The digital museum: new trajectories for the music museum

A significant feature of contemporary museum studies has been the quest to democratise museums' knowledge to broader audiences. For the majority of museums, this has led to the emergence of digital technology mainly being used for the reproduction and dissemination of objects of previous physical collections, with objects ending up being exhibited within virtual and networked contexts in conventional ways. On the other hand, digital technology have also opened up a significant upwards trajectory that finds a perfect fit with another of contemporary museum studies' quests, that of reaching a meaningful engagement with museum-goers. More specifically, digital technology has come to enable museum-goers to perform curating gestures, which means that there are as many artworks as the number of people that have engaged with them. In other words, outcomes are temporary rather than stable, and this points towards the process being more important that the result. Annet Dekker¹ has insightfully called this process 'curation in progress'², which advocates for the museum to becomes not only a place of exhibition but, notably, a place of production.

For the museum of music and/or sound in particular, the emergence of digital technology has opened up thought-provoking possibilities that are clearly beyond creating opportunities to make more accessible the wonders of music museums’ extant collections of musical instruments. As a matter of fact, digital technology has not only allowed sound-related and musical artifacts to be exhibited in virtual museums of music, and so be interpreted and experienced, but it has also enabled musical and sound databases and archives to be given serious consideration and thus valued and safeguarded. Last but not least, the above-mentioned 'curating in progress' approaches have proved to be very interesting to the internet-based museums of sound and music leading to noteworthy creative proposals for museum-goers.

This paper sets out to discuss the opportunities opened up by those 'curation in progress' projects that are specifically designed for works of sound art to be displayed

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² Term coined by Annet Dekker (2015)
within the scope of the digital museums. Taking the case-study exhibition 'Sound Diary', curated by John Barber, which has been on display in the web museum Unplace in 2015, I will provide the delegates with the results of a study I have conducted with web-visitors to the exhibition. As my research focuses on online cultural phenomena, the procedural approaches are grounded in netnographic methods. My main aim, of interest to researchers in the social sciences and professionals of museum and music studies, is to investigate how the museum-goers engaged with both the sonorous experience and the self-curatorial process, and this will reveal how specific aspects of curatorship and museum provision have been informed by virtual and networked contexts. Ultimately, I intend my work to contribute to the development of the burgeoning field of online music/sound museums.