Final assessment of Rikke Haller Baggesen's PhD thesis

June 4th 2015 Rikke Haller Baggesen submitted her PhD Thesis (*Mobile museology - an exploration of fashionable museums, mobilization and trans-museal mediation*) to the PhD school at University of Copenhagen, The Royal School of Library and Information Science. The department for the composition of the assessment committee proposed, that the committee consisted of

- Senior Lecturer Ross Parry, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, UK
- Associate Professor Michael Haldrup, The Department of Communication, Business and Information Technologies, Roskilde University, DK
- Professor Beth Juncker (Chair), Royal School of Library and Information Science, University of Copenhagen, DK

The proposal was approved by the PhD Committee and by the author. The committee's preliminary assessment should be received at the faculty of humanities no later than September 4th 2015.
The following preliminary assessment states unanimously that the PhD degree can be awarded on the basis of the PhD thesis as it is.

Description
The title of the PhD thesis is *Mobile museology- an exploration of fashionable museums, mobilization and trans-museal mediation* (189 pages, 76.869 words, excl. bibliography and appendices. With bibliography, lists of illustrations and 10 appendices 256 pages).
This thesis is about mediating culture outside the museum using mobile media. Pursuing research through design, including workshops conducted at the Designmuseum Danmark, and by centering change and changeability, and by providing concepts for musealising the everyday, the thesis ultimately offers what it calls a 'fashion perspective' (a 'fashion logic') on modern

museum developments, challenging a perceived persistent technological de-
terminism, and what it sees as an overstated and sometimes unquestioned
consensus around the participatory power of digital media.

Mobile Museology is a compilation thesis. It starts out with a prologue **Mir-
rorball museology** introducing the mirrorball as a metaphor for an innova-
tive research process. It will not deliver classic facts, traditional explana-
tions and final strategies for the future, but it intends to throw light in dark
corners of the designated research field needed to be elucidated and rended
'talkable'. The epilogue **Closing remarks** refers back to the mirrorball met-
aphor summing up the process. Both prologue and epilogue function as a
picture of the overall academic creativity which characterizes this thesis.
In between this metaphoric frame we have the academic thesis structured in
6 chapters.

Chapter 1 lays down some key markers (within the sector and within the
academy) for the research, including definitions of 'mobility', 'digital mus-
eology', and 'museal'. It begins to delineate its stylistic approach and intel-
lectual premise – informed and inspired by Latour, before sharing and dis-
closing the author's motives and own personal intellectual prior experiences
and contexts. The structure of the thesis is explained, and methods are brief-
ly described – including the gathering of user views, the use of creative
methods such as journaling, and the running of workshops with museum
employees.

Chapter 2 turns to what the candidate differentiates as 'digital museology'
(29), before focusing on mobile in particular. A short summary of the waves
and schools and propositions of museum research are presented from 'new
museology' to 'post-critical museology'. The characteristics and landmarks
of digital research and writing in museums are briefly considered before
looking towards the Danish context, considering the extent to which post-
digital normativity (33) may – or may not – be relevant to museums there,
as well as the significance of the raft of new thinking that has emanated
from the influential DREAM programme of research. The chapter then
switches to its second main intellectual context – fashion - and the candi-
date's key thesis that 'museum developments can also be seen as corre-
sponding to or driven in part by a fashion logic' (43), suggesting a comple-
mentary perspective rather than an 'alternative understanding' of change in
museums. This leads to the thesis' core interest in 'mobile' and 'mobility'
and what the candidate calls 'trans-museal' mediation (48).

Chapter 3 focuses upon the methodological approach within the research to
assist the work in its exploration of 'potentials' and 'implications' (55). Re-
vealing its approach to research through design (using design as a methodo-
logical tool), the chapter boldly discloses the 'shortcomings' of the critical
design approach used in its research (59). Each of the 'tracks' of the re-
search methods are then considered and methods used within each, includ-

ing the role of the 'probe kit' (70), the use of the blog as 'filter' and 'sketchpad' (76), the anchoring of conversations through 'concept cards' (86). Key themes and outcomes from, specifically, the workshops are then shared (92).

