



Even Better than the Real Thing? Digital Copies and Digital Museums in a Digital Cultural Policy

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Abstract

This article investigates how a digital turn and digital copies have influenced ideas, roles and authorities within a national museum sector. It asks whether digital museums and their digital reproductions expand and/or challenge a traditional cultural policy. Two specific cases are highlighted to inform the discussion on these questions – the Norwegian digital museum platform DigitaltMuseum and Google Art Project. The article argues that there is a certain epochalism at play when the impact of a digital turn is analysed. At the same time, some clear major changes are taking place, even if their impact on cultural policies might be less than expected. I propose that one of the changes is the replacing of authenticity with accessibility as the primary legitimating value of museum objects.

Keywords: Digitization, digital museums, cultural policy, reproduction

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Introduction

The concept of *digital museums* has been around for more than two decades. Historically, the mid-nineties seem to be a formative period for the digitization of museums. In her 1996 article, Suzanne Keene simply states that “in 1995, museums went digital”. For more than twenty years, many and varied ideas on the merging of museum collections with digital technology and networking computers have been circulating. One of the very first uses of this concept is illustrative in the way it expresses an uncertainty about the wider consequences of digital technology:

[Will] it really change their nature in fundamental ways? It is far from clear as yet who are the users, and what they might want. If a museum disregards the seductive new technology, or finds it too expensive, will the institution wither away? Or will it thrive regardless of whether the information superhighway is just a vast distraction from its real business? (Keene 1996: 299)

The actual and factual role of digital technology in museums has been subject to discussion ever since (cf. e.g. Bearman and Trant 1997, Müller 2002, Karp 2004, Cameron and Kenderdine 2007, Parry 2007, Parry 2013): do digital tools simply give museums an opportunity to fulfil old tasks in new (and better) ways, or do they open for new and unprecedented responsibilities? Moreover, do digital technology and digital objects also add a completely new field of responsibility to the custodian function of the traditional museum? The questions are also many and varied, and there does not appear to be a simple answer to any of them.

The development of digitized museums and collections highlights and challenges in a profound way the museums’ notions of authenticity, as well as the dichotomy between original and copy (cf. Trant 1999, Cameron 2007, Cameron and Kenderdine 2007, Lynch 2013). Firstly, in what way do twenty-first century museums (still) need to be keepers and guardians of authenticity, especially in light of digital, immaterial and networked collection practices (cf. Trent 1999)? Secondly, is there such a thing as an original, authentic *digital* object? From the perspective of computer science, there is not. Computer scientist David Levy states on the digital realm that

[i]t is a realm in which, as far as I can tell, there are no originals (only copies—lots and lots of them) and no enduring objects (at least not yet). This makes assessing authenticity a challenge. (Levy 2000: 24)

Following Levy’s claim, Clifford Lynch, information scientist and director of the Coalition for Networked Information, says on digital objects, that

[t]here is no “original.” This is particularly relevant when we are dealing with dynamic objects such as databases, where an economy of copies is meaningless. In such cases, there is no question of authenticity through comparison with other copies; there is only trust or lack of trust in the location and delivery processes and, perhaps, in the archival custodial chain. (Lynch 2000: 41)

A digital representation is in several ways *not* a copy of the original object, and neither does it pretend to be (cf. Smith 2003). Consequently, one important question is what replaces claims for authenticity, as museum collections are made up of digital representations? What kind of legitimacy can be claimed for digital or digitized museums?

These questions are also highly relevant in the context of cultural policy. The fundamental rationale and legitimation of public museums is reflected in the rationale of the public support for these institutions. The perceived value and function of museums is an integral part of the cultural policy for them. Furthermore, any challenge to or breach in the authenticity tradition of the museum is also a challenge to its accompanying cultural policy.

Here, I will investigate the relations between the digitization of Norwegian museum collections and the development of a digital cultural policy. The main questions are: How has a digital turn and digital copies influenced ideas, roles and authorities within a national museum sector? To what degree does digital user democracy and digital industry influence the ideas and concepts of cultural policy?

In this article I aim to discuss these questions and accompanying challenges to cultural policy by examining two specific cases: 1) the development and role of *DigitaltMuseum* – a national digital museum portal [directly translated: “Digital Museum”], and 2) The implementation and role of *Google Art Project* for Norwegian museum collections. These two cases will highlight both processes and results in the development of digitization for the Norwegian museum sector, and will also illustrate the challenges in formulating a cultural policy for digital museums. Even if the described cases in this article are from a national context, the development and challenges they illustrate are evidently supranational and international ones, thus, hopefully, also making this analysis relevant outside the Norwegian context.

To be able to answer the research questions raised in this article, we need to look at instances where the traditional tools of cultural policy and museum legitimacy might be challenged. The digitization of museum collections and the consequences of this development are an important example of this. This article employs a general understanding of cultural policy similar to the one discussed by Bell and Oakley. “Cultural policy is what governments at different scales choose to do or not to do in relation to culture” (Bell and Oakley 2014: 20). What they

choose to do or not do can then be divided into two branches – promotion and regulation (ibid.). I will return to a discussion on the way this generic understanding of cultural policy is related to a public and digital museum policy.

