

Digital Horizons, Virtual Selves: Rethinking Cultural Heritage in the Museum

An international conference at the Research Center for Material Culture of the
Tropenmuseum, Afrika Museum and Museum Volkenkunde

Thursday January 21 & Friday January 22, 2016

The Research Center for Material Culture is pleased to invite you to the conference *Digital Horizons, Virtual Selves: Rethinking Cultural Heritage in the Museum*, which will be held on January 21-22 2016, at the RCMC, Museum Volkenkunde, Steenstreet 1, Leiden.

How should museums remember the digital age? This conference brings together curators and theorists to share and explore approaches towards researching, collecting and displaying digital heritage in the ethnographic museum.

In the past two decades digital technologies have become omnipresent in the museum. They have changed the ways museums document, preserve, make accessible and present cultural heritage. Ethnographic museums follow this trend: they have embraced digital technologies as tools for engaging the public, for cataloguing and disseminating knowledge about their collections and for democratizing knowledge production. However, scant attention has been given by these museums to thinking about digital technologies as cultural objects and practices in their own rights. Ethnographic museums have in many ways ignored the influence of the digital on cultural dynamics and practices as well as the subjectivities associated with these practices. One of the reasons is the pre-occupation with material authenticity, aura and originality – presumably values that the digital lacks – which has prevented digital objects to attain the status of cultural artifacts worthy of a place in museum collections. As a consequence digital heritage is not yet part of the research, exhibition and collecting agendas of these museums. This conference aims to open up a space to create new definitions and roles for digital objects in the museum, to study the artistic, social, cultural and political aspects of digital practices and to explore possibilities for collecting and preserving digital cultures for the future.

We invite speakers to explore questions including the following:

- How can (ethnographic) museums reflect on the impact of digital technologies on identity, culture and society?

- Should the (ethnographic) museum offer a memory space for digital practices and objects, and if so which of those could be of interest?
- How might the study of digital cultural practices enable new perspectives on collections held by (ethnographic) museums? How might the acquisition of digital objects challenge what we understand (ethnographic) museum objects, and associated concepts of material authenticity, originality and aura, to be?
- To what extent do digital technologies enable a rethinking of the foundational principles and practices of ethnographic museums and their colonial past?

The conference will be divided into three sessions:

Session 1: How Digital Technologies Shape the Museum

This session will focus on the ways in which digital technologies are transforming institutional cultures, methods, and knowledge creation in museums. How might the acquisition of digital objects and practices challenge conventional memory and representation processes within museums? What is their relationship with material objects? How can we start thinking of digital heritage as creative works and historical documents that have their own materiality and authenticity?

Session 2: Digital Politics

This session will focus on the influence of social media in protest movements and how digital activism can be preserved for future generations. What would be essential to collect and preserve, in particular within the context of the ethnographic museum? What capacity do digital technologies bring to change power relations both inside and outside the museum?

Session 3: Digital Subjectivities, Cultural Memory and Virtual Worlds

This session will focus on the ways in which cultural and political subjectivities are being transformed, produced and represented through digital technologies, in both virtual and offline worlds. How might the study of digital cultures change our understandings of citizenship, cultural identity, locality and borders? How does the digital influence the way we perceive and communicate with the world around us? How does the digital affect our understanding of cultural memory?

Abstracts & Biographies

Day 1: Thursday 21 January 2016

Session 1: How Digital Technologies Shape the Museum

Representing the Digital

Robin Boast

Ethnographic museums were not always about representation. In the callow age of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, they were about indexing similitude. We cannot underestimate the impact of Boasian representation – verisimilitude – on anthropology museums, and museums in general. Today, representation is the name of the museum game. Digitality is seen as an ideal medium for refining representations – of bringing clarity and accuracy to accounts. Leaving aside the obvious misconception that you can have fidelity in representation, this new representationalism is hampered by two other critical misconceptions. The belief that representations are transparent to the visitor, and that digital media is representational. This brief presentation will situate anthropological museum practice in contrast to digitality as a non-representational medium.

Robin Boast is Professor of Cultural Information Science at the University of Amsterdam, and for over 30 years he has worked on the history, practice, theory, and performance of information in cultural institutions and society. He has been deeply embedded in research in the fields of museology, history and sociology of science, post-colonial studies and information studies in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Europe. His has focused on diverse topics, ranging from the first digital collection projects in museums and universities in the 1970s, to the history of knowledge and its ontologies, to the history of digitality, to the more recent emergence of the digitality and ubiquitous computing.

