

Exploring Deaf Heritage futures through Critical Design and ‘public things’

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Abstract

Increasingly, critical design methods offer heritage scholars new ways of exploring identities, experiences and relationships, extending a dialogic approach that supports the testing and realization of heritage futures (Harrison 2015). This paper focuses upon a two-year national project that aimed to bring together curators, heritage professionals and Deaf communities to consider Deaf heritage as future-making.

Throughout four collaborative workshops, participants co-designed model museums, designed BSL infrastructures, formulated Deaf heritage professions and prototyped BSL souvenirs. By materializing heritage processes and ‘public things’ participants re-purposed their symbolic power to articulate prevailing inequalities and possible Deaf futures. We discuss the ways in which these playful future-making objects revealed hidden, oppressed, and contradictory heritage relations. We argue that a critical design approach to working with BSL users facilitated the disruption of conventional categories of heritage, Deafness and culture.

Keywords: Critical Heritage, Deaf heritage, critical design, participative methods, public things

Introduction

This paper reflects upon a collaborative project led by Edinburgh Napier University’s Critical Design researchers and Heriot-Watt University’s Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies, which sought to creatively advance discussion around the formal recognition of British Sign Language through the BSL Act. Over the two-year duration of the project, we employed design methods to advance discussion around how Deaf heritage might be used to bring British Sign Language (BSL) into public life through Scottish mainstream cultural institutions.

Increasingly, design methods offer heritage scholars new ways of enacting and testing identities, experiences (Lury and Wakeford 2012; Bradley, 2016; Denzin 2017; McKay and Bradley, Moore, Simpson and Atkinson 2018) and relationships that have remained hidden by traditional methods. Methodologically, design extends a shift from ‘top-down approaches to contextual, processual and abductive means to knowing through and about making’ (Morrison, Mainsah and Rygh 2019, 2268). The influence of design methods has propagated an approach to creative co-production that often privileges the disruption of researcher/participant categories (McKay and Bradley 2016) and extends the capacity of fictionalised future-making scenarios. In the context of critical heritage,

such disruption serves to reveal the processual nature of heritage-making and challenge unreflexive and mono-vocal heritage practices.

The arguments that sustain critical heritage are both that heritage can expose and elevate stories of the oppressed and marginalised (Rose 2016), and that heritage offers the possibility of new beginnings (ibid.). In this way like critical design, it promises a certain future-making potentiality summoning what Burrows and O’Sullivan’s (2019) refer to as *mythopoesis*, or ‘a people who are missing’. It is within the context of the call for closer ties between critical design and critical heritage that we situate this paper and the Deaf Heritage project it describes. The paper echoes Schofield, Foster-Smith, Bozoğlu and Whitehead’s (2019) argument for more interdisciplinary engagement between critical design and critical heritage. Like the authors, we recognise similarities in critical heritage and critical design’s commitment to provocative artefacts, polyvocal spaces and multisensory ways of knowing.

According to Schofield, Foster-Smith, Bozoğlu and Whitehead’s (ibid.) it is precisely hidden, forgotten, unofficial and difficult heritage that appeals to researchers of both critical heritage and critical design. The authors summarise the various ways in which design methods can be used to capture user-generated narratives, augment visitor experiences, sustain a participatory approach and develop multimodal encounters with heritage sites. As HCI researchers, the authors are keen to distinguish their approach from that of more normative HCI approaches to digital technologies and usability. Instead, they forge a position between critical design and Critical Heritage Studies, distancing themselves from affirmative and solutionist design ideals and Authorised Heritage Discourse (Smith 2006). The authors stress the importance of seeing instead the political capacity of heritage and design; capable of obscuring and critiquing capitalist relations (Fry 2011). The authors argue that design’s participatory and speculative methods are uniquely suitable to supporting an expanded field of heritage voices and values.

Although the future-making capacity of heritage continues to generate a breadth of research (Harrison 2013; Basu and Modest 2014; Harrison 2015; Stainforth and Graham 2017) there remains a paucity of work that integrates the future-making capacity of design with the future-assembling capacity of critical heritage research. Although Harrison (2015) supports an interdisciplinary future-oriented, dialogic approach to knowledge production (Manzini 2016, 52) critical design is seldom invoked in critical heritage research. There is a need for an expanded view of how design’s speculative and participatory methods might ‘give voice’ to the diverse group of people denied representation by the authorised systems of cultural production (Green 2015). It is hoped that in some small way, this paper develops the conversation that began with Schofield, Foster-Smith, Bozoğlu and Whitehead’s (2019) argument for more collaboration between critical heritage and critical design.

We chose an approach that could mobilize relationships, power structures and networks in such a way as to reveal the ideological frameworks that sustain Deaf heritage’s distance from Scotland’s public life. We sought to bring together academic, professional and non-academic partners as a community of interest equipped with the necessary skills to advance issues surrounding Deaf heritage in Scotland. Our aim was to prioritise Deaf experience and foreground knowledge that is

‘other’ to the specialist institutional vernacular of cultural and heritage industries.