The analysis is based on a combination of empirical sources. The digitized collections of two Google Art Project collaborating museums (the National Museum and the Munch Museum) were systematically studied, as were a number of collections on the DigitaltMuseum platform. For this article, the main source of information on museum policy and digitization has been taken from museum policy documents covering the last thirty years, from the Norwegian Ministry of Culture, Arts Council Norway and the now defunct public body Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority (*ABM-utvikling*, 2003-2010). Furthermore, I have interviewed the current head of the digital development of museums in Arts Council Norway. I have also conducted interviews with the museum professionals in charge of digitization and the cooperation with Google at the Munch Museum and at the National Museum of Art, as well as with the leader of DigitaltMuseum and two representatives from Google, one in charge of Google in Norway and the other one working specifically with the Google Art Project internationally. I have also had access to quantitative data on the use of the digital collections. The national statistics on museums, published by Statistics Norway, has also been a relevant source. It should also be noted that I have first-hand experience in working with policies on digital collection management, working at the Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority, as well as in its predecessor the Norwegian Museum Authority (*Norsk museumsutvikling*).

In the following, I will discuss some principal issues concerning the relations between cultural policy, museum policy and a *digital* cultural policy before moving on to presenting and analysing the two cases in question. These will be presented by emphasising their policy role in relation to other actors, their actual practice and their implicit or explicit understanding of their own duplicating, reproducing and communicating enterprises. The final section of the article will discuss how digital copies of museum originals, as well as the distribution infrastructure for such copies, calls for an alternative type of legitimation for both museums and the policy that governs them.

Cultural policy, museum policy and digital cultural policy

In general terms, the cultural policy of Norway, including its museum-specific cultural policy, exemplifies a Western European approach to cultural policy with a Nordic model added to this kind of approach (cf. Mangset et al. 2008, Duelund 2004, Dubois 2014, Mangset and Hylland 2017). Some basic national differences in organising and implementing their actual cultural policy notwithstanding,

most Western European countries share the following assumption: the production and distribution of culture is (although to varying degrees) a public responsibility. This includes preserving cultural heritage and making it accessible. Furthermore, there is also an inherent ideological component in this kind of policy in viewing cultural expressions and cultural heritage as vehicles for personal and societal growth and identity. This is usually also accompanied by the belief in treating culture as a vehicle for economic growth.

The Nordic cultural-policy model is a variant of this. In a special issue on Nordic cultural policy, Mangset et al. (2008) describe the Nordic nations' cultural policies as characterised by such features as welfare orientation, influential artists' organisations, low level of private subsidies, a relatively egalitarian cultural life, a link between cultural policy and national identity (re)construction and relatively strong ministries and arts councils on a national level (Mangset et al. 2008: 2, see also Duelund 2004).

In Norway, museums have arguably been part of implemented cultural policy for more than 150 years. In accordance with a parliamentary decision in 1836, the Norwegian State Museum for Visual Arts [*Den norske stats sentralmuseum for billedkunst*] opened in 1842, later to be renamed the National Gallery and, subsequently, the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design. In 1866, parliament decided to give economic support to Ålesund Museum, dedicated originally to exhibiting tools and innovation in the fisheries industry (cf. Dahl and Helseth 2006, Eriksen 2009: 66, Solhjell 2005). A number of public subsidies of newly established museums followed.

Beginning in the 1930s, and coming to full force after the Second World War, a fundamental agenda for Norwegian cultural policy has been the idea of democratizing culture (Mangset 1992, Mangset and Hylland 2017). This agenda was heavily influenced by social democratic ideology, viewing access to quality culture as a *right* that should be equally distributed amongst the population, regardless of geography or resources. One of the main vehicles used to attain the goals of such a democratization objective was to ensure that people across the country had access to relevant and high-quality culture. Four institutions were established to accomplish this: The Norwegian Touring Theatre (*Riksteateret*) (1948), the Mobile Cinema (*Norsk Bygdekino*) (1950), the National Touring Gallery (*Riksgalleriet*) (1953) and, finally, Concerts Norway (*Rikskonsertene*) in 1968.

The distribution policy behind these institutions points to a relevant divide in the culture that was the focus of these policies. Besides the example of the National Touring Gallery, which included works of art from for example the National Gallery, collections from museums were not and are not distributed in the same way. Museums have tended to be rather sedentary institutions, linked in several ways to their locality. In the Norwegian case, this is due, for example, to the fact

that it was the institution type itself that was fairly well distributed, leading to a plethora of local and regional museums (cf. Eriksen 2009).

General public access to museum collections and objects was consequently limited by local and regional availability. This changed in a profound way with digitization and digital distribution. What had been a consistent idea underpinning cultural policy for more than 60 years – the idea of democratizing culture – could now include any kind or number of collections and objects, albeit in the form of their reproduction. Herein lies opportunities and challenges: “[U]nlike traditional means of dissemination, digital media presents viewers with the unique problems of authenticity, interpretability, guidance and contextuality – or rather, the lack thereof” (Kalay 2008: 6).

