>Sam Merrifield Library, Moonee Ponds</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>Do you think the media represents all people living in Australia equally? Are migrants portrayed differently to other Australians?</td>
<td>7 March 2016</td>
<td>Sam Merrifield Library, Moonee Ponds</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>What can our leaders do to make Australia a more welcoming, multicultural society?</td>
<td>7 March 2016</td>
<td>Sam Merrifield Library, Moonee Ponds</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>Have you ever been asked where you are from? How did you respond?</td>
<td>7 March 2016</td>
<td>Sam Merrifield Library, Moonee Ponds</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>What can you do to make your local area a more inclusive society?</td>
<td>7 March 2016</td>
<td>Sam Merrifield Library, Moonee Ponds</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>Have you ever been ashamed of your cultural background? What happened? How did it make you feel?</td>
<td>7 March 2016</td>
<td>Sam Merrifield Library, Moonee Ponds</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*No date was recorded for text-based questions - the Studio went to two locations in the possible date range.*
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Author/s:
Henry, David Owen

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Creating space to listen: museums, participation and intercultural dialogue

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