Chapter 4 presents a selection of seven posts from the candidate's research blog before **Chapter 5** shares three articles, on fashion, media and objects that together explore important facets of the overall thesis. Using Foucault's notion of the heterotopia, the first article makes the sophisticated case for what the candidate calls 'a fashion perspective on institutional changes'. The second article uses Flichy's consideration of the 'internet imaginaire' to attempt to critique some of the discourse around the participatory museum, exposing what it sees as some 'idealistic rhetoric' and 'blind communal consensus' (151) around museums and participation (143), as well as social media 'surrounded by hype and abused by spin' (148). Informed by Gumbrecht, and introducing the idea of 'heteroscopia', the third and final of the articles considers how ordinary objects may be culturally significant, and what happens when a musealising gaze is applied to everyday surroundings. The first and the second article have been peer reviewed and published.

Chapter 6, the thesis' concluding chapter, begins with a systematic summary and the restatement of the key ideas from the preceding chapters. And after (with admirable honesty) sharing a challenge and criticism by one author to one of her articles, the candidate concludes by listing some possible future research trajectories that might logically follow her work.

Although the author characterizes the thesis as a compilation thesis it can be read as a monograph describing, documenting and critical reflecting a challenging research process.

Overall evaluation
The assessment committee finds this thesis original, scientific sound and highly relevant as a contribution to the research field. The three opening chapters give a clear presentation of the field, subject matter and scope of the research project and the three articles (of which two have been published) represent a stringent and focused research contribution with highly relevant perspectives on participant/digitalization in relation to museums. The rich and creative methodology based on a 'critical design' approach to explore the 'what-if's', and then the 'what' rather than the 'how-to's' of design in museums, is exciting, and the consistent critical stance throughout the dissertation refreshing. To sum up the committee finds:

A clear and logical meta structure
The overarching narrative is tightly controlled, moving from setting out the definitions, to the problem space and context, through to the key theoretical and methodological tools, followed by the articles (sequenced appropriately)

and finally the summative reflection back on the work and a zooming out from the subject.

A mature and authoritative tone
The thesis is written to a high standard, projecting a command over its subject. The candidate on many occasions negotiates difficult and complex subject and ideas with well-chosen and economic phrasing.

Professionally presented and compiled
The images of the author's research journal attest to not only the creativity and rigour that has characterized this project, but give a rare insight into the research process – a fillip for an examiner, and something that reminds us (usefully, powerfully) of the value judgements and imagination (alongside the empiricism, evidence and logic) that characterize our work in this subject space.

A rich and diverse bibliography
The supporting reading is deep in historic sensibility (older articles and perspectives), circumspect to leading edge discussion, and confident in looking towards it various subject areas and informants – around fashion, digital and museums.

A high degree of sensitivity to the limitations of the methods used
Specifically with respect to the very small workshops, the thesis is free to admit (and, indeed, is keen to reflect upon) how little could be trusted from 'findings of such a narrow study' (96).

Sophistication in the control of the argumentation
Influenced by the work of Latour, the candidate is self-aware of the direction and extent of her own argumentation, and knowingly explores (and explains to the reader) the limits of what she intends to assert (or not), what role data will play (or not), and how far conclusions will be drawn (or not).

A reflectiveness on and playfulness with the academic genre
In the self-effacing concluding chapter, in Appendix 4 (expressing the author's connections with the museum and others involved in the project), and in the poetic epilogue, there is much to admire in the way the candidate embraces 'the requirement for transparency' (60) with which a research must engage. The thesis is characterized by the way the candidate uses (but also explores) the possibilities of the 'subjective mode' (23) and the ways in which, as she puts it, 'academic genres must be mouldable to fit contemporary research interests' (13). And in the way the thesis stitches in the candidate's WordPress site and the blogs that have accompanied the project's progress, it appears to bring her own research into her every day, in ways that seem to reflect, and catch the light of her work's investigation into the museum's entry into the everyday.

The assessment committee's matters of concern
In spite of these strengths and academic virtues the committee also finds
weaknesses related to the research concept, the creative methodology, to
terms and notions and the relations between them worthy to be confronted
and discussed during the defense.