We begin by offering an outline of the context and aims of a Deaf heritage project. We then describe our synthesis of critical design and critical heritage through a participatory, speculative and critical approach. Following from this, we identify the futurity of Deaf heritage in relation to the BSL [Scotland] Act (2015) (hereafter the BSL Act) and the space it negotiates between the categories of disability and culture. We then discuss the relationality of Deaf heritage, its epistemic status and marginalization. This leads to a discussion of our methodological aims to create a transmodal and collaborative space ‘where public things’ (Honig 2017) perform Deaf heritage futures. We then outline four workshop activities in relation to their brief and material composition. Our argument is threefold, firstly that critical design reveals the contingency of heritage values and processes. Secondly, that the ‘reality effects’ of speculative objects articulate the potentiality of Deaf heritage futures in Scotland. Thirdly, that critical design provokes heritage publics into being.

The Scottish context is key to the project’s ambitions: with the formal recognition of BSL as a language through the BSL Act, followed by the first BSL National Plan, in October 2017 Scotland became a focus for Deaf futures. Notably, the Scottish Government’s pledge “to make Scotland the best place in the world for people whose first or preferred language is BSL to live, work and visit” (Scottish Government, s.d.) places a significant emphasis upon culture and public life. Our heritage sector, arts spaces and museums are fundamental to the future inclusion of BSL in public life, offering as they do ‘a space to reflect and debate our values; without reflection, there can be no considered movement forwards’ (Bishop 2013, 61).

This historic moment revealed a lack of engagement between Scotland’s cultural institutions and its Deaf communities. A lack, which in structural terms meant a lack of equality and a lack of access to cultural space, resources and experiences of public life. The two-year project (2018-2020) was structured through four touring workshops and exhibitions in Glasgow, Inverness, Edinburgh and Stirling. These four cities were chosen to reveal local representations of Deaf culture, geographic heritage provision and cultural resources. In practical terms, the project’s principle aim was to fuel BSL promotion in the culture and heritage sectors by formalising a collaborative network of heritage and cultural institutions, Deaf communities and researchers whose work coalesced around the subject of Deaf Heritage.

Our approach echoes Schofield, Foster-Smith, Bozoğlu and Whitehead’s (2019) call for an alliance of critical heritage and critical design. Like the authors, we foreground the need for more *diversity* and more *convergence* of different types of knowledge in heritage-making. Our emphasis upon different types of knowledge is key both to critical design and critical heritage’s commitment to questioning assumptions of value and power. It is also a common value in the participatory methods employed in both areas and in the design research of Schofield, Foster-Smith, Bozoğlu and Whitehead (ibid.). To advocate ‘plural heritage’ as the authors do, is to argue for heritage’s ethical responsibility to champion ‘multiple voices, multiple intersections and a complex nexus of cultural and stakeholder communities’ (Galla 2016, 304). This is the ‘social action’ of heritage imagined by Harrison (2013) and viewed by Winter (2013) as an untapped capacity to address socio-political and environmental issues.

Critical design is uniquely positioned to further the ‘social action’ of heritage, seeking as it does to provoke debate rather than problem-solve ‘by pointing out ideological constraints that influence the people's perception; and generally, by promoting critical thinking’ (Jakobsone 2017, 4). The lure of critical design is also in its strength to summon ‘what if’ scenarios through playful and ‘performative methods’ (Knudsen and Stage 2015) that construct fabulations and offer ‘resistance to the world as it is perceived or understood’ (Burrows and O’Sullivan 2019, 17). In so doing, critical design highlights the processual nature of knowledge. While critical design excels in practices of problematizing and *fictioning* (Burrows and O’Sullivan 2019) critical heritage elevates the lived experience of heritage, critiquing systems of power that have valorised, or denied identities, values, spaces and objects.

Critical heritage represents a break from ‘authorised heritage discourse’ (Smith 2006). In this way, critical heritage brings a much-needed criticality to ‘questions of power, authority, ethics and the wider socio-economic and political consequence of heritage and heritage practices’ (Fredheim 2018, 619). Within the critical heritage paradigm, participatory future-making methods recast heritage as a resource ‘related to human action and agency, and as an instrument of cultural power’ (Harvey 2001, 237). We align ourselves with this paradigm and with participatory future-making methods for three reasons. Firstly, to facilitate a collaborative process that gives equal authority to the Deaf community and cultural professionals. Secondly, to facilitate speculative outcomes that are co-produced objects rather than written documents (in order to avoid the predominance of English over BSL). Thirdly, to create a new public formed of Deaf communities and Scotland’s heritage professionals.

Language and Culture: The futurity of the BSL [Scotland] Act (2015)

On the 17th September 2015, the BSL Act was passed and Scotland became the first country in the UK to legally recognise British Sign Language (BSL). The formal recognition of BSL as a language through the BSL Act marked a seminal moment in Scottish life and beyond. The campaigning and policy development that led to the Bill was sustained by Scotland’s Deaf community and representative organisations, Scottish Council on Deafness (SCoD now deafscotland), Deaf Action and the British Deaf Association (BDA) in Scotland. The process of campaigning revealed the Deaf community’s call for future citizenship (De Meulder 2015), and revised the status of BSL as a minority language, which in turn instituted a cultural mandate to recognise the distinctiveness of Deaf culture.

