

How to become a collective culture - The current affair between Danish art museums and Facebook

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2010

The emergence of social media has given the general public the possibility to upload and share information, and communicate and interact in platforms online. But the actual question especially for the art system is: Do the art museums stand a chance in a collective culture?

Imagine the art museum as an interactive collaborative place where our culture is constantly generated through the voices of artists, curators, critics, academics, scientists, museums visitors and the general public. Where the traditional museum space and the walls of the famous *white cube* are dissolved.

In the following, I will argue that the art museum is facing several challenges with social media and that it has to re-invent itself in order to embrace a collective culture. The presence of technology is not enough for creating a collective culture. The art museum has to break down the walls of the museum, physical as well as mental, and re-think the art museum as an institution. This article is based on recent research on the use of Facebook by Danish state-subsidize art museums (Damkjær, 2009).

With Web 2.0 the users are not satisfied being passive consumers, but they want to interact and participate in collective collaborations. According to the Australian media theorist Axel Bruns the rise of social media with Web 2.0 marks a paradigm shift in our contemporary culture from industrial modes of production to *Producersage* (Bruns, 2008). Coining the term *Producersage* (production–usage) Bruns stresses a dissolution of traditional producer–consumer roles and present instead a new hybrid *Prod-user*, which both produce and use content in collective collaborations (Bruns, 2008; 2). Applying Bruns idea of *producersage* on today's culture scene I will in this article refer to a *collective culture*, meaning the users as *producers* of our culture - both producing and using our culture. To remain relevant in our contemporary society the art museum has to respond to this paradigm shift and open itself up for a collective culture.

Many art museums are already experimenting with social media, creating profiles on social networking services such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, and YouTube.

As one of the most popular social networking sites in Denmark, Facebook has naturally experienced growing participation by Danish state-subsidized art museums. By September 2009, 18 out of 39 Danish state-subsidized art museums had created a Facebook profile— including *The National Gallery of Denmark*, *Arken*, and *Louisiana Museum of Modern Art*.

On Facebook the art museum enters a collective culture where the users are *producers* of the art museums online profile sharing, commenting and tagging content. However, a closer look at the 39 Danish state-subsidized art museums' use of Facebook shows that an actual collective culture barely comes into existence. The content produced by the users is generally limited and of poor quality. Most of the discussion on Facebook rarely advances beyond small talk and the content shared lacks any immediately apparent theoretical or cultural importance. The most common types of comments are related to museum visits, where the users thank the museum for a pleasant experience or conversely announce their intention of making a future visit to the museum (Damkjær, 2009). A possible explanation can be found in the fact that Facebook is primarily used by the art museums as a marketing *channel* to the users, and not as an environment to *interact* with the users. The art museums mainly use Facebook to market the art museum online by uploading information about current and forthcoming exhibitions and events, with the purpose of attracting visitors to the art museum. Furthermore there is a tendency among the art museums to use Facebook as a homepage, uploading several posts once or twice a month instead of being continually present in their Facebook profile. Moreover, the art museums are mainly practicing monologue instead of dialogue, not encouraging the users to interact and participate. Using the metaphors used on Facebook itself to describe their behavior, one could say that the art museums behave as authoritarian and self-promoting friends.

The results of the research indicates that the majority of the art museums surveyed do not use Facebook on the medium's own terms. Facebook is instead seen as little more than simply a convenient new channel through which to market themselves in a traditional manner, rather than as an environment in which to *interact with* the users, opening themselves up to user participation and dialogue (Damkjær, 2009).

A closer look at the art museums use of Facebook reveals several dilemmas, indicating a gap between a collective culture and the art museum as an institution. Three dilemmas in particular uncover how Facebook potentially breaks down the borders between the traditional museum space and the public space and questions the very foundation of the art museum, and its character and role in our society.

The first dilemma occurs when the art museum has to establish a **social relationship** with the users. This creates difficulty for the art museum because in this context the institution must be on par with the users, and thereby give up centuries of traditionally-held authority. In doing so, the art museum must step down from the hallowed Pantheon of its exclusivity -- an act, which heralds a breakdown in traditional conceptions of museum space versus public space.

Secondly, the art museum must first create objects of sociality before meaningful **dialogical content** can manifest itself. By letting the art museum itself, the art experience, and the museum visit be a social object for interaction, the art museum is forced to open up traditionally closed conceptions of museum space. This creates a dilemma for art museums, because they are again forced to release their attachment, as institutions, to the traditional exhibition space. The *white cube* dissolves.

Thirdly, the art museum has to integrate Facebook into the art museum's daily work. This occurs as a dilemma for the art museum because Facebook represents a convergence of several media forms, mixing communication, branding, and marketing. This **media convergence** results in a deconstruction of the art museum's customary structure as an organization. Furthermore, a new political dimension influences the organization of the art museum— as a traditionally hierarchical, *top-down* organization, the art museum is again sharply challenged by Facebook, which offers a democratic *bottom-up* structure.

In its traditional form it is problematic for the art museum to embrace a collective culture. The art museum's presence on Facebook does not automatically open up for a collective culture. In order to become a collective culture, the art museums have to deal with the above-mentioned dilemmas by; 1) giving up authority, 2) rethinking the museum space and 3) restructuring the organization of the art museum.

While the emergence of new media technologies reinforces the reinvention of the art museum, this metamorphosis has been emerging from within the museum institution itself as well. As is often referred to with the term "New Museology", a shift from an *exhibition-centered* to a *visitor-centered* museum is occurring. According to Gail Anderson, this shift marks a broadening of focus from primarily the exhibitions themselves to the role of the museum in serving the public and *how* the museum exhibits art and communicates it's background and perceived cultural significance to its visitors: "*The collection holdings are no longer viewed as the primary measure of values for a museum; rather, the relevant and effective role of the museum in service to its public has become the core measuring stick.*" (Anderson, 2004: 4). In this context, Facebook can be seen as a decisive catalyst in reinventing the art museum. On Facebook the focus is on the relationship to and the dialogue with the users.

But how can the art museum reinvent itself and become collective? According to Bruns *produsage* is not a product, but an ongoing process (Bruns, 2008). Following Bruns I will suggest that the art museum should not see itself as a *static museum space*, but rather as a *dynamic museum place* in order to create a collective culture. In the distinction between space and place lies awareness on social and cultural aspects of the users interaction. According to Paul Dourish, a collaborative environment is a

notion of place rather than space: "*Physically, a place is a space which is invested with understandings of behavioral appropriateness, cultural expectations, and so forth. We are located in 'space', but we act in 'place'.*" (Dourish, 1996: 3)

The art museum being a place where the users *interact* with each other as well as the museum and create a mutual cultural understanding and behavior. Dourish goes further and claims that: "*Space is the opportunity; place is the understood reality.*" (Dourish, 1996: 3) Becoming a dynamic collaborative museum *place* indicates that the museum comes into being in the interaction between the users and the art museum in an ever changing process.

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