Questions to the thesis focus and outcome
The thesis acknowledges very early that it has inhabited a 'certain complex
of issues' (15), and that it is presenting 'a particular conjunction of issues'
(16). This is indeed the case, and the experience a reader gets. The thesis
could have been much more direct (in its title, its abstract, and its opening
passages) on what the key ideas, findings and contributions of the research
have been. In particular, the consequence of fashion perspective on institu-
tional changes and the specific challenge to aspects of the notion of 'partici-
pation' could have been conveyed much more directly at the start of thesis –
rather than the detail and the reasoning slowly being revealed. Likewise, the
beginning could have shared with reader what, specifically, the new concept
of the 'museal gaze' was, how it worked, why it is different, and it can help
us to achieve. The candidate clearly knows the answer to all of these, and
the thesis ultimately responds to all of them. However, in presentational
terms, structural terms, the thesis (amidst its references to the reflections and
refractions of the mirror-ball), could have placed these specific answers at
the outset more overtly and less elusively in front of the reader.

One might also wonder if the focus (and title) of the thesis, ought actually to
have been what its third article considers its focus, namely 'How to concep-
tualize and realize the museal experience of/in the everyday'. Is that not, ul-
timately, what this thesis is about - with fashion both a means to conceptual-
ize this and as an example, and digital media (distributive and trans-medial)
just part of the answer?

Questions to the construction of 'mobile museology'
It is acknowledged that this is a PhD framed around publication, and that
there are three articles at the centre of this thesis. It is also appreciated that
the thesis is self-aware in the genre of writing it is developing. It is also rec-
ognized that part of the thesis value and originality (and experimentation) is
in its creative reworking of academic norms of writing and presentation.
And, also, it is acknowledged that the supporting narrative of the blog posts
is external to the main thesis for a reason.

And yet, that said, the result of these approaches and decisions is that the
thesis is just a little too multifaceted and multi-dimensional in places. One
senses the candidate is aware of this. The thesis, after all, refers to its own
'spiralling process of exploration' (51). Likewise, the blog posts are pre-
sented as not constituting 'a unified text', nor leading 'to any conclusions'
and 'represent work-in-progress considerations (99). However, whilst en-

gaging and intoxicating, this all has to be conveyed in a way that is generous to the reader and helps them follow a logic and a story.

The original contributions are highlighted in the last six pages of the thesis. Yet, the thesis would have benefited from an explanation (or at least a proposition perhaps) of how these different ideas (on legitimate participation, on the heteroscopic gaze, on fashion as a perspective on museum development, on situated and grounded critiques of the postdigital, on mobile trans-museal mediation as way of musealising the everyday ...) all connect. Ultimately, the thesis declines to assemble the ideas together in a clear and cohesive way for the reader.
The introduction opens with registering that "mobile media" have entered the museum" (15) and from this registration RHB deduces a need to consider current changes in museums through what she coins a particular "mobile museology". The committee finds this suggestion intriguing. Drawing on Latours compositionist manifesto she presents her arguments "not to be read as statements but as propositions (p. 20) drawing together the patch worked field of "mobile museology". While we find the argumentation precise and compelling we also have some reservations against RHB's appropriation of the term 'mobile'. Mobile Museology is a compelling concept that has the scope to rethink a whole lot of issues in relationships (in-) between museums, between museums and 'the outside world' e. g. mobilization of exhibitions, objects, circulation of replicas/authentic objects, circulation between everyday worlds (cf chap 5c). "Mobilizing" museology is a really interesting perspective that could produce a whole host of interesting analysis on such topics – but it seems that RHB delimits MM to "an interest within the academic field of digital museology" (sp.16), related to "the emerging field and discipline of digital humanities" (p. 17). Our questions to this limitation would be: Doesn't RHB here run the risk of a technological reductionism, of conflating mobility with digital/virtual mobility? What if the metaphor of mobility were applied more broadly to the field of museology/museums (including ideas, people and objects) when "exploring "the scope for and possible implications of 'mobile museology' "(s 21)?

Chapter 2 ends up with another interesting proposition (!) by explaining that "I consider what could be called 'trans-museum' or trans-museal mediation: making the museum 'mobile' by staging museum experiences or facilitating museum understandings outside the museum, with or without the aid of mobile media" (p. 48) An intriguing idea but: How do RHB see the contours of this 'trans-museum'. She has a very short but interesting discussion of different ways of "mobilizing collections", but what are the implications for her key concept "Mobile Museology"?