Without formal recognition from bodies such as UNESCO, national heritage organisations and arts councils, practices of conserving and curating Deaf culture have been denied traditional routes to funding. This marginalisation sits in a historical context wherein Deaf Schools, Deaf Clubs and Deaf historical figures remain unrecognised and unmarked by the cultural sector. In this way, the securing of Deaf culture in Scotland is at crisis point (Jamieson, Discepoli and Leith 2019).

Our heritage sector, festivals and museums are fundamental to the future of BSL in Scotland’s public life, offering as they do a space of reflective debate. This historic moment revealed a lack of engagement between Scotland’s cultural institutions and its Deaf communities. A lack, which in structural terms meant a lack of equality, and a lack of access to cultural space, resources and experiences of public life. The reworking of marginalised identity and linguistic lives in this new

Scottish landscape of cultural rights (brought about through the BSL Act) is complex, not least because museum workers, heritage and education professionals are unsure how to engage with D/deaf communities, and how to renegotiate the space between deafness as disability and culture.

The negotiation of the space between deafness as disability and Deaf culture has continued to be central to the Deaf futures imagined during the preparative campaigning and wake of the BSL Act. Deaf futures in Scotland were fuelled by a human-rights imaginary that foregrounded equality and social justice for sign language users. Rooted in Deaf activism these claims on the future are complexly interwoven. Advancing the rights of Deaf children to BSL education, providing BSL interpreters across the public sector, ensuring access to Deaf cultural/community space and resources all intersect with broader social aims to raise awareness of Deaf culture and Deaf lives.

The future that sits on the horizon of Scottish public life imagines the promotion of BSL, and an expanded and thereby richer understanding of language and culture. However, on the same horizon there is another future; one with a medical and curative view of deafness, which through neonatal screening programmes refers deaf children to a process of being fitted with cochlear implants. There is a darker-still future, one where advancing genetic intervention prevents hereditary hearing loss (Snoddon and Underwood 2014). This medicalised futurity is set within a broader context of loss; declining numbers of Deaf schools, clubs and community spaces that historically provided an affirmative sign language environment (Snoddon and Underwood 2014). The disappearance of Deaf cultural space has negatively impacted ‘the process by which Deaf individuals come to actualize their Deaf identity’ (2003, xviii), a process Paddy Ladd refers to as *Deafhood*.

These coterminous futures of medical intervention and human rights are further contextualised by a neoliberal setting that privileges assimilation over diversity and inclusion (Snoddon and Underwood 2017). It is therefore little surprise that the case for sign languages’ legal recognition is often seen by Deaf communities as countering eugenics-based curative futurities. In the prevailing context, Deaf futures are particularly fragile. By celebrating and legally recognising sign languages, a new landscape of cultural identity comes into view. In this context, the project aimed not only to fuel BSL promotion by formalising a collaborative network, but it also sought to explore the fragility, marginality and future-making potential of Deaf heritage.

It is widely acknowledged that Deaf communities tend to be cautious and even mistrustful of the research agendas of academics. As the majority of researchers who venture into Deaf communities are not themselves deaf, there is a legacy of problematic and imbalanced research relationships between researchers and research participants, ‘fraught with problems, prejudice, mistrust, misunderstanding, unmet expectations, identity crises and pervasive mythologies’ (Baker-Shenk and Kyle 1990, 65). As non-signing academics, we were sensitive to these problems, and although we undertook introductory courses in BSL, our status at the beginning of the project was very much outside the Deaf community.

We sought allegiances with a Deaf historian and the national organisation responsible for conserving Deaf culture, *Deaf History Scotland*. From the beginning of the project we were treated with a measure of curiosity, if not scepticism. The Deaf community is used to the academic gaze of linguistics, but not design, or heritage researchers. With hindsight, the novelty of a design-based project focused upon Deaf heritage was a fortuitous beginning that solicited enough interest to secure well-attended workshops.

Deaf Heritage as a Wicked Problem

As discussed above, we approached the subject of Deaf heritage from a critical standpoint that we locate at the intersection of critical design and critical heritage. It is from this vantage point, that we came to view Deaf heritage as a ‘wicked problem’ (Rittel and Webb 1973) that defies a simplistic solution. From the beginning of the project, we recognised Deaf culture’s marginalised status as a systemic and normalised denial of Deaf culture in public life.

To talk of Deaf heritage is not to consider it as block-buster touristic heritage, but heritage as memory, marginalised identity and belonging. It is also a claim to an identity and to cultural spaces that have been disappearing from our cities and towns since the late 20th century (O’Brien, Stead and Nourse 2019). Without formal recognition from bodies such as UNESCO, national heritage organisations and arts councils, practices of conserving and curating Deaf heritage are denied traditional routes to funding.

This marginalisation sits in a historical context, wherein Deaf Schools, Deaf Clubs and Deaf historical figures remain unrecognised and unmarked by the heritage sector. Deaf culture’s *outsideness* from public life, relates to broader structural inequalities wherein Deaf culture is denied the epistemic status aligned with educational institutions such as Deaf Schools, theatres, arts hubs and National Museum space.