Alt-w - The Commission and Acquisition of a Diva and Other Stories

Mark Daniels

No one should ever consciously create a diva, let alone welcome them into their permanent collection. The Alt-w Fund was established in Dundee by Scottish Screen in 2000. Short for Alternative Web, the fund was established to support artist engagement with the burgeoning medium of the World Wide Web. But after sixty or so said projects, the fund was relaunched by Mark Daniels of New Media Scotland in 2008 with the exhibition Alt-w: New Directions in Scottish Digital Culture at the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Glasgow. Application guidelines were rewritten as times had simply changed. One of the first new projects to be commissioned held up a mirror to social media practice. It was also an example of the Internet of Things. The project was

Cybraphon, an autonomous emotional robot band created in Edinburgh by the FOUND Collective. This is Cybraphon's story, as the curtain almost rises.

Mark Daniels is a curator who engineers engaged experiences. He trained as an architect at Kingston University before completing the MA Art as Environment at Manchester Metropolitan University. He was the inaugural Director at Northern Architecture where he curated a diverse range of subjects including love hotels, sitooteries and science fiction cinema. As International Co-ordinator he was responsible for the main exhibition of the 2004 Liverpool Biennial. An increasing interest in new media led him to folly in Lancaster in 2005, and to New Media Scotland in 2008. He was Creative Director the Inspace laboratory at the University of Edinburgh from 2009 to 2014. He is Chair of the Alt-w Fund which supports artists & technologists in Scotland to make new work. He is based in Edinburgh.

The Reconstruction of The Digital City, a Case Study of Web Archaeology

Tjarda de Haan

Twenty-two years ago a city emerged from computers, modems and telephone cables. On 15 January 1994 De Digitale Stad (DDS; The Digital City) opened its virtual gates in Amsterdam. DDS, the first virtual city in the world, made the internet (free) accessible to the general public in the Netherlands. But like many other cities in the world history, this city disappeared. In 2001 the city was taken offline and perished as a virtual Atlantis. The digital (r)evolution has reshaped our lives dramatically in the last decades. But our digital heritage, and especially the digital memory of the early web, is at risk of being lost. Or worse already gone. Time for the Amsterdam Museum and partners to act and start to safeguard our digital heritage. The project re:DDS, the reconstruction of De Digitale Stad, was born. The acquiring and preservation of born-digital objects have different demands than physical objects. This is a new area for the heritage field. How to dig up the lost hardware, software and data? And how to reconstruct The Digital City, from a virtual Atlantis to a virtual Pompeii? In our case study of webarchaeology we will try to answer the questions: how to excavate, reconstruct, present, preserve and sustainably store born-digital data and make it accessible to the future generations?

Tjarda de Haan Tjarda de Haan is a guest e-curator and a web-archaeologist at the Amsterdam Museum. She is excavating and reconstructing The Digital City, the first virtual city worldwide. She recently published her first article on webarchaeology "The reconstruction of The Digital City, a case study of web archaeology" in co-operation with Paul Vogel in the "Magazine for Histories of Media Art, Science and Technology". <http://www.bitsandbytesunited.com/?portfolio=publication-the-reconstruction-of-the-digital-city-a-case-study-of-web-archaeology>. Way back she studied Contemporary history at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam and at the Humboldt Universität in Berlin, with a scholarship of the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst. Then she worked for several companies including The Digital City, ICATT interactieve media, Het Parool and the

Amsterdam Economic Board as a webstrategist and webmaster. Nowadays she also runs her own agency Bits and Bytes United. Other assignments include a webdocumentary for the 100th birthday of Schiphol, restyling and migrating websites and giving lectures.

Session 2: Digital Politics

The Politics in and of Social Media Metrics

Mirko Schäfer

Social media are deeply embedded in our everyday life activities. As users interact with each other through Facebook, Twitter and other popular applications, they generate data. These data are used by the platform providers to improve their services, manage their users and curate the so-called user generated content. The data are also made available to third parties. Marketeers use them for market research and targeted advertising, political campaigners for mobilizing audiences, researchers for analysing user activities and the police for criminal investigation. This presentation discusses how data collection and analysis transform our understanding of the public sphere. Capturing indiscriminately the profane and irrational gut reaction as well as the informed debate and the sophisticated commentary, social media platforms constitute an ever growing archive of online conversations. What practices of analysing this data resource are currently developing? Which practical, political and ethical issues are raised through these practices? These questions will be discussed referring to examples from a three year investigation into the datafication of the public sphere in the Netherlands.