As a subject, fashion, seems to adopt different roles at different points in the thesis. Is it here as a way of framing a feminist discourse (44) around museum technological and media change? Is it there as a set of mechanics for approaching mediation in a different way - as chapter 5 implies, looking at

However at times this leaves the reader with fragments that are not always easy to assemble, and parts of narrative that are not always easy to follow.

The seven blog posts in Chapter 4 are a good case in point. These evidence a creative process. But, for a reader, it is hard to gauge what else they evidence, as they include a reverie, informality and a speculation that declines the rigorous academic analysis and the systematic reasoning that typically allows for a thesis to be constructed. They come across, consequently, as notes and of work un-synthesized. It is difficult as a reader to know how to read (and work with) these chapters - is it to hear examples, is it to listen to an argument, or is it simply to notice the ways the researcher approached her subject? A reader may end up feeling intrigued as to know why these blog posts (these exhibition visits, these examples, these reflections) could not in fact have been synthesized into a discussion and a coherent single narrative. The impression one is left with is that it appears that in order to make a sophisticated point about the nature of Latourian shaped enquiry and research through design, we have been denied an important (and exciting) synthesis. After all, do not these posts start to show the connections (the terms, the assumptions, the possibilities) for thinking about a trans-museal presentation and engagement with fashion? The elements and the evidence was all here to build this narrative, this case.

Questions to the decision to decline systematic analysis

Whilst it is appreciated that research through design permits and encourages an inherent creativity and openness in its enquiry, there remains a question as to how the varied data from the workshops, interviews and probes were analysed. Again, the candidate is the first to recognise the 'ambiguity' of this evidence, and acknowledge its 'eclectic' (74) quality. And yet, it is hard for a reader (or examiner) to hear that the 'the material was not subject to analysis' (74), especially as conclusions still seem to have been drawn from the exercise and the evidence it generated. On the one hand the thesis admits the risk of this missing analysis, and yet it also chooses to (from its very limited profile of participants) to suggest 'a potential discrepancy between museum objectives and user interests and media habits' (75).

Questions to participatory strategies

RHB points out that even in radical formations of participatory strategies museums tend to operate with an us-them dichotomy in relation to the public (p. 144): "By asking the public to participate, museums are still taking an educational role" (p. 145). A finding that would have been interesting to reflect in relation to RHB's experiences with conducting staff workshops. However one could make a counter-argument: being in privileged positions within privileged institutions what would then be the alternative? To neglect a power-relation is not the same as dissolving it.

'the influence of fashion mechanics on communicative or curatorial strate-
gies and museum development' (135)? Or is it to serve simply as an exem-
plar subject (in and of the everyday) that challenges the museum to be dif-
ferent in its mediation – 'trying to conceive of new ways for the museum to
frame fashion outside of the museum' (70)? The thesis is perhaps all of
these, but it is not always clear which and when. There was certainly the po-
tential here for an extremely exciting (ground-breaking even) consideration
of the link between fashion and a feminist discourse and what that might al-
low for in a new narrative and conceptualisation of technology and change
within the museum. Is fashion, in other words, a way of starting to offer a
feministic critique of the history and discourse of digital media change in
the museum? The thesis alludes to this, suggesting the prism of fashion to
see '[a] willingness to embrace perpetual change' (45) within a feminist
context. Likewise, fashion is seen as the discourse to allow for a role for
'technological trends' (46). There is even a sense here that fashion tools (the
journal and journaling) have a way of re-conceiving the research process
(78). Ultimately, the conclusion refers to a new 'fashion logic' (180), and
yet the thesis never quite fully unfurls and explains how specifically, practi-
cally, fashion can be used to explore and suggest new ways of seeing, rea-
soning and articulating digital mediation and the museal gaze. The observa-
tions remain suggestive and, consequently, somewhat elusive for the reader.