Early in the project, we acknowledged that our interest in heritage extended to wider societal questions of cultural exclusion, oppression and epistemic inequality. In this context, we wanted to develop what is meant by ‘doing heritage’ (Johnston and Marwood 2017). Our aim was to performatively explore heritage processes and to prefigure the spaces and identities that a formal mainstream celebration of Deaf heritage might entail.

Throughout the four workshops our aim was to summon possible futures, specifically of a people to come (those Deaf curators, museum guides, arts co-ordinators and policy networks that are missing from Scotland’s public life). We were interested in the currency of speculative prototyping to generate models that might allow for a more natural conversation across BSL and English-speaking communities. Given that participants were comprised of BSL users and English speakers we had to negotiate interlingual and intermodal communication practices (and the everyday cultural idioms we rely upon to make conversation flow).

Our aim was to create a participative space where spoken English was not given primacy. This demotion of spoken English was important if we were to create a space where Deaf participants felt comfortable and genuinely part of the discussion. Although we acknowledged that we would have to rely upon BSL interpreters at each table, our aim was to transcend the reliance on interpreters by focusing on the collaborative activity of *making* things that imagined distinct Deaf futures.

Highlighting recent developments in translation and multimodal studies, Carreres and Noriega Sanchez (2020) champion methods that reach beyond traditional linguistics to enable experimentation, which ‘open up new spaces – both aesthetic and political – in which a range of meaning-making practices come together’ (200). The authors argue for transmodal meaning-

making methods that advance new forms of agency. Inspired by this call, the collaborative future-making activities we developed throughout the project sought to advance new forms of agency through creative interactions.

Collaborative Methods and Agonistic Future-Making

Our commitment to privileging different types of knowledge and developing opportunities for Deaf communities aligns with action-oriented research and the values of emancipatory research (Oliver 1992). Our methods embrace the complexity of different perspectives, and endorse the importance of *working with* rather than against tensions. We argue that speculative and critical design (SCD) might encourage an understanding of the political complexity of Deaf heritage and materialize the barriers to its inclusion in Scotland's public life.

Malazita's (2018) succinct account of SCD methodology reflects the basis for its relevance to our project aims:

“SCD methodologies encourage design practitioners to experiment with ‘design for debate’ – with the use of designed products and spaces to spur conversation among users and audiences. Ideally, these conversations question the social and epistemological – and therefore political – status quo” (97).

This invocation of design stresses its criticality, where functionality is aligned with stimulating debate (Malpass 2015). It is Malazita's repositioning of SCD as a *platform* rather than a space, or object that is particularly useful to our work. This reconceptualization privileges agonistic political design as that which unsettles ideological frames. Moreover, SCD as a platform emphasizes its capacity to build social allegiances and summon ‘the kinds of political work that design can do’ (101). Malazita's reconceptualization of SCD as a *platform* rather than an object, or space echoes DiSalvo's (2012) earlier call to consider *workshops as a design form* and Lury and Wakeford's (2012) reference to creative methods as enabling the *happening* of social worlds. In this repositioning, both the platform and the workshop aim to critically explore relationships between systems, objects, identities and communities. where participation creates new publics (Chilvers and Kearnes 2016).

The work of Marchart is particularly useful to how we might understand SCD in relation to the kind of collaborative disruption we sought to introduce to the Deaf Heritage workshops. Marchart gives serious consideration to the capacity of art and design to manifest contentious encounters. Marchart's (2019) insistence upon the potential of interventionist tactics to disrupt, subvert and resist hegemonic structures is particularly relevant to researchers in critical design and critical heritage. Moreover, Marchart identifies the capacity of art and design practice to perform counters to hegemony, to expose latent possibilities and micro-contingencies.

Much of Marchart's thinking can be traced to the work of Mouffe (2005, 2013) who has expanded upon the aesthetic dimension of antagonism where art exposes the fact that ‘things could always be otherwise’ (2013, 2). Mouffe insists upon the importance of creatively fostering a position of negativity and dissensus in relation to politics. For Mouffe, antagonism represents a struggle

between enemies while agonism describes a struggle between adversaries. She privileges agonism as the enemy of apathy and cornerstone of democratic processes. It is also in agonism rather than antagonism where she identifies the potential for ‘artístico-activist practices’ capable of fostering spaces of counter-hegemony. According to Mouffe, agonism performed through acts of creative disruption assumes a structural role that supports an agreed democratic participative process.

Knudsen and Stage (2015) describe the kind of performative use of people and things as belonging to an ‘apparatus’ that exceeds the function of a conventional methodological instrument. Instead, the authors argue that the apparatus is ‘both part of and co-create[s] the very phenomenon to which they provide access’ (50). The authors describe the ways in which collaboratively produced objects can provocatively and performatively articulate felt experience. This reading of a methodological apparatus begins to describe our own provocative use of ‘public things’ (Honig 2017) to give substance to BSL in public life.

Informed by critical design and critical heritage, our methodological aim was to construct a collaborative space where ‘public things’ (Honig 2017) could leverage debate about Deaf futures and the future of Deaf heritage(s), highlighting diverse perspectives and lived experience. Through a series of ‘public things’, the platform of the workshop facilitated the exploration of possible, probable, plausible and preferable Deaf heritage futures (Bland and Westlake, 2013; Coulton, Burnett, Gardiner, 2016).