The relations between digitization and cultural heritage go back around 25 years in the Nordic countries, and the inclusion of digitization in public-museum policy came a few years later (cf. Hylland 2014). The democratic potential of digital tools was acknowledged already in 1996, where in the Official Norwegian Report (*Museum – mangfold, minne, møtestad*), which in many ways laid the foundation for a revised Norwegian museum policy, the committee maintains that information technology might make information and knowledge in museums more easily accessible. Furthermore, the report states: “A clear tendency in the use of IT is the movement towards closer contact between institutions, often across borders, through the *internet*”¹(NOU 1996: 87).

The ideas that were introduced in this report were to be relaunched and expanded in a number of following official reports, policy documents and white papers on cultural heritage (NOU 2002:1), the archives, libraries and museum sector (Ministry of Culture 1999), digitization (Ministry of Culture 2009a), museums (Ministry of Culture 2009b), libraries (Ministry of Culture 2009c) on cultural democratization (Ministry of Culture 2011). Ideas of accessibility, democratization, communication and co-creation are important throughout these and other similar documents (cf. Hylland 2014). A recent report from the Auditor General of Norway, a *performance audit*, concerns the governmental efforts to digitize cultural heritage. This report affirms clearly that providing access is a consistent political goal for digital cultural heritage (Riksrevisjonen 2017).

In a previous article I have suggested the consistency of these goals is due to different ideas or traditions of democratization merging: 1) ideas of unrestricted access to digital information online (open source, creative commons), 2) cultural policy ideas of cultural democracy (everybody’s culture should be included) and cultural democratization (everybody should have access to culture of high quality), in addition to 3) ideas of the importance of writing history *from below* (local history, social history, oral history) (Hylland 2014.). The normative foundation for a digital cultural heritage or museum policy is hence based on such a combination

of ideas of democratization. The target group for digitized heritage should enjoy a combination of access to, involvement in and influence on this heritage.

From a cultural policy perspective,² digitization of museum collections can be viewed as two different kinds of re-distribution of power. On the one hand, digitization has for almost two decades been seen as a tool for cultural democracy – making cultural heritage widely accessible, making it possible to have crowdsourced documentation and making artefacts and objects matter more to more people.³ On the other hand, digitized cultural heritage has also become a focal point for global digital companies, with Google being the primary example. Google Art Project, following up on Google Book Project⁴, makes high-resolution images from art collections available online.

In other words, there is both a movement towards greater public accessibility and participation, as well as an increase in collaboration with private companies. The same dual movement is also present in all other cultural areas where content is distributed digitally. Both kinds of power redistribution imply a potential decline in the importance of public cultural policy. However, giving more influence to the public and/or to the digital industry will necessarily and consequently have impact on the influence of traditional cultural policy.

Or will it? Let us see how such processes might be illustrated by two concrete cases: DigitaltMuseum and Google Art Project. The following section describes these two digital museum platforms as two examples that differ on a number of parameters in the way they make digital reproductions accessible: context, size, scope, ambitions and so on.

Cases: two platforms of digital museum reproductions

DigitaltMuseum is a digital, web-based platform providing access to museum collections.⁵ Initially, the platform was developed and used as a tool for Norwegian museums only, but it has later also been implemented by a number of Swedish museums. The purpose of DigitaltMuseum is described on their webpage:

The Norwegian museums have large and exciting collections. Traditionally, these have primarily been presented in exhibitions and books from the museums. Large parts of the collections have rarely or never been shown to the public. The goal of DigitaltMuseum is that the museums' collections can be easily accessible to everyone and anyone who is interested in viewing them, independent of time and place. Our hope is that the collections can now be more easily used for studies, teaching and image retrieval.⁶

DigitaltMuseum is a tool and a platform that is based on and developed from the museum collection software *Primus*. This software was originally developed by a consortium of Norwegian museums, and eventually administered by the quasi-autonomous organisation Museenes datatjeneste [“Museum IT Service”]. The software was module-based, where one of the modules that was developed, *Primus Web*, was based on the acknowledgement that the online presence of museums had to include some kind of access to their collections. Many of the museums, being Primus users, also signalled a need for a digital outreach platform for their collections. The first version of DigitaltMuseum was launched in 2009. At the end of 2016, around 85 Norwegian and 50 Swedish museums have their collections (or rather, parts of them) digitally accessible through this platform. In addition to this, the platform also includes collections from several archives, institutions and other non-museums. The total number of accessible objects is, as of April 2017, 1.95 million objects from Norwegian cultural heritage institutions, including digitized photographs (1.22 million), digital photos of artwork and cultural history objects, as well as information on the objects themselves. The depth and detail of the information on the objects differs greatly.

An object is typically presented as shown in image 1 (parts in Norwegian). A photograph of the object is accompanied by categories of information from the collection management software. There are also information boxes where the digital audience might suggest tags/keywords for the object and supply additional information about it.

