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Lecture held by Dr. Susanne Richter, Museum for the Printing Arts Leipzig

1. Is there a Future for Printing Museums in the Digital World?

The future of print, and the future of books, has been the subject of vivid discussions in the last two decades. We can see this in trade journals as well as in the daily press all over Germany. By now Print media was able to hold his own on the media markets of today. But the digital revolution worldwide and the new possibilities of digital devices, such as iPads or Smartphones, are beginning to replace some printed media.

Does this herald the end of print media? And are our museums to be closed in one or two decades, because no one is interested in the production of printed media? I don't think so. But it is our duty to fight and highlight the advantages of print media, be it as books, newspapers, reviews, posters or advertising material, and to make sure that their distinctiveness and their uniqueness will be truly noticed even in the future. Right from the beginning the graphic industry was innovative and complex. Anyone entering a modern printing house today will be deeply impressed by the fact that this is really a high-tech-industry. And the production of printed media is still very complex and this is one the distinctive features compared to online-media.

But I am afraid to see in the last years, that the printing industry economically is enormously in trouble, the printing houses, the paper distributors, the manufacturer of printing presses, they are all in the same boat, as we say in German. The today high-tech printing presses are getting always more productive and efficient, but the market for printed media is stable, the print runs are going down. At the same time, digital printing systems such as inkjet or toner are an increasing technology. Next year, in Düsseldorf, a new fair, the digi:media, will start, one year before the drupe 2012. This is also a reaction to the changing markets and their needs. Obviously in these difficult times there is no money and support for the long tradition of the printing industry and therefore no means to highlight the image of, in some respect, an decreasing industry.

But not only the printing industry, but also the classical publishing houses with their books seem not to be much interested in their own history. This is the experience, I had, during an exhibition that I organized with several partners and institutions in Leipzig. Unfortunately this is another

important target group for our museums, that in some respect ignores our work. But is there another target group left? So should we stop to collect, store and explain all the material and exhibits in our museums? Is there anybody left, who in future will be happy to get to know something about the history of printing and the history of industrial heritage?

In my opinion, the image of museums is not the best at the moment. Art museums seem to be more fashionable right now than technical ones or as museums of cultural history. Should we become also more fashionable or should we stick to more digital and virtual means and devices for presentation? Or will be our next place to visit us via internet? No, I do not think so. But we have to think about how many digital devices we need to explain our collections to our visitors. But maybe, we will need less in future than we might think today. But this is not my task in this lecture. Some of our colleagues will tell us more about this today and I am really looking forward to their lectures. My task today deals with the visitors of tomorrow, their wishes and expectations towards a museum of graphic arts. Media habits are changing so fast, so what can we do to meet and assist our visitors during the time they spend in a museum, how should we develop our collections to be successful by tomorrow?

There is one positive fact, I should start with. In Germany there are more people going to the 6.500 museums than into the soccer stadiums, and the number of visitors of museums is still increasing. These are good news! Hanno Rauterberg, journalist of weekly newspaper Die Zeit, recently wrote that Museums are the most popular means of education and enjoyment, and this because the real world is becoming always more virtual, that there is increasing desire for places that are static or remain, where the exhibits are real and authentic and where they are still full of meaning! Museums are not enormous storage places like the Internet but fortunately places of knowledge. Already in 2004 Max Hollein, Director of the Frankfurt museums, wrote in the Berlin newspaper Der Tagesspiegel, "Save the charisma of exhibits". He is right, even when I have to admit that it is easier to save and exhibit the masterpieces of Rembrandt or Manet but a printing press of the 19th Century. But a couple of week ago, a student from the Chemnitz University, Department of Media, wrote into our guest book "thank you for preserving the grandmother and grandfather of the today speedmaster printing presses, I had the opportunity to see, to get explained and that I really liked. So I am aware where the technique comes from and to imagine the evolution and innovation of the decades between the old and the latest development of today." The same happened outside the museum, at the drupa fair in 2008. Surrounded by the latest innovations of the printing industry in Hall 9, the Museum of Printing

Arts in Leipzig showed some of its presses from our collection and there was always a crowd of people, when our operator turned on the Letterpress Victoria Front from 1952 or when an Leipzig artist worked at an copperplate hand press from 1850, or not to forget the Boston handpresses with postcards for self service. People love to touch, to see, to smell, to hear, what is far from their reality and their everyday life.

In this respect we as printing or graphic museums have an advantage, lot of our exhibits are noisy and smell and therefore are real and can tell stories. And we can create an authentic atmosphere apart from some stylish museums that spread out more and more. But this is only valid for today target groups. What about the future ones?

We have to start thinking about our target groups of tomorrow and try to reach them even today. We all do this within the bounds of possibility, but are we doing enough and are we doing the right things? If I were satisfied with the situation at the Museum of the Printing arts in Leipzig, I would not be here in Wadgassen today. I am not satisfied and I would like to share some ideas with you regarding the attitude and expectations of young people of today, who, after all, might be visiting our museum in ten years time.

2. Media habits of the young generation

My remarks reflect my own personal opinion, based on the many years I worked in the German printing industry and on the three years I have been working in Leipzig. I guess they are not universally valid and are only in some part backed by scientific research, but I hope they will spark a lively discussion.

Let us start with today's University students, because in ten years, they might be parents and as such they will educate their children and influence their first steps into the world of media. In university courses – and I am referring more to the humanities – it might be noted, that many students are no longer able to research a topic without using Google etc. But mostly science starts with a question that has not be answered before – be it in Wikipedia or in the standard literature.