This approach to thinking about Deaf heritage futures takes inspiration from Honig’s (2017) theory of ‘public things’. In her book of that title, she insists that we take seriously those ‘public things’ that underwrite everyday forms of citizenship, and give substance to social life. Her conceptualisation of both ‘public’ and ‘things’ is particularly useful to advancing the ways in which collaborative design methods might articulate wider socio-political contexts, alternative realities and networks of power.

She describes ‘public things’ as those which

“furnish a world in which we encounter others, share the experience of being part of something that is larger than ourselves, and work with others, acting in concert, to share it, to democratize access to it, to better it, to desegregate it, to maintain it. A politics of public things is committed to the daily practice of preserving, augmenting, and contesting the qualities that make public things both ‘public’ and ‘things’” (Honig 2017, 36).

The examples she provides range from monuments, memorials and parks to the infrastructure of transport and water supplies. She makes a compelling case of the centrality of ‘public things’ in the constitution and orientation of citizens in a participative democracy. Honig (ibid.) contends that the agency of ‘public things’ resides in their relations: they are never neutral and are equally capable of thwarting, and facilitating public life.

Any successful ‘public thing’ she explains, “presents us with this problem: the public things that constitute the demos exclude some and privilege others” (24). Still, she argues that ‘public things’ have ‘integrative powers’ (91) and are divested with the power to imagine alternative futures. Honig’s ‘public things’ implicate design in three ways. Firstly, whether it is a museum or a bus,

design affords public things their utility, symbolising how they are used. Secondly, design produces meanings of publicness, belonging and kinship through the material articulation of identities. Thirdly, future object-relations and encounters are cast through the design (new materials and technologies) of ‘public things’. ‘Public things’ *institute* possible futures. They have the potential to promote change, suggest empathy and infuse awareness (Flanagan and Nissenbaum, 2014). From model museums to gift shop merchandise, the ‘public things’ we used across our four workshops were designed to critically imagine the future of Deaf culture in public life.

The project’s format was structured through four touring collaborative workshops that invited heritage professionals, curators, Deaf artists, historians and activists to consider the futures of Deaf heritage. That is to say, we developed a series of ‘public things’ designed to conjure a future relationship with organisations, government and public life. Participants came from both Deaf organisations and the museum and heritage sectors. In this way, the collaborative activities emphasised the responsibility and capability of participants to improve the prevailing status of Deaf heritage.

Our aim throughout the four workshops was to mine design’s propositional nature and develop tactics of fictionalizing Deaf futures to reveal the Deaf community as ‘unauthorised subjects’ (Skrede and Hølleland 2017) within the heritage industry. Our approach to disrupting conventional heritage values and processes echoes Levitas’ (2013) argument for a speculative sociology that transcends reality to provide a vantage point that valorises the process of imagining and exploring ‘the structural limits of what is thinkable’ (120).

Participants were asked to explore the limits and future components of Deaf heritage in public life through four critical fabulations; the possibility and necessity of a space (the Deaf Museum), a cultural system (BSL Infrastructure), a profession (curator) and commodities (Deaf Museum merchandise). Each ‘public thing’ was brought into existence through props and cultural probes that solicited the collaborative response of participants seated around large tables.

Participants included heritage professionals, curators, academics Deaf activists, artists and Deaf historians, each of whom brought a different understanding of Deaf heritage. During the workshops, we introduced ‘public things’ by way of their significance to the day’s theme and asked participants a number of questions designed to stimulate thinking and making. Over two years and four touring workshops we developed a library of ‘public things’ that allowed us to develop discussion around Deaf heritage in Scotland.

‘Public things’ were presented as design probes, which Michael (2012) insists “must be sufficiently provocative, novel, entertaining, open, inviting to prompt answers that are unexpected, expressive and creative” (174). As an activity, each ‘public thing’ was introduced verbally and with text. BSL interpreters were provided with the text and activity in advance of the day, and were able to ask for clarification as to the nature of the activity, materials and possible outcomes. It is worth emphasizing that BSL interpreters were fundamental to explaining the mood of the activity and the scope of the design activity. The interpreters’ understanding of the ways in which we were using collaborative methods and their scope for provocation, tension and debate was crucial to sustaining both criticality and a playful approach.

The following paragraphs describe the ways through which we employed SCD to explore heritage processes and values as ‘public things’.

Deaf Museum Probe Kit

The second activity of the first workshop took the form of a probe kit, comprising a box of museum models and a scale model of an intersection of a typical museum space. *The Deaf Museum of Scotland* does not exist and therefore the proposition of a Deaf museum offered an important starting point to consider how, as one of the foremost ‘public things’, museums might play a role in Deaf futures. One kit was given to each mixed language table and the brief asked each table a simple question, namely:

‘What will the future museum of Deaf culture look like? What will it display and how will it be curated?’



Figure 1 The ‘Collaborative Curating’ brief given to participants with intersection of museum space and museum and props

The roundtable discussions that followed were intense and revealed divisions as to how Deaf heritage *should be* narrated. The process of collaboratively making the museum provoked discussion and dissensus around a number of points; the importance of telling the story of

oppressive oralist schools and expressing the lived experience of oppressed children (now grown up).