Methodological concerns
Critical Design as a tool for envisioning possible futures is introduced, and
it is explained how thinking design as a tool for critique and research gave
the project a liberating starting point (p. 59). Issues of validity are ad-
dressed, as a process of describing problems through "attempted solutions"
(p. 61) and by paying attention to "method stories rather than method In-
structions" (Lee quoted p. 63). These two points, in turn guide us through
the research design of the project, and the various tools are presented. How-
ever the committee asks for more: Given the rich and varied material what
findings/inspirations did RHB bring with her from this work and why? The
section on "issues raised in workshops I & II point to some interesting find-
ings regarding how museum staff see their institutional role and how to ex-
pand this e. g. "transfer [the] glasses]" (p. 92). Could more findings from the
material have found their way into the dissertation to support the scope of
the project?

The candidate herself identifies a 'risk of fragmentation' (177) within the
approach she has chosen to take to both her research methods and the
presentation of her final thesis. Certainly, undertaking research through de-
sign, was an exciting and distinctive characteristic of this thesis, and some-
thing to be commended and celebrated in the candidate's approach – both in
its courage, but also in the way its thoughtful and self-reflexive application
provides here an example for others to follow and from which to be in-
spired.

Theoretical concerns

The first of the articles elaborates the idea of "fashion logics" in museum design. Drawing on Foucault's notion of "heterotopia" it is argued that, like fashion, museums are "committing to the present, even when representing the past" (p. 131) – the specific examples discussed show how current 'fashions' in museums blurs "boundaries between museum culture and commercialism" (p 134). While the author certainly has a point (and develops a poignant and precise analysis) we think this argumentation might be substantiated further by relating to discussions on themed spaces, brand scapes etc. more broadly.

The third and final research paper "Hetoroscopia" draws in particular on Gumbrecht but again relates to Foucault's concept of heterotopia (p. 166). The search for "the switches" that enables us to convert mundane everyday experiences into aesthetic experiences is interesting and illustrated with good examples. In some sense the notion is under theorized and could call for being developed in relation to other work by Foucault stressing how 'the gaze' works as a productive force constructing the "facts" in front of it (e. g. The Clinic), this could have enriched the discussion.

Questions on the postdigital

With respect to the thoughtful critique made of 'the postdigital' on p. 41, is there not a difference between what that Parry article is suggesting (that 'computing', that digital technology has progressed and matured from its state of 'arrival' and adoption'), and the wider comment made by the candidate that new forms of digital media will continue to appear and confront the museum and its audiences? The candidate uses the latter to challenge the former, when in fact the idea of 'postdigital' is not about suggesting 'the end of the new' (and a perpetual state of non-disruption and change around forms of digital media), but rather – simply – that there are signs in some institutions from the perspective of some practitioners and pieces of evidence that one phase of development (one stage of the relationship between museum and digital) may be coming to an end.

Some overstatement

The committee would disagree that, with half a century of development and practice, that 'Digital Humanities' is an 'emerging field' (17) – or at least would look to have a statement like this qualified.

The thesis also posits that there has been 'a prevailing dominance of digital interests in current museum practice' (17) and that this work sits as something of a counterpoint to this. The committee would challenge whether this is a fair and accurate characterization of 'current museum practice'. There is undoubtedly interest (in scholarly and practical terms) but 'dominance' seems an overstatement of this presence.

In spite of these matters of concern the committee finds the dissertation original, innovative and highly qualified. On this basis the committee therefore unanimously recommends that the PhD defense takes place September 18th.
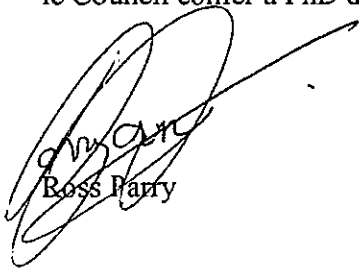
Ross Parry   Michael Haldrup   Beth Juncker

On September 18th 2015 Rikke Haller Baggesen successfully defended her PhD dissertation. As a result we recommend unanimously that the Academic Council confer a PhD degree on her.
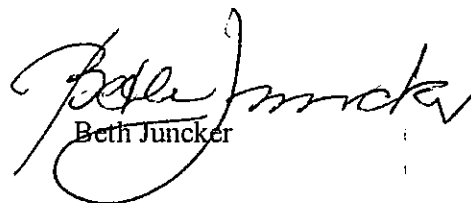
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Michael Haldrup

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