

Introduction

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This themed issue on digital technologies and museum experiences illuminates ways in which museums increasingly take up and appropriate forms of communication beyond print, in particular technologies “born” digital, such as the Internet, personal computers and mobile devices; but also – more generally – the way they make use of audiovisual media that are being digitised and thus can cross-fertilise with information and communication technologies (ict) and with telecommunication. As such, the issue adopts an inclusive definition of digital technologies across the digital domain of communication. Also, taken together the articles as a group adopt a rather inclusive definition of the term “museum” so as to encompass, for example, science and experience centres, in addition to art galleries and museums featuring cultural and natural history. These inclusive definitions allow for analytical insights to be gained across traditional technological and institutional boundaries and point to commonalities and divergences of views, e.g., regarding audiences, the relations between online and offline content, and organisational challenges in meeting new demands with respect to technology, funding and objectives of existence.

In theoretical terms, the issue draws on, and brings together, developments in two related areas, namely media studies and museum studies. The term “digital technologies” signals a shift in media studies over the past two decades towards an increasing acknowledgement that media are also technologies that harness particular affordances (Gibson 1977), an acknowledgement that has been slow in the making not least due to longstanding and mostly well-founded critiques of technological determinism and hesitation regarding a

perceived over-emphasis on the technological side of communication. However, these positions have been questioned by developments in technology studies towards more situated approaches (e.g., Winston 1998; Volti 2001), and by the concomitant advent of technological digitisation which has served to blur established boundaries between ict, telecommunication and broadcast media. As a result of these trends, this themed issue does not focus on ict, computers, mobile phones or the Internet, but rather on digital technologies, thereby stressing the new alignments, crossovers and remixes of communicative options through technical means within the entire media ensemble.

In addition to this development towards digitisation, media studies has seen an increasing interest in recent years in *space* and *place* as theoretical and empirical concepts (e.g., Couldry and McCarthy 2003; Falkheimer and Jansson 2006; Warf and Arias 2008). This spatial turn was propelled first by the uptake of the Internet as a global phenomenon, then by the appropriation of mobile and location-based gadgets, and most recently by the fusion of these technologies and services into smart phones and 3G networks adopted in more and more parts of the world. The time-honoured emphasis in media studies on the home as a concrete locus of media use and on the public sphere as a more abstract site of democratic debate and deliberation has shifted towards other sites and settings such as shopping malls, schools – and museums – just as the neat division between public and private forms of communication has been questioned. Museums are becoming new vistas for media studies scholars interested in the shifting and transmuting relations between place and space as these relations are being renegotiated through the integration of digital technologies and forms of communication.

Museum studies has seen a similar shift and dispersion of established foci of interest. The emphasis placed on studying the acquisition, preservation, exhibition and communication of tangible and intangible objects in physical museum locations has widened not least since the advent of satellites and the Internet with their corollary of options to create online displays of materials on site and online, illuminate cultural and natural heritage in the urban environment through location-based museum displays and even form museums that are entirely virtual. This does not mean that media had been left out of museums till the advent of the computer. Since their inception, museums have made use of print as a key technology for acquisition, preservation and research, just as exhibitions and efforts of dissemination have had as their mainstay printed catalogues, leaflets, and later instructional material for school visits. In the latter half of the 19th century, visual material added to the tools of dissemination and display in the form of photographs, posters and later film; and from the 1960s on, audio guides and then video displays widened the range of communicative means even further. Computer-enabled databases and information management systems were developed in countries such as the United States and Great Britain from the late 1970s on (Williams 1987); while the adoption of digital technologies for exhibition, communication and interaction with museum visitors only seriously got underway in the 1990s. Similarly, this is the decade when sustained research on these situated museum media began to take

shape as a sort of digital museum studies (Falk and Dierking 1992; Hooper-Greenhill 1994). Hence, the theme of this special issue reflects a fairly recent coming together of diverse research traditions and interests.

As is already evident from this brief sketch, the concomitant developments in media studies and in museum studies are lodged within wider socio-cultural transformations catalysed, but not caused, by the wide, if uneven, take-up of digital technologies. Key among these transformations is a widespread discourse that we are witnessing a global transformation towards immaterial forms of production, supplementing, if not supplanting, material forms of production. Whether one speaks of networked societies, experience economies or knowledge societies, the terms generate an image of global forms of interaction that are at once marked by competition and interdependence in terms of knowledge formation, collaboration and storage. These discourses materialise as financial priorities, policy measures and cultural trends, all resulting in a series of tensions and dilemmas within media as well as museums.

The most important tension of key importance for the interaction between the two – and hence for this issue of *MedieKultur* – is a tension between enlightenment and entertainment. The enlightenment discourse lies at the heart of museum development as a common good, as a lever of national identity and general character formation for citizens (*Bildung*). This line of thinking resembles the rationale found behind public-service broadcasting as developed in the 1920s and 1930s in the global north. Conversely, a more recent entertainment or experience discourse stresses personal choice (and the competence to make it) and individual lifestyle, and defines cultural institutions, including media and museums, as brands on a competitive, and increasingly global, market. Any adoption and appropriation of digital technologies in museums, be they onsite or online, operate within these ongoing tensions, creating dilemmas concerning lofty aims (Why should such technologies be introduced?), as well as mundane routines (How can the gadgets be implemented?) and future outcomes (What is in it for museum professionals? For visitors? For potential museum development?).