Participants developed an aesthetic language to capture the difficult narratives of their propositional Deaf museums. A pattern emerged in the aesthetic, what we might call an activist style that communicated the relations of power and subordination common to the experience of living in a hearing world. Other models went further renouncing the capacity of a conventional museum to do justice to the marginalised status of Deaf culture.



Figure 2 Outcomes of the ‘Collaborative Curating’ activity, showing an aesthetic we might describe as an activist style

Building an Infrastructure

Our second workshop provided an opportunity to develop an activity that responded to the concept of ‘BSL Infrastructure’, which had emerged through the first workshop’s discussions. The concept offered a useful way to think about the entangled material and immaterial resources required to create equality in Scotland’s heritage sector. We devised a BSL Infrastructure probe kit comprising children’s wooden bricks, a dynamo, paper, sellotape and scissors.



Figure 3 The ‘Building Infrastructure’ brief

The brief stated

‘The Scottish Government commit to a long-term aim that is ambitious in its remit to change lives of BSL users and place Scotland as the best place in the world for BSL users to live and visit. However, in practical terms Culture and the Arts have little by way of infrastructure; how will lives be changed and how will careers in the arts be enabled? Questions remain unresolved as to how the government will create more meaningful opportunities in the cultural sector, but you may be able to offer insight as to what kind of BSL Infrastructure will work.’

‘This is your chance to work together as a group to identify and build a BSL infrastructure.’

Participants were asked to consider levels of priority, as well as the relations between the elements of a proposed BSL infrastructure.



Figure 4 The ‘Building Infrastructure’ outcomes

The Future Deaf Arts Job

In the third workshop, we developed the theme of infrastructure further by asking participants to consider *how* the infrastructure developed in the previous workshop would be organised, and by

whom. We wanted to summon the future Deaf workforce that such an infrastructure would necessitate. We asked participants to consider what type of person might head this infrastructure and what their roles and responsibilities might include.



We also asked participants to consider broader issues related to the person's gender, lifestyle, tastes and daily rhythms. Each table was presented with a 5ft cardboard silhouette that had been painted with blackboard paint, allowing participants to write and draw her/him into existence.

Figure 5 One of the outcomes of the 'Roles and Responsibilities' activity

The brief gave the following introduction:

'Meet your new participant. She's ambitious and keen to impress. She just needs some direction! Each table will create the job that is needed in cultural organisations to ensure equality and creative opportunity (not just access). Use drawings, diagrams or text to bring her to life'.

Each table considered the attributes of this imagined arts professional at great length, going into much more detail about their private life than we had anticipated. Heated conversations about the gender identity and sex of the candidate resulted in most cases, in a proposed Deaf transgender professional. Adding further layers to the imagined professional's identity participants conjured 'Sam' who enjoyed the arts as much as popular culture and staying home with the cat as much as a night out at the theatre. Participants invested a great deal of time in discussing and summoning the identity and cultural tastes of a future Deaf advocate.

Deaf Merchandise

In the fourth workshop, we returned to the subject of the Deaf museum, but with an emphasis upon merchandising, asking participants to prototype a Deaf souvenir. The gift shop is usually a considerable area in museums and heritage sites, and an extended site of learning (Kent 2009) where visitors continue to engage with the subjects raised through exhibits. Currently, there are no Deaf or BSL museum souvenirs and their absence from the language of museums is significant, speaking as it does of the lack of Deaf culture in public life.

We wanted our participants to consider the entanglement of this absence in relation to Deaf identity, Scottish culture, consumerism and design. We also wanted participants to consider the souvenir as a significant object in the cultural representation of Deaf people and BSL in Scotland. The short brief that asked each table to design a *BSL Discovery Kit* explaining:

‘The gift shop is where we buy our over-priced souvenirs, Viking books, Archaeology DIY kits, tote bags and Egyptian hieroglyphic rulers. In this way, the gift shop supplements museums’ educational aims through merchandise. So, we have provided you with a potential piece of future BSL merchandise – a BSL Discovery Kit for which you need to design the contents.’



Figure 6 ‘BSL Discovery Kit’

Participants were slow to engage with this activity. It emerged through discussion that Deaf participants initially saw this activity as demeaning and did not see how a souvenir could develop the conversation around Deaf culture in public life. It took some prompting and wider discussion across the room before participants began to design objects that were either symbolic of Deaf culture, or mined BSL communicative orders

(embodied and spatial). One table designed a lamp designed in the shape of an arm and hand while another produced greeting cards with introductions to BSL.



Figure 7 ‘BSL Discovery Kit’ outcomes



Figure 7 ‘BSL Discovery Kit’ participants at work

Revealing conditions of possibility by designing ‘public things’

Throughout each of the four workshops, we hoped to facilitate debate amongst a new public borne of a shared interest in Deaf heritage futures. Through a dialogic future-oriented approach to knowledge production (Manzini 2016) speculative and critical design facilitated a collaborative process that gave equal authority to the Deaf community and cultural professionals. We asked participants to think *of/with* component parts: to plan and build a heritage system.

