

Abstracts

Saved by Curious George? Challenges Faced by Museums of Science and Technology

By Mette Kia Krabbe Meyer

This paper addresses the challenges faced by museums of science and technology in communicating interdisciplinary perspectives and in trying to make their means of communication more aesthetically informed, sensory and physically engaging. The point of departure is the Steno Museum, Denmark's Museum for the History of Science. In 2005, the museum developed the idea of the Inspiratory, an experience-based center of learning, where science as well as science history was to be incorporated into broader cultural history. Our knowledge about natural laws was to be communicated in tandem with storytelling about the implications of science for society and everyday life in an experientially stimulating manner.

The plans for the Inspiratory were shelved indefinitely. However, the work towards it was central in formulating the exhibition *Ovulation: Having babies with technology* (opened in autumn 2007). Based on the author's own experiences in curating this exhibition, the paper focuses on the challenges met with interdisciplinary work and with new means of expression.

The paper offers insights into how the story about the development of anatomy, technology, and medicine within the field of reproduction can also be the story of shifting practices and perceptions of sex, family, identity, children, and the mother's health and illness. Also, the issue of how the acquisition of knowledge is also a sensory, phenomenological and aesthetic experience is dealt with.

The paper emphasizes that interdisciplinarity and sensory experience logically result in dialogic communication. An ethnological approach to the subject matter calls attention to polyphonic communication revealing varying attitudes towards and perceptions of life and science. This means that museums of science and technology are being challenged in many ways. Not only must we draw on new bodies of knowledge and expertise in order to be able to tell broader and more relevant cultural histories about science, but we also have to be creative in order to produce spatial installations rich in sensory and aesthetic experiences. In this way, we will be both communicating knowledge and making room for reflections. Finally, we have to break with the idea of the museum as nothing but a mouthpiece for science. We need to develop polyphonic modes of expression and stories that not only provide the answer but, more importantly, ask questions and generate debate.

Living History - Another Way of Conducting Communication

By Marie Drost Aakjær

This article deals with the use of living history, experience and entertainment. Within the museological sphere there are many different opinions on how to teach history as good as possible. The article considers the development in the perception and use of experience and identification as teaching methods in museums. Have these methods become more acceptable in relation to the "professionalism" of the museums? Which effect does this have on the use of living history in museums? The basis of this discussion is in a fieldwork in connection with the authors final thesis.

"Professionalism" is often used as an argument for and against the use of living history, but the question of the content of this term is rarely raised. The concept is given meaning trough connections with other terms. In the article the author uses the tradition around discourse-analysis. The analysis of the way "professionalism" is spoken of can be used to show some of the problems inherent in using living history. The key concepts experience and identification can both have different connotations in relation to professionalism. Experience in a personal/emotional meaning or in connection with entertainment can get negatively associated with professionalism, while a connection with learning can give it positive associations with professionalism. Identification becomes problematic through the precondition of needing a direct link between present and past.

In the institutions I have visited during the fieldwork, both experience and identification are seen as fundamental elements of their professionalism. Both can work as didactic tools and links to the past. Within the ethnological tradition this is not necessarily the demanded focus. When more and more institutions take up living history it can give a broader view on the different professions and how they can complement each other in the museological work. It can be interpreted as a search beyond the specific professional spheres towards a more developed cooperation that also calls for reflection on how to portray history in museums.

Making Things Public A Thoughtexhibition on Things, Public and Democracy

By Kristian Hvidtfelt Nielsen and Carina Serritzlew

Making Things Public was the title of an exhibition about science, technology, politics, and democracy curated by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, shown at the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, Karlsruhe, from 20th March to 3rd October 2005. The exhibition itself was an experiment, what Latour in his opening talk called "a thought exhibition", gathering different disciplines and practices in trying to understand how in contemporary societies the sciences interact with policymaking and public debate/opinion. It was, to use another phrasing of Latour, an "intellectual show" in which the twin con-

cepts, "things" and "public" were used to guide the exhibitors and the visitors through an amazing collection of installations, images, texts, objects, and virtual effects. Implying the original meaning of the word, the concept of "thing" refers both to matters of public concern and to the political assemblies enacted to discuss and deliberate upon them. Inspired by the Dutch philosopher Noortje Marres' notion of "the public", based primarily on the early 20th century discussion between two public and prominent Americans, journalist Walter Lippman and philosopher John Dewey, the exhibition attempted to demonstrate that democratic publics are not passive, but active constructions that contribute to the construction of "things".