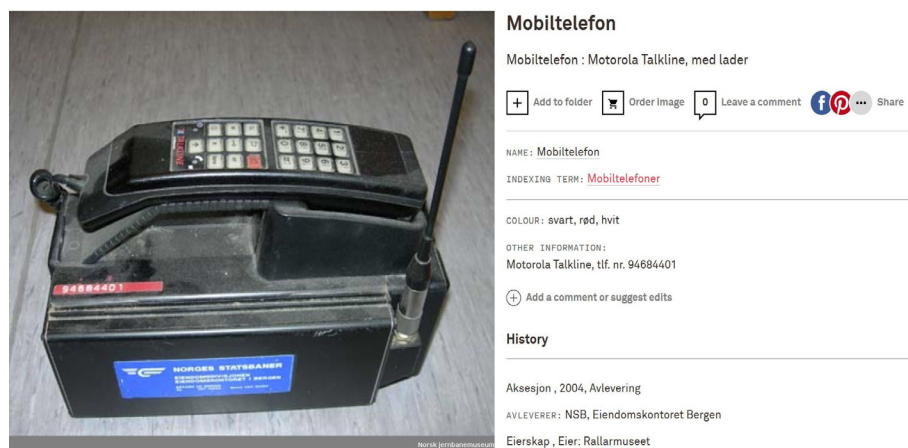


Image 1. Screenshot from DigitaltMuseum. Mobile phone in the collections of the Norwegian Railway Museum, including the section on catalogue data. From DigitaltMuseum/Norsk jernbanemuseum.

The digitization behind the DigitaltMuseum platform is marked by a rather complex division of labour, involving a combination of amateur and professional

input. First of all, there is no central agency for digitization of the museum collections, and all the practical digitization is undertaken by the museums themselves. The report from the Auditor General on digitization showed that as many as 41% of the museums used people from unemployment schemes from the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV), and 34% percent used volunteers for this work, in addition to their own staff. Only 13% of the museums used professional firms to digitize their collection (Riksrevisjonen 2017: 55). The technical development of DigitaltMuseum, including the programming, the digital system architecture and the interface of the platform, is carried out by employees in KulturIT. The company is organised as a joint stock limited company (*aksjeselskap*), and owned by five Norwegian and one Swedish museum (Anno museum, Jærmuseet, Museene i Sør Trøndelag, Nordiska museet, Norsk Folkemuseum and Lillehammer museum).

An important part of the idea behind DigitaltMuseum was that it should include some kind of interactivity with users of the platform. There is (at least) a twofold ambition behind this kind of idea, which of course is not unique to DigitaltMuseum. As will we discuss in more detail below, the premise of digital interactivity with users is one of the most prevalent *topoi* in international museum discourse over the last two decades. For a system like DigitaltMuseum, getting the users activated might be a good way to tap into the vast source of information that the large numbers of interested amateurs in different areas have in their possession. This source of knowledge is potentially useful when filling in some of the many gaps in the information on different objects in the digitized collections. The users of DigitaltMuseum are encouraged to contribute relevant pieces of information and more anecdotal, personal stories related to different objects. Ideally, this might enhance the quality of the collections. Furthermore, this kind of contact is at the same time also a way of relating directly to the museum public in the hope that the institution and their collections are made *relevant* for the contemporary public.

The development of both Primus and DigitaltMuseum has been heavily subsidised by public agencies. The defunct Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority, and from 2010, Arts Council Norway, have supported the development financially. All in all, these technical platforms have received around 25 million kroner between 2007 and 2013 (Gleinsvik et al. 2014). As of now, DigitaltMuseum is more or less the default, publicly sanctioned (and funded) tool for online access to Norwegian museum collections. The relative importance of economic support from the public authorities has, however, diminished over the years. In 2015, around 10% of the income of KulturIT came from development support from Arts Council Norway, while the remaining 90% came from user payment.

DigitaltMuseum and KulturIT have not been exempt from criticism. In 2014,

two separate reports on digital museum development were published: *A digital infrastructure for museums* [Digital infrastruktur for museer] (Gleinsvik, Wedde and Nagell 2014) and *System tools for museum logistics* [Systemverktøy for logistikk i museer] (de Haan 2014), both commissioned by Arts Council Norway. In two different ways, these reports are critical to how and if the needs of museums of today have been satisfied by the way the operations were organised and run at the time.

DigitaltMuseum and the museum software that it is founded on merges two basic tasks for museums: managing collections and giving access to them. This is consistent with the two basic goals for digitizing cultural heritage, as described by the Office of the Auditor General in its 2017 report on the digitizing of cultural heritage. The criteria for the performance audit, as identified by the Auditor General, are: 1) conserving and 2) providing access to cultural heritage (Riksevisjonen 2017: 35). The DigitaltMuseum is in a way providing a certain amount of basic access to the public both to collection management and to the objects themselves. By opening for comments and questions, there is also a small possibility for anyone to make an actual contribution to the documentation of the object. But what do we know about the use of the platform and its interactive possibilities? Between the first year of operation, 2009, and 2013, the number of visits increased dramatically, from 80 000 visits in the first year to over 1.3 million visits in 2013 (Gleinsvik, Wedde and Nagell 2014: 41). Recent numbers from Google Analytics⁷ show that DigitaltMuseum had over 1.6 million visits from January to November, with around 980 000 users. On average, the visits to DigitaltMuseum last for three and a half minutes.