Thinking as Marchart (2018) reminds us “is a *material practice*. It is part of, and concerned with, the matter of our social world...By way of thinking we actualise the political rather than merely meditating on its concept” (159). The design process of working through various iterations, negotiating conflicting ideas as to priorities, and debating how discrete parts might fit together performed the ‘doing of heritage’ (Johnston and Marwood 2017) and the potential ‘social action’ of [Deaf] heritage (Harrison 2013).

By invoking possible futures through speculative and critical design, our aim was precisely to *unsettle* the ideological categories of heritage and culture in relation to BSL. Through the event/platform of Deaf Heritage workshops, we created a space of disruption and contest; one where the ‘public things’ of a future Deaf heritage could be materialised and imagined relationally. The critical intent with which participants approached the first workshop’s activity offers some insight into the ways in which the Deaf community saw their denial from authorised heritage discourse. The Deaf museum was attacked and defaced not to destroy the possibility of a future

Deaf museum, but to materially communicate the multi-faceted power of museums to both exclude Deaf lives, and communicate the lived-experiences of oppression. By scoring the walls of the model museum and inserting scissors into the model, the future museum designed by participants narrated a difficult heritage; one that demanded to be acknowledged within a frame of injustice and oppression.

As a ‘public thing’ the future Deaf museum was constituted as a space where we might encounter difficult heritage and where we might navigate its equally difficult positions, subjects and affects. Participants of the first workshop not only grasped the possibility of such places, but their necessity in the telling of Deaf oppression as a significant aspect of Deaf heritage. By working through multiple iterations of the Deaf museum’s materialities, narratives and educational intent participants simultaneously researched and prototypically intervened (Binder 2016) in the processes of Deaf heritage-making. The prototype Deaf museums that emerged from the first workshop were informed by a Deaf-led activist aesthetic that symbolised oppression and a rejection of an oralist attitude and cultural system.

The common language of *making* focused BSL users and English speakers’ upon communicating values, identities, responsibilities and experiences. In this way, the making of the museum had a revelatory role in disclosing the different perspectives of participants. Building on the exploration of these early workshop discussions we started to refer to a ‘BSL infrastructure’ to describe a system of people and things in Scotland’s cultural sector. When we first began to discuss the concept, Deaf participants identified the need for a new BSL sign to convey the *action* of a BSL infrastructure; the BSL sign for a ‘built (architectural) infrastructure’ was deemed to be inappropriate, as was the BSL sign for ‘network’. We decided to explore the lack of a distinct BSL sign as a workshop activity. In this way, we harnessed ‘uncertainty as a generative approach’ (Akama, Pink and Sumartojo 201, 39) to ‘stage’ (Guggenheim, Kräftner and Kröll 2017) the absence of a BSL infrastructure and collectively enact the planning of a BSL infrastructure.

Collaboratively building a BSL infrastructure with blocks simulated a certain agency and developed a useful ‘what if’ space to orient discussions about the relationality of Deaf heritage to governmental power, Scottish cultural organisations and ‘public things’. Participant discussions centred around the *absence of* Deaf heritage professionals in mainstream heritage organisations as well as the *absence of* funding, cultural spaces and Deaf curators. Building a BSL infrastructure was a speculative act of relational thinking – looking not at one future thing, but at the relation between future things and people. The activity of building was not immediately popular with all of the participants. One elderly Deaf participant initially refused to ‘play’ and explained that he saw the activity with bricks as trivial. Joining the table to facilitate group discussion, we began to talk instead about the local provision of Deaf spaces and opportunities for social events. We used one brick to symbolise a former Deaf club and another to symbolise the local council’s D/deaf hub and asked what might link these two resources. Conversations developed around the lack of connections between agencies and a lack of centralised information about Deaf culture and BSL supported leisure opportunities. By the end of the day, the table had created a complex model that materialised the absence of BSL resources in Inverness.

By the third workshop, the recurring theme of *absence* coalesced around issues of Deaf spaces and employment opportunities. Despite the attendance of Deaf historians, researchers and artists none

of the Deaf participants were strategically placed to support the inclusion of Deaf culture in public life. We chose to symbolise the absence of a BSL arts professional by way of a 5ft cardboard cut-out that stood above the seated participants. The cardboard cut-out symbolised a potential professional identity, an ambition and source of income for Deaf participants. The cardboard figure oriented workshop discussions towards issues of presence, absence and otherness in the culture and heritage sectors. Questions developed around the discussion of *who is* an arts officer, *who is not* and *why not*. During this activity, the potential professions and necessary skills absent from Scotland's public life came into sharp relief. For participants, the cardboard cut-out symbolised a significant gap in the fulfilment of the government's mandate to bring BSL into public life.

Through the process of collaboratively identifying a future BSL professional that would represent Scotland's Deaf community, participants transformed the landscape of heritage, populating it with well-paid (not volunteer) Deaf heritage professionals. From 'unauthorised subjects' (Skrede and Hølleland 2017) within the heritage industry to the provocation of a people still to come, the four 5ft cardboard cut-outs stood amongst the workshop tables with their roles and responsibilities written upon their chests. Their presence rather eerily emphasized the absence of Deaf curators, arts professionals and policy makers amongst the participants. The activity provoked debate about more personal attributes, debating where she/he might eat, shop, socialise. Participants not only named the BSL arts professional, but also constructed a complex identity. Through the insistence of a transgender individual, participants articulated marginality in heritage and cultural work as complex and intersectional.