Related to this overarching set of tensions are dilemmas associated with power and voice of communication. Who is speaking as a museum voice – and to whom? Through which frames of interpretation are voices claimed and heard – and in relation to which interpreters? These dilemmas have already been addressed for several decades, spurred in particular by museums of cultural heritage featuring indigenous cultures or colonial settings; and the dilemmas are now being radically challenged with the adoption of technologies such as social network sites, personalised mobile chats, webcasts – all of which allow, and demand, new positionings for audiences as participants and co-producers of meaning.

Again, it is important to stress that digital technologies are not harbingers of a new-fangled attention to visitors by museum professionals or for audiences by the media scholar. Visitors are key to the rationale behind modern museums of the 19th century – as beneficiaries of the edification and quality improvement on offer through exhibitions for the

general public and, more selectively, as participants in school visits and similar customised education programmes. Still, it is significant that sustained research in this area, in the shape of visitor studies, only took off in the 1990s, as noted above, when new modes of interacting and communicating with visitors began to challenge established views. In tandem with this growing interest and catalysed by digital technologies, definitions of visitors multiplied; and today the well-established notion of cultural citizenship vies for attention with definitions of visitors as cultural consumers, prosumers (Toffler 1980; Tapscott 1997) and engaged community members.

In media studies, users have been key elements of interest since the formation of the field in the 1920s and 1930s – first as objects of media effects and, later on, as individuals engaged in fulfilling particular gratifications through particular media uses. From the 1980s on, audience studies took off as an international research trend focused on theory-driven, and often qualitative, empirical analyses of interpretive communities (overview in Schrøder et al. 2003; Nightingale 2011). Currently, a plethora of definitions of media audiences are on offer, including users, citizen-consumers and audience-publics (see overview in Livingstone 2005). Most of these definitions address and seek to tackle recurrent discussions associated with, e.g., individual versus collective forms of media interaction; and the objectives of media engagement for entertainment, knowledge provision or for participation and action.

Evidently, the dispersion of audiencing in media studies parallels the one seen in visitor studies – and for much the same reasons. Still, the two research traditions currently have very little overlap in terms of, e.g., methodological knowledge sharing, joint journal publications or research frameworks. It is hoped that the present issue can offer some assistance in beginning to map out the commonalities between museum and digital media studies in terms of overarching challenges, theoretical foundations, methodological issues and empirical insights.

All the authors in this issue address these commonalities in different ways as they traverse the analytical meeting points of disciplines. Jørgen Riber Christensen offers a much-needed historical take on current issues in describing four steps in the development of exhibition technologies and visitors' participation. He analyses different display technologies, from stipple engraving to digital pens, and sketches the historical development of curating towards the digital and paratextual participation of visitors and audience. He argues that the authentic and auratic exhibited objects in museums enter into a dialogue with surrounding paratexts.

Palmyre Pierroux, Ingeborg Krange and Idunn Sem investigate the ways in which features of different social and mobile technologies, specifically blogs and mobile phones, are able to support meaning making in young people's encounters with contemporary art. They discuss the ways in which digital technologies may be designed and used for pedagogical use on museum field trips.

Megan K. Halpern and colleagues analyse families using SunDial, a handheld treasure hunting game that utilises GPS technologies around a science centre. Their study suggests

that the game supports rich informal science education experiences, provides insights about families' interaction patterns around and with single handheld devices, and demonstrates the value of navigation as an educational experience.

Anne Kahr-Højland examines EGO-TRAP, a mobile phone facilitated narrative at a science centre. Her study suggests that EGO-TRAP scaffolds pleasurable engagement and counteracts the tendency of "random button pressing" that often occurs in classical science centre exhibitions. As the favoured media of young students, the mobile phone plays an essential role because it offers an experience which they describe as both personal and flexible.

Randi Marselis shows how digitisation brings new possibilities for reaching source communities. She discusses how these communities through digital participation can become resources for building cultural heritage. Based on a case study of the Museum Maluku, she argues that in order to design an appropriate mode of user participation, as well as a sense of ownership, it is crucial to take memory politics of source communities into account.

Nanna Holdgaard and Celia Ekelund Simonsen examine the attitudes and conceptions of digital technologies and media in Danish museum organisations. They argue that digital technologies and media are considered digital add-ons to the traditional forms of museum dissemination and communication. In order to create a coherent and complete museum experience (both on-site and online), it is necessary to develop integrated and collaborative work processes and structures between departments.

Outside the special theme, this issue of *MedieKultur* includes three additional articles. Sophie Esmann Andersen and Anne Ellerup Nielsen analyse the digital installation CO2mitment/CO2nfessions. In their analysis, they explore how the citizen is framed and invited to enact his/her responsibilities to the natural environment in an urban setting and how the digital mediation facilitates various forms of relations and climate conscious positions, incorporating both narcissistic desires, universal anxiety, moral obligations, ethical virtue and image performance.

Christian Morgner examines large-scale events and their role in a globalised media world in relation to public reactions and public involvement. With a focus on emotional reactions towards three different media events – the Titanic disaster, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, and the death of Princess Diana – he examines the audiences' impact on and inclusion into the media itself.

Finally, Matthew A. Killmeier and Paul Christiansen explore musical persuasion in political advertisements. They argue that music determines an advertisement's character through framing and underscoring. In a close reading of a 2004 Bush-Cheney advertisement, they apply this theory of frames and underscoring to explain the advertisement's effectiveness.

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