These numbers do not, however, say much about the qualitative nature of the use of digital museums, digital collections and digital objects. A user survey from 2014 might give us some additional information on user patterns (Gleinsvik, Wedde and Nagell 2014: 41ff). The majority of the users, close to 75%, are 40 years old or more, while 14% are 30 years old or younger. Around 35% of the respondents in the survey report to be regular users, visiting the platform once a week or more. When asked to describe why they visited DigitaltMuseum, a large group of the users stated that their reason for the digital visit was unspecified entertainment: looking at pictures, getting a glimpse of the past and sharing what they found on Facebook. Another group has more specific reasons, for example obtaining information on their hometown or relatives or objects that they own themselves. The last group of users, which amounts to around a third of the respondents, use the platform for professional or educational purposes, as part of their work or education.

A survey like this points to the rather self-evident understanding that a user of a digital museum is not one and the same thing, but also to the possible distance

between ambitious policy and mission statements, on the one hand, and actual use on the other. The leader of KulturIT describes user interactivity as a multifaceted challenge. The knowledge potential of users is not exploited enough, he says, but any piece of information from them entails a certain workload for the professionals. Processing a thousand new pieces of information requires a lot more work than if the information had been gathered by the museums themselves, he points out. He also notices an evident impatience in the digital audience, expecting that any query, whether it is questions about particular items, questions of valuation, offering objects or correcting information in the database, is answered within minutes. It is also clear that the level of interaction varies across the different collections that form DigitaltMuseum. The informant from the National Museum says that during a period of two or three years, their collections had received around 60 comments from users, which is not an impressive indication of user interaction. However, as both this informant and the leader of KulturIT explains, important parts of the communication with users take place on Facebook.

Google Art Project (earlier, Google Art) is an online platform that the company initiated in 2009 and launched in February 2011. Initially, the platform was launched in collaboration with seventeen international museums, including the Tate Gallery in London and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The number of collaborating museums, galleries and institutions has expanded gradually, and in January 2016, Google announced that over 1000 museums were included on the digital platform.⁸

The concept of the platform is to make digital reproductions with high resolution accessible, in addition to making it possible to virtually tour the included museums, using the same technology as is employed in the Street View version of Google Maps. Furthermore, another feature lets the users create their own virtual collections, combining reproductions from different institutions. This is done by logging in with a registered Google account. This exemplifies the extreme convergence that characterises a number of Google enterprises. Google Art uses Google Maps and Street View technology, the search engine directs queries to the digitized images and the images are linked to educational content on YouTube (owned by Google) and to scholarly work registered in Google Scholar. Browsing the Google Art platform, users might also seamlessly share their virtual collections on the designated social media platform Google+.

The technology employed in making the digital reproductions has two levels of digitized quality. The basic level, described as “high-resolution images”, is a digitization that follows a certain standard for digital reproduction. In addition to this, Google has also asked all collaborating institutions to choose one image to be digitized through what the company refers to as *gigapixel* technology, which means creating digital images that contain more than one billion pixels, or picture

elements. This is done by using a camera devised specifically for this purpose, set up and operated by technicians from Google. The process of capturing an image in this way takes several hours, a representative from Google explains, and for that reason it usually takes place at night.

In Norway, Google Art Project has collaborated with four museums: the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, the Munch Museum, the International Museum of Children's Art and Hallingdal Museum. The first three of these museums are geographically located in Oslo, while the latter is located in Nesbyen, some 150 kilometres north of Oslo. The artwork chosen by the National Museum to be digitized in a gigapixel version was *View from Stalheim* by Johan Christian Dahl, see image 2.



View from Stalheim
Johan Christian Dahl 1842

From the collection of
The National Museum of Art, Architecture
and Design, Norway

Image 2. View from Stalheim, by Johan Christian Dahl. Screenshot from Google Art Project. Copyright: The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design.

The Munch Museum chose their absolute centrepiece, *The Scream* by Edvard Munch, as their gigapixel image. The image below shows how it might appear if one zooms in on the eyes of the iconic screaming figure. The illustration should give an impression of the level of detail that this kind of digital reproduction might entail.



Image 3. Detail from Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, from Google Art Project. Copyright: The Munch Museum.

The Google Art Project is an integrated part of an entity that Google has named Google Cultural Institute (GCI). This entity is especially interesting in the context of cultural policy. GCI is, in its own words, a

not-for-profit initiative that partners with cultural organizations to bring the world's cultural heritage online. We build free tools and technologies for the cultural sector to showcase and share their gems, making them more widely accessible to a global audience.⁹

This is a similar understanding to the way GAP originally was described on their website:

A unique online art experience. Users can explore a wide range of artworks at brushstroke level detail, take a virtual tour of a museum and even build their own collections to share. With a team of Googlers working across many product areas we are able to harness the best of Google to power the Art Project experience. Few people will ever be lucky enough to be able to visit every museum or see every work of art they're interested in but now many more can enjoy over 40 000 works of art from sculpture to architecture and drawings all in one place. We're also lucky at Google to have the technology to make this kind of project

a reality. (from Bayer 2014: 5)

Google's mission statement is also a more or less condensed version of the ideas inherent in such descriptions. The company states that its mission "is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful."¹⁰ This is a statement that the leader of Google Norway also quotes as a natural way of explaining how Google Art Project should be understood. These statements describe a basic mission that in many ways is similar to the basic ideas inherent in Western European cultural policy: ideas of making accessible, democratizing and distributing culture and cultural heritage.