In this article we present the exhibition's basic concepts. Examining the exhibition using analytical tools provided by cultural and art historian Rune Gade, we also provide specific examples of the somewhat complex and, indeed, intellectual structure of the exhibition. In so doing, we hope to extract important messages from this exciting, multifaceted, and transdisciplinary exhibition. We also believe that the exhibition and the questions it raises give rise to a future message for many museums: perhaps it is no longer enough to communicate things as objects to the existing public of the museum; rather, in the future the role of the museum might be conceived as the construction of new things (objects and subjects) and, thus, new museum publics.

"The Days of the Museums are Over" Exhibitions Between Museum, City and Everyday Life

By Line Hjorth Christensen

The article traces a historical as well as a current opposition, that of museum versus daily urban life and examines the forms of display generated by vigorous interconnections of the two areas. Referring to a bestselling novel by British author Zadie Smith who, speaking through her main character, condemns the idea and future life of museums to that of lively, spectacular, dynamic urbanity, the article sets out to connect museums and city by listing up exhibition types and tendencies of the 20th and 21st century. It emphasizes a type of exhibition which absorbs rather than distances traits of the outside world and which embodies and reconstructs natural surroundings as an elementary characteristic of its form. This inclusive exhibition type is traced from early open-air museums, eco-museology and an early modern consciousness of the viewer position to interwar initiatives in design museums – pointing forward to contemporary activities such as Late at Tate events where museum visits are turned into "a kind of promenade theatre". In the process of "building in" urbanity either as totality or fragment this type of exhibition has, in many cases, broken with traditional museological categories such as chronology, evolutionism or taxonomy. In the process it has, critically, turned its back to the idea of "the disciplinary museum" and vital museological reforms and new variations of the type have evolved.

Curating and Dis/playing the Biopolitics of Prevention – A Risk Assessment Software as a Museum Object?

By Susanne Bauer

This contribution explores a digital artefact developed for preventive medicine as a potential museological case. Software tools that guide clinical practice epitomize a new mode of medical knowledge. In the last decades, medical practice has rationalized decision-making by drawing on quantitative risk estimates derived from population studies. In what ways can museums address and historicize the changing notions of health and disease that have resulted from the digital mediation of medicine? Albeit a key feature of clinical medicine, decision-support software is still an unusual item within a medical museum collection. This paper argues for the collection of risk assessment software in museological collecting, as the tool epitomizes the mode of reasoning so important with evidence-based medicine. Starting from an exploration of the medical software object, the curatorial description follows the object's life cycle. The tool was designed to present individualized risk figures as visual displays in graphs, diagrams and pie charts; the system computes numerical risks for cardiovascular disease using individual profiles based on long-term epidemiological studies. In adopting population-based risk assessment, doctor and patient manage uncertainty: The individual patient is localized within the grids of population categories and assigned the risk value of this group. In the context of a medical history museum, the risk assessment tool reflects the changing doctor-patient relationships and shows how medical practice is co-shaped by algorithms. While science communication has often taken a narrow focus on education, for instance on statistical literacy, museums can do more: they can create spaces for epistemological reflection, e.g. on risk assessment rationalities, and on the culture of prediction. This enables museums to expose modes of knowing as historically situated practices and open up the biomedical present to broad debate.

Place or Presence? - Museums in the Age of the Internet

By Mikkel Thelle

As a series of new media has emerged since the 1990's, museums have been challenged on the attachment to the physical place and the authoritative voice associated with it. The experience that meets the online cultural consumer is changing rapidly from being that of a visitor to a website to a user of resources consumed through multiple sources. Social software is placing the position of the museum professional among other, more or less competent voices.

It is hard to see a coherent answer to these changes. One strategy could be to let go of the resources so long kept in control – and see them being used in all kinds of contexts and for different purposes. This would mean a disintegration of the traditional understanding of the knowledge produced by museums – an enlightenment idea of the professional providing both the

information and the framework for understanding it. On the other hand it could also mean that many more would get to know and use our collections, education resources and stories.

The printed press, radio and (to a degree) TV is part of the mass culture associated with the nation state and the mass public. These media have established well defined spaces, roles and rules for acting in public space. The internet has questioned these two core concepts, thereby setting the stage for a new media culture. It is important for cultural institutions, not least museums to influence this culture, and for that purpose we have a lot of potential.

We have in the last couple of years seen more and more creative and ambitious internet projects from museums throughout the nordic countries. Stories, resources and learning are coming online in a still more massive stream. This material hits the web in a period, where internet presence is a concept in transition, with syndication and social media creating new channels of information. In april, the conference "Museums and the Web 07" adressed this situation in a filled hotel in San Francisco central, and had the main conclusion: the museum website as we know it will soon be dead. With this conference as a point of departure, the article set focus on the museum and its attachment to a physical place. A relation that could be about to change.