

Draft outline

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Affinity and Battlefield

Artistic strategies and new digital media in science museum communication practices

Affinity and Battlefield is a cross-disciplinary Ph.D. study combining art and media practices and theoretical analysis. The methodology consists of three parallel tracks:

1. Development and production of practical projects, communicating science, utilizing new digital media in the context of the old museum medium. These projects are ‘artistic interventions’ and will be made by several artists from different fields of work to

- a) Bergen Museum of Natural History (project working title: *In Deep Water!*)
- b) Bergen School museum (project working title. *When School was a Child*).

2. Development and production of a documentary video work where the process of *Affinity and Battlefield* is shown within a framework of cultural and media theories. The work will preferably be made as a production for television made in cooperation with a production company, but alternatively as an amateur work logg.

3. A written Ph.D. thesis where the work is analysed, theorized and summed up, supported by a broad theoretical framework and the practical experiences developed from 1) and 2).

I have several roles, being in charge of the three parts, but management, manuscript and directing are the central practical roles but hopefully I will have several enthusiastic co-developers. All other functions will be carried out by others. Being the theoretical responsible I must have an extra sensitivity towards integrating relevant perspectives, concepts, working tools and specialized skills

that I can spot from theoretical in-depth analysis – and the other way around, I must tune the theory in towards the challenges that are born out of the practical work.

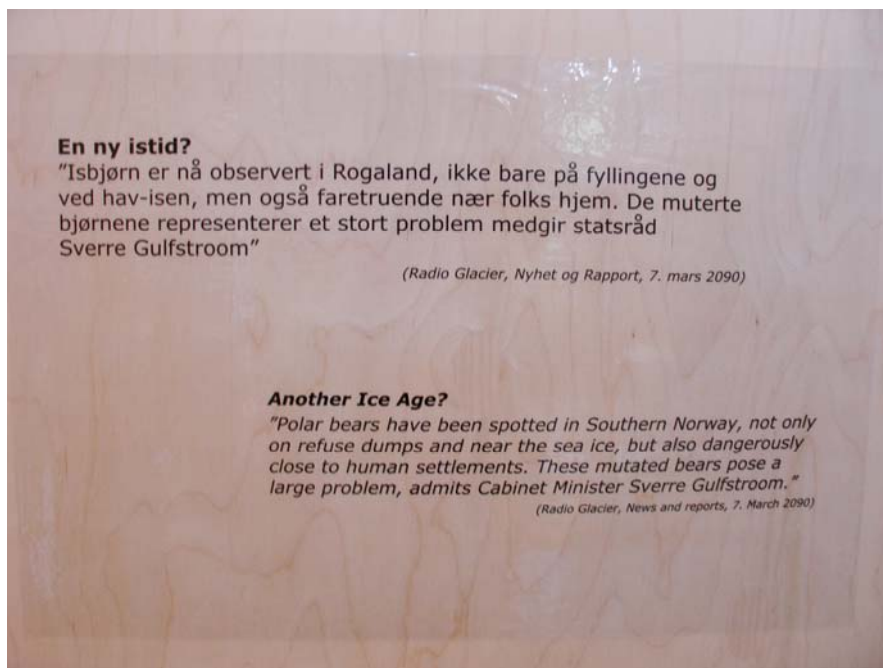
Main arguments and challenges

One of the arguments in this work is that what I've called 'artistic approaches' can contrast, supplement the scientific museum's communication forms and thus suggest new communicative strategies which allow new readings and hereby revitalize the field. Today this happens in isolated cases but it's not the norm and is rarely considered by the scientific staff when planning virtual or physical exhibitions or other communication projects, so an artistic approach to science communication needs to be addressed and articulated further.

Affinity and Battlefield is carried out at the Department of Information Science and Media Studies (*Infomedia*) at The University of Bergen (*UiB*) but take on both cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional collaborative strategies. By including artistic and documentary practices as well as theoretical analytical work in the methodology current and potential science museum communication practices are investigated. The resulting knowledge will have the character of being a theory-practice synthesis since these three 'tracks of knowledge' run parallel.