In general, GAP seems to have been rather well received by the international museum sector and audience, although some critical voices have been raised, especially when it comes to the question of how much influence the company has. In the words of critic Siva Vaidhyanathan, who wrote *The Googlization of Everything* already five years ago, Google has been

moving quickly from a service through which people found information online to one in which it served as an embedded guide to navigating choices, associations, tastes, and the world around us. This means that Google, the most flexible yet powerful information filter we use regularly, could come to exercise inordinate influence over our decisions and values. (Vaidhyanathan 2011: 199)

Written before the launch of GAP, the argument is no less relevant as the information of interest to Google also has come to include cultural heritage (see also Hillis, Petit and Jarrett 2012).

Other critics have pointed to a perceived distance between the Google and GAP discourse on democratization and interactivity, on the one hand, and the practical implementation of the concepts, on the other hand. Alanna Bayer writes:

If users cannot respond to one another's content, or directly respond to gallery content, the GAP community cannot truly achieve the "community building" celebrated in Web 2.0 discourse. In fact, many of the functionalities and qualities Web 2.0 is largely known for are absent in the GAP interface. (Bayer 2014: 74)

She contrasts this to the narrative that is effectively promoted by the corporation – that of openness, possibilities and seamless convergence. She adds that

GAP might represent a movement toward the democratization of art

collections. To use the term “democratization” to suggest an escape from traditional gallery control is misleading: both systems exert restrictions of some kind. In the case of GAP, the user cannot partake in the potential empowering or “democratizing” effects without entering into a relationship with Google, the business. (Bayer 2014: 75f)

The critique against the power and influence of Google is, according to one informant from Google Norway, based on a misunderstanding, as he claims as some people feel that since Google is a large American company that makes money on some of their many enterprises there must be a capitalist ulterior motive to everything that they do. He simply does not understand the resistance to the company’s invitations, and describes how the National Library of Norway turned down an invitation to collaborate with Google on digitizing their collections. According to him, there are no ulterior motives for Google in such projects, and says that one of the basic ideas of the company is to make the world a better place. The mottos for Google and its holding company Alphabet are, respectively, “Don’t be evil” and “Do the right thing”.

A specific challenge for the Google Art Project has been the potential obstacles related to the legal issues of copyright and ownership (see Papakonstantinou and de Hert 2012). To avoid a similar lawsuit to the one that was filed by the American Authors’ Guild against Google Book Project in 2005, GAP has introduced the practice of blurring out artworks in its Street View section. This means that when a user takes a virtual tour of the museum halls, several of the artworks on the walls of the museum will appear as blurry rectangles. Although it is unclear whether the same agreement has been made between Google and the participating museums (ibid.), a general distinction seems to have been made between the Street View images that are generated by Google and the images of the actual artwork. Google has legal ownership to the former, while the museums have the ownership of the latter.

How do the Norwegian museums describe the relation to and collaboration with the large international company that Google quite evidently is?¹¹ The Munch Museum and the National Museum of Art began to work with Google and GAP in 2012, with the Munch Museum being the first and only Norwegian museum that took part in the international launching of the platform in Paris in April 2012. The reported intention of the Munch Museum was to make the museum, Munch and his art more widely accessible. The marketing and communications director admits that there has been some internal discussion as to whether it was a good idea to collaborate with Google, but they decided that it was so they could increase knowledge and awareness of the museum. The interviewee from the museum says that they have no direct information on the actual impact of the collaboration

with Google, e.g. on the number of visitors to the museum. She says that GAP is relevant to but not very important for the (digital) work they do, and that she sees GAP as a channel for directing web traffic to their own webpages. There has also been substantial development in the availability of digitizing technology. Now, the technological solutions that Google could offer in 2012 are not as difficult to obtain as they were back then.

The interviewee from the National Museum of Art makes a similar point. He maintains that the initial interest in cooperating with Google and GAP was partly sparked by interest in the technology that they could offer. The relevant technology is much more available today, he says, and adds that many institutions are not dependent on Google to be able to offer digital access to their collections. The collaboration between GAP and the National Museum resulted in the digitizing of around 200 artworks, one of which was photographed with the above-mentioned gigapixel technology. There is also a Street View documentation of the museum, but, as the museum representative says, the exhibitions have changed a lot since the initial filming, making the virtual tour a tour of how the museum exhibitions looked back in 2012. There was some initial concern from museum employees and the Norwegian Artists Copyright Society (BONO) as to whether the cooperation with Google was consistent with the established copyright. Eventually, however, the museum signed an agreement with Google in 2012. The agreement states that Google has all intellectual property rights to the so-called Museum View images (the virtual tour of the museum), while the museum has ownership of the high-resolution images. The gigapixel image is initially owned by Google, but on a set date ownership is transferred back to the museum, on certain conditions. There is also a clause that gives Google certain rights to use the digital images for their own purposes.