Mirko Schäfer is Assistant Professor for New Media & Digital Culture at the University of Utrecht and director of the Utrecht Data School. Schäfer studied theater, film and media studies and communication studies at Vienna University, Austria and digital culture at Utrecht University, Utrecht. Currently, he is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Centre for Humanities at Utrecht University. He is co-editor and co-author of the volume *Digital Material. Tracing New Media in Everyday Life and Technology* (Amsterdam University Press, 2009). His book *Bastard Culture! How User participation Transforms Cultural Production* (Amsterdam University Press 2011) has been favourably reviewed by peer-reviewed journals and was listed as best-seller in the section computer science by *The Library Journal*. Schäfer was organizer and co-curator of [d]vision - Vienna Festival for Digital Culture. He is a member of the advisory board of SetUp Utrecht. Schäfer is a curator for the Centre for Humanities-Impakt Festival Fellowship and co-curator of the Utrecht New Media Evening at Impakt.

Scraping, Analyzing and Curating Facebook Pages

Thomas Poell

This presentation reflects on the analytical opportunities and problems presented by very large Facebook Pages. It builds on an interdisciplinary research project on the Kullena Khaled Said Facebook Page, the most popular online platform during the Egyptian revolution of early 2011. For this project, 14,072 posts by page administrators, as well as 6,810,357 comments and 32,030,731 likes by 1,892,118 users have been extracted via a customized version of the social media research tool Netvizz. Addressing the central questions of the symposium, I will, first, consider the intricacies of collecting data through Facebook's API (Application Programming Interface). Subsequently, the presentation turns to the different analytical strategies available to humanities and social science researchers working with big data. Reflecting on the articulation of citizenship and activist leadership through the page, it shows why it is important to study and collect social media data. Finally, I will discuss the security, privacy, and legal issues that accompany the curation of social media data by museums and academic institutions.

Thomas Poell is assistant professor of New Media and Digital Culture at the Department of Media Studies at the University of Amsterdam. His research is focused on social media and the transformation of public communication around the globe. Together with professor José van Dijck, he leads the KNAW-'Over Grenzen' research program on Social Media and the Transformation of Public Space. He is one of the program leaders of the Amsterdam Centre for Globalization Studies, and part of the core team Audiovisual Data and Media Studies of the national infrastructural project CLARIAH (NWO). During the spring semester of 2015, Poell was Research Associate at UC Santa Cruz, and visiting lecturer at the University of Helsinki.

You remember if you participate

Golrokh Nafisi

The powerful illustrations of Golrokh Nafisi reflect on recent political events in the Middle East. They aim to unite, empower and encourage social change. These images are continuously circulating within the Web and among others widely spread by the 'We are all Khaled Said' Facebook page. We will interview Golrokh Nafisi on her vision on presenting her work within (online and offline) social networks. How does she engage with her audience and how does the audience engage with her work? Where do social networks add towards her work and does she see this as part of her work? Is it possible to present her work that is so embedded within web culture, within the physical space of the museum? Could her work be preserved for future generations and which aspects of her work are important to preserve? How can we preserve the social relevance of art and culture? We would like to invite the audience to get involved within the conversation, and also submit ideas and questions.

Golrokh Nafisi (1981, Iran) studied at the Art University of Teheran and the Rietveld Academy Amsterdam and she is still working in both cities. In her work she covers daily events, her errands, her activities and the politics of the Middle East, and specifically Iranian society.

What We Talk About When Talking About Online Cultures

Annet Dekker

A mere two decades have passed and already many artworks that were made for the web have disappeared due to domain name expirations, domain-name snatchers, lack of back-ups, soft- and hardware updates, and too many bugs and spam that destroy the incentive to continue. At the same time, a lot of things have been said or proclaimed about art that is made online, whether it be Internet art, net art, net.art, new aesthetics or post-Internet art: how it is made, how to present it and how to preserve it.

In this presentation I focus on attempts that have been made to preserve online cultures: from large institutes that scrape content and invent new documentation methods, to 'amateur' examples that form their own 'networks of care', and finally by paying attention to the stories, myths and fictions that survive through analogue means and stick in human memory.