Stefan Weber, media and communication scientist in Salzburg and Dresden, has done scientific research on the spreading the so-called "Google-Copy-Paste-Syndrome". The internet has influenced reading and writing of young people in the most dramatic fashion – and what is particularly sad, their ability to critically assess the sources they use. "Texts are no longer

properly read, but merely scanned, quite often without proper verification of sources and with surprisingly naive trust in the internet.” In this context, Weber also criticizes the advocates of open access, since “open access to knowledge is not simultaneously the basis of innovation and emancipation” but consists of “proper verification of sources, reading, understanding, interpreting and assessing of everything read”. He requests more verification of sources, so that even in future, one will be able to distinguish between original, quotation and plagiarism.

Young people continue to be highly interested in training in the media - an interest that has actually been growing for many years. Many universities of applied science have expanded their range of offer, numerous young graphic designers try and gain a foothold on the design market. Unfortunately, however, I have to concede, that many universities teach only very limited basic knowledge, which in turn, has a negative impact on the production of print media.

Let us look at today’s kids, aged 6 to 13. They are one of our museums’ important target groups. In a chart by “Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest”, published in the FAZ, I found the following figures regarding favourite activities for boys and girls. Luckily, meeting friends and playing outside still rank first and second respectively, but next comes watching TV, with slightly more girls favouring this activity, followed immediately by the computer, which is more strongly used by boys than girls, and then game consoles. And way down come books, with 11 % of girls and 5 % of boys indicating an interest in reading. The difference is even more striking when it comes to painting/drawing/handicrafts, where girls show more enthusiasm (17 %) than boys with just 4 %. This is quite distressing given that a large part of our museum’s educational programme for this age group is focussed on the education and training of creativity and motor activity.

Media education is therefore called for – within the family, in schools and in museums, too. What strikes me in this context, above all in Germany, is that in recent years the focus was very much on integrating computers in schools, to eliminate social disparities and to make the kids fit for the new media. Back in the 1990s this was certainly the right approach, but this initiated a change in values, moving away from analogue media, such as books, to digital and online media. Wouldn’t it be appropriate now to lay greater emphasis on print media? This opinion is also voiced by Kim Kokipii, managing director of Papierfabrik Scheufelen in Lenningen near Stuttgart. He proposed a “new balanced media education” in schools, to make the kids aware of the specific aspect of each media and to focus on the use of media and accordingly the differences

regarding their content and reception. Once we as museums find no longer any support in schools, where learning with print media seems to become more and more obsolete, the future might look rather dim for us and our museums. Therefore, we have to join forces to make sure, that we strengthen the position of print media in schools.

3. How can we reach our audience and what shall we collect in future?

I don't want to paint to gloomy a picture of the future, quite the contrary, I think there is a lot we can do, and time might be on our side. I would, thus, dare to claim that in an increasingly digitized world people will lay greater emphasis on sensuousness and haptics. This, however, has to be combined with higher levels of information and entertainment quality – something which we have to tackle right now.

I have no easy answer to present to you today. In the Museum for the Printing Arts in Leipzig we are currently – and in my view for the next 10 years or so – successful, because we provide the opportunity to “touch and feel” the printing processes. We are lucky because our employees are still able to present and explain all the machines and devices. Through special exhibitions, linked to graphic reproduction and Book Art we try to grant an insight into the production of the final products, for this purpose we make use of our ample stock of exhibits. Our educational programme includes creative courses linked to these special exhibitions, we offer special programmes during school holidays in summer and winter and throughout the year everybody has the opportunity to try out typesetting and printing. In the foundry you might get a lead letter and quite often an individual signature sign/monogram is made at the Linotype, which can then be taken home. Lever Presses in our exhibition are available anytime, so that basically no-one will leave our museum without a free souvenir.

We want to stick to this “hands-on” philosophy and we are currently training a younger staff member in all technical fields, to make sure that none of the know-how and skills of the older employees, who will retire over the next years, will be lost.

We have the hope, that the interaction of online and analogue, computer and print media will enable the children and youth to be more aware of the different media, assess the respective advantages and disadvantages of each media and will hopefully lead to a kind of aha-experience, making it clear that beyond screens and moving pictures there is a different world, which in its relative silence hides a lot of treasures well worth discovering. Training, developing

and supporting this perception and awareness, that is our task for the next 10 years or so. If we are not able to make people understand that print media have played an important role as a source of knowledge, criticism and sheer enjoyment in the past and present and that they will continue to do so in future, too, we will very soon become redundant. We at the Museum of the Printing Arts will also focus on Typography and typefaces, since this is the link between old and new media, it might be the connecting link to highlight the relevance of print in a digital world.

And now let me briefly touch upon what we will collect in the future. The digital revolution, insofar as it affects our collection, has to be included with examples. For a short period a 1985 MAC was standing in my office, while we tried to sort out, where to store it. Given that the digital PrePress is missing in our museum, we haven't exhibited it yet. But the reaction from people coming into my office made it clear to me, that this MAC will be a wonderful completion of our collection. Today almost everyone recalls how small and compact the devices were, and I bet that 10 years hence, a 1985 MAC will have the same spectacular effect on our visitors as a Linotype has today. I am very happy that at the moment we are preparing a new part of our permanent exhibition for the so-called PrePress. In 2011 you can see Monotype Machines together with this little MAC and also various modern Prepress devices. Printing museums definitely are not boring when the exhibits can be touched and seen in motion and are presented in an appropriate atmosphere. To some extent, time is on our side, all we have to do is identify, what the truly relevant exhibits of tomorrow will be. I think we have to succeed in integrating the production process, the communication path and the end product and making them come alive. Even today merely collecting and documenting devices is far from enough, tomorrow it will be completely outdated and – thus – our existence will be endangered. There is a lot to be done – let us join forces, it is worth while. Let's make visible and touchable what the digital revolution was like in the crucial years between 1990 and today. Print media will not die out, it will change and with it the museums dedicated to the history of print will change, too.

Thank you for your attention!