There is a rather small degree of overlap between DigitaltMuseum and GAP, with some interesting exceptions. The painting chosen for the gigapixel image in GAP from the National Museum of Art, *View from Stalheim* (see above), can also be viewed in DigitaltMuseum, as well as in the museum's own digital collection on their webpage. These are two different reproductions, and there are no links between the three digital versions of the painting. There is also an interesting difference in the administration of the property rights of the digital image. The DigitaltMuseum page has a standardised "Order image" button leading to a page to order high-resolution images of the artworks in the museum. The GAP page offers no possibilities to download or order images, while the digital collection on the National Museum page includes the possibility to download a high-resolution digital copy of the painting under a Creative Commons license (CC-BY-NC¹²).

The example illustrates how different digital communications of one and the same original may be rooted in different contexts and different ideas on the rela-

tions between the original and the copy. But what about the digital contra the analogue user? The museum interviewees from the two museums have comparable reflections on the relationship between the digital and the analogue museum visit; or, between browsing a digital copy or viewing the analogue original. They both say that they do not perceive the digital copies to be any serious competitors for the originals, but that they rather complement each other. The idea that digital access might threaten the number of actual museum visits was more common some years ago, they claim. The reproductions are understood as ways of enhancing the interest in and expectations of the originals. Nevertheless, they also acknowledge that there is a characteristic of the digital museum experience that qualitatively differs from the analogue, real one. One of them explains it in this way: “The digital museum is a way of telling a story that you’re not able to tell in the museum itself. It creates new stories and connections and expands the rooms of the museum. This gives a certain intrinsic value to the digital experience”.

Concluding remarks: Accessibility is the new authenticity

What kind of implications might be drawn from the cases described above? How do they serve to illustrate a digital cultural policy for museums? First, we might start by presupposing that there indeed is a close relation between what happens on the micro and structural levels. In other words, the changes on the museum-object level sparked by digitization – reproduction, de-territorialisation, de-materialization – have equivalents on an institutional *and* on a policy level. When the objects change, the functions of the institutions in charge of them change, the significance of different actors changes and so does also, directly or indirectly, the respective policies of the field. These changes are not unique to the museum sector, as all digitization of cultural products has changed and challenged the value of cultural artefacts. On a general level, the use of digital reproductions in museum collections, exemplified here by DigitaltMuseum and Google Art Project, seem to influence the authority of museums, create liquid forms of ownership, challenge authenticity, add new actors and roles to the field, and, consequently, also change the cultural policy of the sector. I will comment on each of these points in this final section.

A number of analysts have contended that digitization indeed limits, challenges or even deconstructs the authority that lies at the core of the collections and exhibitions of the museum. Ross Parry traces this to the introduction of digital collection management, which in turn has made it possible to access objects from a distance, create virtual collections and crowdsource curatorial input to the collections (Parry 2007). Another comment on the relation between digital tools and museum authority, from Sebastian Chan, Chief Experience Officer at the Austra-

lian Centre for the Moving Image, is that: “The [cultural heritage] sector has been slow to respond to the ‘digital turn.’ Despite more than 40 years of engagement with the ‘database’ and its impact on collection management and documentation practices, the sector has had difficulty in coming to terms with the shifting sands of its own ‘authority’” (Chan 2015: xv). In her above-mentioned analysis of Google Art Project, Alanna Bayer writes that “[t]he World Wide Web provides a potential method for diluting the art institution’s authority, aiding in the incorporation of both large and small voices into artistic conversation” (Bayer 2014: 82). There is no doubt that digitization, exemplified in the webpages of DigitaltMuseum and Google Art Project, in a principal way affects authority, simply because the control over and knowledge and ownership of the objects are dispersed through digital reproduction.

Ownership is a key issue here that is complicated by digitization. This issue is illustrated by the National Gallery of Denmark, which since 2008 has had a comprehensive programme for working digitally with their collections (Sanderhoff 2014a). In a long article, the director of the museum reflects on the principles and challenges related to the ambitions of becoming a digitally present and aware art museum (Sanderhoff 2014b). The museum was also part of the Google Art Project, and the article describes a number of potential objections to being included in the GAP portfolio, including the right of a private company to use digital images from the museum:

Google wanted to reserve the right to use the images on all existing and future platforms. What caused an internal discussion was that the users of Google Art Project should not be allowed to download the images from the website freely, only to view them and interact with them on Google’s own platform and with Google’s tools. In other words, Google Art Project is a “fenced garden”, preventing users from re-using images and data on their own terms.¹³ (Sanderhoff 2014b: 69)

The solution chosen by the museum was to make the paintings and images included in GAP available as high-resolution downloads on their own webpage, and the director describes this as a “small hole in the fence around GAP”. The overriding decision was to make as many digitized high-quality images as possible publicly available, using Creative Commons licences (CC-BY). This means that the museum allows free downloading, use, re-use, adaptation and even commercial use of the images, as long as their source is credited.