Contrasts, or assumed contrasts, are set up to enable, or to reinforce, comparative analysis and make visible similarities and differences – and thus clarify the possibilities cross-media and cross-'practices/regimes'. It is my belief that comparative aesthetic analysis through theory AND practice will enable transfer of knowledge and experience. The methodology, one could say, is developed in order to establish several "axis's of creativity" or "carriers of innovation". The focus on utilizing new media technology within the older object-oriented museum medium is such an axis of creativity. The different media - the museum exhibition, the new media project(s) and the video documentary – can of course be seen as both separate media entities and as converging media fields. Aesthetic traits that are media specific might be traced and provide understanding of the communicative possibilities of these different media forms seen in isolation as well as seen as converging media landscapes. The earlier mentioned art-science perspectives are also brought in as a *carrier of innovation*. The arts and the (natural) sciences can be seen as representing different communication regimes although these borders must not be seen as fixed and something given in any case or situation. In *Affinity and Battlefield* these borders are seen as widely a social construction and are to be challenged.

I will try to nuance these general concepts and also make them more precise by exemplification in the presentation. By showing examples from earlier projects I've made, or been part of, that involves science communication - with and without use of new media technology. ¹



Photos: Nina Svane-Mikkelsen. From the exhibition *Havlandets Fremtid, Havlandet 2005 / The Future of the Coast Land* (Norway).

Manuscript, structure and text development (with the workgroup and Hanna Hilt Design): Nina Svane-Mikkelsen. Design: Hanna Hilt, Graphics: Willy Skramstad.

¹ see <http://www.stedsans.net> for information on and resources from the development of *Affinity and Battlefield* as the project evolves – and for information on earlier projects (for instance pictures from the exhibition *Havlandet 2005*)
See http://www.stedsans.net/nina_sm/presentations/whale_chong/whalechong.htm or http://bergenmuseum.uib.no/nettutstillinger/alle/om_whalechong.htm for an earlier new media project on whaling to Bergen Museum

When it comes to *Affinity and Battlefield* I will first and foremost present the status of *In Deep Water!* as a departure point for a discussion on digital learning games as an art form that needs artistic research and practices as research to develop. *In Deep Water!* is directly connected to the International maritime research project *Mar-Eco*² which is coordinated by Havforskningstituttet (Institute of Maritime Research, *IMR*) in Bergen. *Mar-Eco* involves 16 countries. *Bergen Museum* is housing the findings.

I am uncertain whether ‘the art-part’ of the project *In Deep Water!* will be considered weakened by the latest development of the project. It is only during the last three months this project has become a digital learning game which implies – or demands – a lot of constraints, maybe more constraints than the ‘artistic interventions’ idea. On the other hand constraints can carry creativity. *In Deep Water!* is a project with an outspoken goal of communicating, targeting a specific audience and communicating a specific theme, holding pedagogical aims. These are frames that might for some be contradictory with (fine) art practices but I still find it important to use the term ‘art-practice’. I consider it least constraining in the development process which is highly important. It also plays a role in how the ‘casting’ is made and thus affects the outcome of the total project. It articulates a specific kind of knowledge, makes it visible for other involved fields of knowledge what it is they cannot do themselves (the biologists for instance).

I will come with suggestions to where I think the art rests and the research hides (from verbalisation) within this project and to come up with some more explanations on why I think the artistic practice and research is important within communications and other cultural projects, especially within emerging fields (like new media technology) and why I cannot call it anything else.

² See <http://www.mar-eco.no>



Developing contents for multiple media in physical space, manuscript-level – a page from the work-manuscript to *The Future of the Coast Land*.

How to investigate, exploit fully and make visible the aesthetic competency? I attempt to use cross-disciplinarity and collaborative practices as a broad, large and fine-masked net for obtaining maximum degree of ideas and innovation, but I am in the beginning of a process and see the need to strengthen the concepts for describing this kind of research process. I aim for is making the development process as transparent as possible – as transparent as I dare, one might say. This will happen at the website <http://stedsans.net> where updated information on *In Deep Water!* can be found. Thus I hope that the framework of the project and the communication of the process will help to add to the understanding of artistic practice and media practice as research.

Nina Svane-Mikkelsen, 12. October 2005