Annet Dekker is an independent curator and researcher. She is researcher of Digital Preservation at Tate, London, research fellow at London South Bank University & The Photographers' Gallery, London, tutor at Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam, and fellow at Het Nieuwe Instituut.

Previously, she worked as Web curator for SKOR (2010-12), as program manager at Virtueel Platform (2008-10), head of exhibitions, education, and artists-in-residence at the Netherlands Media Art Institute (1999-2008), and as lecturer for new media theory at Rietveld Academy.

Together with Annette Wolfsberger, she produced Funware, an international touring exhibition in 2010 and 2011 about fun in software (curated by Olga Goriunova). In 2014, she completed her PhD on conserving net art entitled Enabling the Future, or How to Survive FOREVER. A study of networks, processes and ambiguity in net art and the need for an expanded practice of conservation at the Centre for Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths University of London, under supervision of Matthew Fuller.

Day 2: Friday 22 January 2016

Session 3: Digital Subjectivities and Virtual Worlds

Digital Media and the New Politics of Representation

Victoria Bernal

The internet opened up unprecedented access to diverse populations and individuals the means to express themselves and represent their lifeworlds without intermediaries like curators, censors, editors or other authorities. This has great political significance as people use the affordances of digital media to contest, reproduce, or recontextualize official and mainstream texts and images. This essay explores questions about the characteristics of digital media including the ambiguities of its spatialities, temporalities, and reach and also about the relationship of the virtual to offline contexts through a focus on two examples of Eritreans' activities online. One example is a virtual war memorial established on a diaspora website as a testament to those who died in the 1998-2000 border conflict with Ethiopia. The other example is the rich field of online texts and images Eritreans have produced about their capital city, Asmara.

Victoria Bernal is Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Irvine. Her scholarship addresses questions relating to politics, gender, migration and diaspora, war, civil society and activism, and digital media. Her most recent book is *Nation as Network: Diaspora, Cyberspace, and Citizenship*. Dr. Bernal has carried out ethnographic research in Sudan, Tanzania, Eritrea, and cyberspace. She is a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University for the 2015-16 academic year where she is researching issues of digital privacy and surveillance.

The Digital Lives of Artefacts in Diaspora

Deirdre McKay

Plastic replicas of what are now museum objects move with the Filipino diaspora. Images of these objects circulate, in various ways, via digital media, moving across social media, video, still photographs and phones. So, too, do the recorded cultural performances and events to which these objects are attached. The circulation of this digital data forms a key part of the migrant archive – the accretion of information migrants and sending communities use to shape their hope for the future and secure their changing cultural identities. My talk will trace the digital lives of plastic replicas from the Philippines. Suggesting how digital data could be linked to and extend on museum collections, I will track the ways migrants use these images to shape a global and expansive sense of self.

Deirdre McKay is Senior Lecturer in Geography at Keele University. The author of *Global Filipinos* (Indiana, 2012) and *Making Migrant Care* (Indiana, in press), her current project explores the social

life of plastics and the ways digital cultures shape migration. She has carried out fieldwork in the Philippines, and with Filipino migrants in Hong Kong, Singapore, Canada and London and via social media. Her publications explore experiences of migration and development, examining the shaping of subjectivities via photography, digital media, and materiality. After a year as Honorary Visiting Fellow in Anthropology at University College London (2009), she began working with Filipino collaborators on plastic replica objects. With funding from the British Academy, her team developed an exhibition, *Everyday Objects*, for the BenCab gallery in Baguio City (2012). Their work appears in *The Social Life of Materials* (eds. Drazin and Kuechler, Bloomsbury, 2015).

Digital Existence in Museums of Anthropology in the Global Age

Anna Reading

This paper suggests that the study of digital cultural practices can enable new kinds of perspectives in Museums of Anthropology. The combination of digitization with globalization or what may be termed the global age is changing human existence in fundamental ways. Human beings are born, live and die in what may be termed the global memory field: mobile and socially networked technologies enable human beings to communicate, record, document, store, socially share and access mediated memories of the human body, human everyday living practices and digital lives after death.

How should ethnographic museums reflect on digital existence and the impact of the global memory field on identity and cultures? How could the Museum of World Cultures offer a memory space for the variety of digital practices, digital rituals and digital heritage objects? What kinds of practices, rituals and digital objects might be of interest? The paper suggests a framework for representing and preserving the global life.