Questions of ownership have apparently always been important for museums as they have to deal with challenging cases of settling the rightful owners of objects in their collections. Now, digitization has added an extra layer of challenges

to this by making questions of copyright and legal ownership of digital material a core issue, as the example from the National Gallery of Denmark clearly illustrates. The solution chosen by museums like the National Gallery, the Dutch Rijksmuseum and others is to endorse a form of collective ownership, fronted by such statements as: “Our cultural heritage belongs to us all. (...) When cultural heritage is digital, open and shareable, it becomes common property (...) It becomes a part of us” (Sanderhoff 2014c: 14). In a way, the digital cultural objects create a liquid, displaced form of ownership. Indeed, the very possibility of ownership of digital content has been called into question, as exemplified by a recent book by the two lawyers Perzanowski and Schultz, *The end of ownership* (Perzanowski and Schultz 2016).

Authenticity is a core value for museums; a legitimating value. Although it might be considered a late nineteenth century or early twentieth century ideological invention, as contended by Lisa C. Roberts (1997), for example, there is no doubt that “[m]useums are in the authenticity business” (Burton and Scott 2003: 58). Put in another way, “[a]uthenticity is a fundamental measure of museum distinctiveness and serves as an important criterion for allocating a museum’s scarce resources (Chhabra 2008: 430). But how about the *digital* museum? Is there such a thing as an authentic digital object? As we have seen argued by Clifford Lynch and David Levy, authenticity is a seemingly self-contradictory concept for digital objects. The very nature of being non-original and immaterial makes the idea of being authentic challenging. This basic fact has implications on different levels. It influences the ideas of value and legitimacy, regarding the objects *and* the actors managing them. Digitization replaces authenticity with accessibility as the primary value of the object. An analogue original is valuable because it is authentic, while a digital copy is valuable because it is accessible. Furthermore, the legitimacy of key actors follows in the same vein of thought. The traditional legitimacy of museums resides in their role as custodians of authenticity, while the legitimacy of for example Google (Art Project, Book Project and so on) in this context lies in the production of accessibility. With the increasing digital presence of cultural heritage institutions, they are also becoming producers, guarantors and guardians of access. In a digitized cultural environment, access becomes both a core value and a central commodity to be given, had, shared, bought or rented.

Digital reproduction and accessibility introduce new actors to the field and a new division of labour. Furthermore, the roles of the existing actors have changed, as has been analysed thoroughly with such concepts as digital democracy, web 2.0, web 3.0, prosumer, crowdsourcing, produsage and communities of practice (cf. Stuedahl 2011). The introduction of new actors, software developers, private companies and global media conglomerates, is complicating the established relations between public government, museum institutions and the general public. At

the same time, there seems to be a potential *epochalism* present in the continuing discussions on these matters. There are no evident signs of digital objects actually reducing the interest in analogue ones. The proposed new role of the public does not seem to change in any fundamental way the basic work of the average museum, and the knowledge of the crowds has to a very little degree influenced the actual curating and managing of collections. The role of an actor like Google might also be more important for a principal discussion than for actual practice. GAP has digitized around 200 artworks from the collections of the National Museum's collections, while the museum itself has digitized around 35 000. The collection amounts in total to around 400 000 objects.

All in all, there seems to be a slightly exaggerated belief in and/or fear of digital democracy and digital industry. But they have not in any profound way affected and changed the principal cultural policy of the Arts Council Norway, for example, or the practical cultural policy of the museums themselves. What has changed, however, is the number and roles of actors, and the kinds of legitimacy, valuation and ownership that characterises the field of cultural heritage. This can lead us to conclude that in spite of revolutionary changes on a principal level, we still live in a not-so-brave and not-so-brand new digital museum world.

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Notes

1 My translation.

2 Following e.g. the perspectives of Hesmondhalgh 2006, Healy 2001 and Jenkins 2006.

3 For a critical view on this development, see Keen 2007.

4 Google Books had, originally, an explicit ambition to digitize (literally) all published books, approximated to around 130 million unique publications, within the current decade. Cf. <http://booksearch.blogspot.no/2010/08/books-of-world-stand-up-and-be-counted.html>. For an analysis of the consequences of electronic cultural policy, see Vaidhyanathan 2005.

5 URL: digitaltmuseum.no and digitaltmuseum.se.

6 Cf. <http://digitaltmuseum.no/info/digitaltmuseum> [accessed 28/10/16]. My translation.

- 7 Google Analytics is a free service from Google to analyse website visits and traffic. The numbers are provided by KulturIT.
- 8 <https://blog.google/topics/arts-culture/from-self-portraits-to-street-art-1000/> [accessed 14/11/2016]
- 9 <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/about/partners/> [accessed 14/11/2016]
- 10 <https://www.google.com/about/company/> [accessed 15/11/2016]
- 11 Just how large depends on the method of measurement. Judging by stock or market value, Alphabet, Google's parent company became the world's largest company in early 2016. Cf. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/feb/01/how-alphabet-made-google-biggest-company-in-the-world> [accessed 18/11/2016].
- 12 The CC BY-NC license is a so-called attribution, non-commercial license, allowing for sharing, copying and redistributing the material, in addition to remixing and transforming and building upon it. The conditions are that appropriate credit must be given and that it is not used for commercial purposes. (cf. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/deed.en>) [accessed 02/05/17]
- 13 Original in Danish. Translated by the author.

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