In each of the future-making activities described above, the 'public things' were designed to conjure a future relationship with organisations, government and public life. Collaborative activities emphasised the responsibility and capability of participants to improve the prevailing status of Deaf heritage. The future that was typically imagined made no connection to the consumerist context of tourism, museum gift shops and heritage souvenirs. The future that had been conjured did not afford a perspective of consumerism, nor its relation to Deaf culture. By the fourth workshop we decided this exclusion should be addressed. In its dissonant relations to the present, posing the *speculative object* of the Deaf souvenir frustrated conventional ideas of Deaf culture as marginalised and disconnected from commercial heritage spaces and values.

The speculative Deaf souvenir triggered hypothetical networks of objects and values. When participants collaboratively pursued the possibility of selling/buying a BSL Discovery Kit they were immediately prompted to think of its packaging, marketing, experiences, price-tag, and of course the demographic of the end-user. The commodification and economic imperative for heritage is a key theme within Harrison's (2013) critical heritage, but the generative potential of thinking through speculative souvenirs remains untapped. As Deaf heritage workshop activities revealed, the gift shop offers the possibility of developing *objects of relevance*; speculative souvenirs that critically engage with difficult subjects (Kent 2009) and designed to disrupt prevailing ideas and values.

During the third workshop, an argument emerged amongst the Deaf participants as to the nature of the workshop. At first, the argument did not involve the participation of a BSL interpreter, but as facilitators we wished to understand the argument and joined the group. It transpired that the argument concerned the need for Deaf-led workshops that explored BSL and Deaf culture. When

one Deaf participant gestured to the room as evidence of a workshop that *was* successfully exploring Deaf culture another Deaf participant insisted that it was *not* Deaf-led and therefore questions had to be asked *why* it existed. The argument developed and divided participants. Some agreed that the event should have been organised by a Deaf organisation, while others disagreed and pointed instead to the amount of people in the room (sixty-four participants). Still, the disagreement lingered and the discord between researcher-researched presented what we had aimed to overcome, an unequal power dynamic.

Conclusion

Deaf futures do more than simply turn up, instead they are projected through political, cultural and social assemblages that institute what can and cannot be said about Deaf people. Following the BSL Scotland Act (2015), the Scottish Deaf community's expectations changed. Through the collaborative making of 'public things' Deaf participants, heritage professionals and academics exposed the ideological framework of both Deaf heritage and the possible futures made possible by the BSL Act. Throughout the four workshops, speculative critical design provided a future-making approach to performatively bring into focus the 'wicked problem' (Rittel and Webb 1973) of Deaf heritage and its inclusion in Scotland's public life.

The 'reality effects' of 'public things' not only stimulated affective reactions to proposed heritage landscapes, but also revealed 'the people who are missing'. In this way, the speculative critical design methods we used might be understood as a 'creative bridge' (Cross 1997), or a 'transversal connector' (Guattari 1996) that performatively connects different regimes of life through fabulations, that offer 'resistance to the world as it is perceived or understood' (Burrows and O'Sullivan 2019, 17). Moreover, the *making* of four 'public things' provoked participants' sense of responsibility at levels ranging from policy officers at the Scottish government to curators from the National Museum of Scotland.

Methodologically, our aim was to explore the potential of speculative critical design research methods to facilitate the *diversity* and the *convergence* of different types of knowledge in a heritage context, specifically in a context where Deaf heritage is denied epistemic value. Through participatory workshops, we sought to critically engage with the diverse ideological frameworks that sustain the marginalised status of Deaf heritage while revealing both assemblages of power, and the capacity of our participants to change the future of Deaf heritage in Scotland. The workshop format offered the ideal space within which to collaboratively explore possible futures and 'cultivate a sense of the possible' (Savransky, Wilkie and Rosengarten 2017, 5).

As the four 'public things' described above demonstrate, speculative critical design methods offer critical heritage researchers a repository of creative approaches apt for unsettling common sense (Mouffe 1985). By posing questions through a variety of 'public things' integral to the heritage process, it was possible to mobilize objects' capacity to speak of facts without being factual. Instead, the speculative 'public things' allowed for what Barthes (1986) describes as the production of 'reality effects'.

At the intersection of critical design and critical heritage lies an understanding of the structural forms of power that sustain injustice and inequality. In many ways, critical design and critical

heritage are perfect bedfellows facilitating as they do, an understanding of what “might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of acknowledging what is foreign to it” (Foucault 1985, 9). If the future we are working towards is akin to Schofield, Foster-Smith, Bozoğlu and Whitehead’s (2019) ‘plural heritages’ where forms of heritage-making are dedicated to diversity, access and participation, there is room for wide-ranging collaborative research between critical design and critical heritage. On course to such a future, we might continue to develop future-oriented methods that not only mine the representational, but consider how to bring together different linguistic communities and extend access at the point of heritage-making.

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