Book Review

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Kirsten Drotner & Kim Christian Schrøder (Eds.):
Museum Communication and Social Media:
The Connected Museum.
New York: Routledge, 2013

"Most of the chapters that make up this book originate in a symposium hosted by the Danish Research Centre on Education and Advanced Media Materials (DREAM) in October 2010", the editors Kirsten Drotner and Kim Christian Schrøder tell us in their introduction (p. 8). Only a few, it appears (and we are not told which), have been solicited especially for this publication.

Having now worked my way through the ten chapters of *Museum Communication and Social Media*, I have trouble grasping what the book as a whole is supposed to give me. And I wonder whether a more thorough editorial effort might have contributed both to the reading experience and the scholarly value. To tell the truth, I wonder what must have gone wrong for the experienced editors (and brilliant scholars), whose somewhat confused introduction has very little connection with the chapters that follow (except, of course, in the passage that summarises all ten, one by one), a problem that culminates in their surprising claim that "[i]n this volume we have collected *eleven* research articles" (p. 12, my emphasis).

One problem with the reading experience is the repeated enthusiastic exordia of many of the chapters about the wonders of the social media and how they have been appropriated by one of the coveted but difficult audiences for museums nowadays: young people. One might have expected the editors' general introduction to the field to set the scene once and for all. Had the book been a monograph, this would have been a matter of course, but the editors of a collection ought to be precise in their commissions and heavy-handed

when working through the contributions to have writers stick to the main theme and to avoid repetitiousness.

One general problem in the book is that most of the chapters have a very remote relation to social media, if any at all (and a few chapters also have a very weak relevance for museums). In the introduction, the editors list six main categories of social media (blogs, media-sharing sites, social bookmarking sites, social network sites, virtual word sites, and wikis) with Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Delicious, Digg, reddit, Facebook, MySpace, and Wikipedia as specific examples. However, only two or three chapters actually discuss the use of any of them in museums: Lynda Kelly gives an impressive but also very condensed overview of the basics of "The Connected Museum in the World of Social Media", as her contribution is called; Randi Marselis and Laura Maria Schütze tell a very interesting story about how blog posts, Flickr, Facebook, and Twitter were used by the Dutch Tropenmuseum to collect information about people in photographs of postcolonial migrants from Indonesia; and Glynda Hull and John Scott present and discuss the international social networking project "Space2Cre8", vainly trying to indicate some relevance to the museum world.

Even in these chapters, only a small number of the social media mentioned in the introduction appear at all, and most of them are simply not mentioned again in the book (at least, if we can trust the combination of the book's somewhat slipshod index and my own general impression and memory).

What the many remaining authors do discuss, on the other hand, is what is commonly lumped together under the concept of "digital" media. In museums, the most common electronic devices are handheld mobile guides, which are obviously quite anti-social – as pointed out (p. 177) by the authors Mike Sharples, Elizabeth FitzGerald, Paul Mulholland, and Robert Jones in their chapter on how these guides can be used in slightly more interactive ways than we normally see in museums and on city tours. In his short final contribution, Bruno Ingemann suggests how another personal sound device, the less often used sound domes (directional loudspeakers above the visitor's head), might be made both interactive and more social.

Quite common, too, and nearly always interactive are the computers placed in museums for visitors actively to find extra information about the exhibits. These computers are only slightly more social than the mobile guides – at least, if they are a normal desktop size. Several chapters tell about different ways of expanding the computer screen and similar devices for a more interactive and social use in exhibitions.

One example might be "Munch's World": four small "installations" around wall-mounted interactive screens at the National Gallery in Oslo, where the young audience was invited to study and play with Edvard Munch's paintings and their context (and to take selfies posing like Munch in his self-portraits). Palmyre Pierroux and Sten Ludvigsen describe the experiment.

Karen Knutson describes another example: the so-called Timeweb of the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh. Timeweb can be used both on computer screens in the museum

and at home. It is a many-layered information and presentation programme that not only offers basic facts but also uses the huge collections at the museum to tell about Warhol's work and its historical context. And, in the second part of the chapter by Monika Hagedorn-Saupe, Lorenz Kampschulte, and Annette Noschka-Roos, the authors give a surprisingly basic introduction to the Europeana website, after having reviewed a study of reactions to a genetic testing dilemma presented to visitors at an interactive station in the Deutsches Museum (for science and technology) in Munich.

The only two contributions I have not mentioned so far are the two initial chapters, which happen to be the two that seem to have the most remote connection to what the book's title suggests as its theme: Ross Parry starts out with a theoretically diffuse discussion of the concepts of "fiction" and "authenticity" with a plea for using the Web to reconnect with "the playful, illustrative, fictive and theatrical qualities that have come to define the museum" (p. 30). And Pam Meecham follows up with a wordy essay on (according to its subtitle) "Museums, Technology, and Material Culture", using the grand commercial, travelling exhibition "Van Gogh Alive" as her main example with its environmental projections of details from van Gogh's paintings.

The intention behind the book, however, is not only to present examples and explorations of the use of social media in the museum world but also "to promote much-needed dialogue within and across research traditions" – not least between the traditions of visitor studies and audience studies, "[o]riginating in museum studies and media studies, respectively" (p. 8). To my mind, there is also a "much-needed" dialogue between visitor or audience researchers and museum researchers with a background in the humanities and a more interpretive perspective; as a humanistic scholar myself, I prefer the chapters that describe and comment on actual exhibitions to the more abstract or technical ones.

A distinctive feature of many of the contributions with a background in the social sciences is how the text is nearly drowned out by the references (parentheticals stating author/year, etc.). Since the references on many occasions seem rather superfluous since they back up rather banal points – and often lack page indications – they tend to give the impression that they are inserted quite mechanically and that the authors have never read the actual texts to which they refer (or, at least, that they have not inspected them lately).

I made a random check of an often-used museological quotation from Stephen E. Weil that appears (in three slightly different and all slightly wrong variations) in the introduction and two of the chapters; Weil's original formulation is "From Being *about* Something to Being *for* Somebody". Only the joint authors Hagedorn-Saupe, Kampschulte, and Noschka-Roos seem to have an inkling of what they are quoting (p. 113). Drotner and Schrøder write that Weil made the "assertion" that museums "must" change in the indicated direction (p. 8), Lynda Kelly (whom the editors seem to paraphrase) that he "declared" this to be the case. Embarrassingly, in reality, the phrase is not a call for a new way of conceiving museums in the 21st century but – as the many capitals suggest – the descriptive *title* of a 1999 article by Weil from *Daedalus* (p. 229), a title that summarises Weil's narration of how

American museums already had changed during the half century since the Second World War. And, as Weil makes clear, the title is itself almost a quotation of the 1992 commendation by Joanna Cleaver of the revivification of Boston's Children's Museum, which opened already in 1961 (p. 247). Blindly quoting a nice phrase without knowing what it is you are quoting is sloppy scholarship, if you ask me!

It is indeed admirable that Drotner and Schrøder have managed to get an international publication from their DREAM project into the series with the strange title "Routledge Research in Museum Studies". But, despite some interesting contributions, it is disappointing that the publication is not more thoroughly worked out.

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