Anna Reading is a mnemologist and is Professor of Cultural and Creative Industries and Head of the Department of Culture, Media and Creative Industries at Kings College University of London, UK. She is also Honorary Visiting Professor in Communication at the Institute for Culture and Society, University of Western Sydney. She is the author of *Polish Women, Solidarity and Feminism* (1992); *Communism, Capitalism and the Mass Media* with Colin Sparks (1998) and *The Social Inheritance of the Holocaust: Gender, Culture and Memory* (2002). She is the editor of *The Media in Britain* with Jane Stokes (1999); *Save As...Digital Memories* (2011) with Joanne Garde-Hansen and Andrew Hoskins and *Cultural Memories of Nonviolent Struggles: Powerful Times* (2015) with Tamar Katriel. She is a joint editor of the international journal *Media, Culture and Society*. Her plays *Kiss Punch Goodnight* (1987) *Want* (1990) *The Stoning* (1991) *Grandma's Garden* (1992) *Falling* (1996) *RP35* (2004) *Cacti Hearts* (2010) and *To My Dearest Daughter* (2014) have been performed in the UK, Ireland, Poland, the US and India. Her new book *Gender and Memory in the Global Age* will be published later in 2016 by Palgrave.

They Are Talking To Us!: Digital Heritage in The Making in Indigenous Australia

Jessica De Largy Healy

In the early 2000, as Internet was reaching the remote Aboriginal community of Galiwin'ku, in north-east Arnhem Land, a group of ceremonial leaders set out to establish an Indigenous Knowledge Centre. Conceived around a complex database that would reflect the principles of Yolngu knowledge organization, the centre sought to establish relations with various institutions holding north-east Arnhem Land collections in order to initiate the digital repatriation of these materials. This ambitious digital heritage program, which involved new forms of reflexivity, self-representation and collaborative practice, was followed throughout the region by a myriad of creative experiments with new media technologies. Drawing from a number of these recent productions, this paper will reflect on the ways in which these digital cultural practices challenge common perceptions of what heritage is and how these may enable new perspectives on the value of museum collections.

Jessica De Largy Healy is an anthropologist who has been conducting research in Australian Indigenous communities since the mid-nineteen nineties. Her PhD (2008, University of Melbourne/Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales) examined the development of a digital knowledge archiving project in the Yolngu township of Galiwin'ku, in north-east Arnhem Land. She has published extensively on image and media making practices, processes of digital repatriation and contemporary ritual performances in this region. An adjunct researcher at the Centre de Recherche et de Documentation sur l'Océanie (Credo AMU-CNRS-EHESS) and at James Cook University (Townsville, Australia), she currently works in the musée du quai Branly Research and Higher Education Department.

Global Games – The Significance of Videogames

Stephan Schwingeler

The exhibition »Global Games« shows recent developments in the area of computer games, including those known as impact games, newsgames, or serious games. The effects of globalization and other real-world reference points are clearly reflected in computer games.

Computer games now address the conflict in Syria, the use of drones in combat zones, the global economic interrelations of the globalized financial market, the situation of refugees at Europe's borders, the social injustices of turbo-capitalism, and much more. In contrast to the escapism of mainstream computer games, serious games focus mostly on the challenges and issues of a globalized and digitized world.

The computer games with the paradoxical name serious games are capable of transforming players into interconnected citizen scientists. Some games are even programmed by research institutions with the aim of using human perception to support complex research projects. Playfully presented virtual puzzles, for example, generate information that can yield important results.

Ever since the ZKM opened its doors in 1997 computer and video games have been permanently on display in the ZKM because they are a significant and integral part of our everyday digital world. Here the ZKM has assumed a pioneering role.

Stephan Schwingeler (*1979) is a curator, researcher and lecturer. Currently he is research associate at the ZKM | Museum for Contemporary Art. His first book deals with the topic of space in video games and is one of the first art historical publications in the field of Game Studies. His Ph.D. thesis and second book examines the practices and strategies of Game Art and artistic video game modification from the perspective of art history and media theory.

He was the scientific consultant of Cologne's Next Level Conference. In the last couple of years he also was responsible for running the GameLab at the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design.

Among other things he is responsible as a curator for the exhibition ZKM_Gameplay at the internationally renowned ZKM | Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe. ZKM_Gameplay features Game Art, Indie Games, Serious Games and other forms of experimental gameplay. His newest exhibition Global Games presents videogames as political media. More information:

https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephan_Schwingeler