

## The job that no one wants to do? Museum educators' articulations about guided tours

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### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to investigate museum educators' articulations of their performance during guided tours. The paper investigates preparations for a guided tour, considerations related to doing guided tours and the events after the guided tour. The text focus especially on preparation and the aftermath as this is not normally discussed in research on museum education. The paper is based on participant observation of guided tours, filming of guided tours and qualitative semi-structured interviews. The material is analysed using performance theories and theories on materiality. The paper seeks to unearth knowledge imbued in the museum educators' performance and reveal what can be known from guiding bodies.

**Keywords:** museum education, guided tour, performance theory, museum educator, The Swedish History Museum.

Museum educators have a long history in museums, but there is limited recognition and understanding of their work (Tran and King 2007: 131). Katie Best calls for more research, arguing that museum guides, and guided tours, have been overlooked in research, leaving little insight into their practices (Best 2012: 35). This paper draws on this insight and investigates museum educators' articulations and considerations related to their performance during guided tours. The paper focuses on the museum educators working at The Swedish History Museum, an archaeological museum in Stockholm (Sweden). Guided tours are, in this and many other Swedish museums, the most common educational activity, making the study a typical example of how museum education is carried out in Sweden: but the paper's findings are also applicable to other countries.

In Sweden, museum education is considered one of the most important tasks in museums and as a platform for 'democratic discussion[s]' (Svanberg 2010: 20). This discourse is also highly present in Swedish official documents, which suggests that museum education should be a high priority as it can assist in critiquing normative mediations of, e.g., history and offer new kinds of perspectives and narratives.<sup>1</sup> Although academic and political discourses positions guided tours, and consequently also museum educators, as important, I will nevertheless show in the following discussion that the job has a low status. For instance, Ester working as a museum educator at The Swedish History Museum, told me, referring to guided tours, that 'there is no one who really wants to do the job or experience that they have the time.'<sup>2</sup> Her comment marks how guided tours are considered among the museum educators. This consideration also spills over into how the people doing guided tours are seen and in an informal conversation at a conference with an employee at the museum it was revealed to me that it was common that staff-members downgraded museum educators' work and content knowledge when they were not present at meetings.

Research also shows that museum educators have a low status in Swedish museums (Ljung 2009: 98). International research has argued that museum work has been downgraded and not seen as a 'highly valued resource' resulting in that museum educators feel undervalued (Nolan 2009: 118). Museum education is, furthermore, commonly put in contrast to other

museum professions who deal with objects or text and museum educators' voices are often side-lined at the institutions and in the larger museum community (Rees Leahy 2011: 28; Reid 2013). It is also argued that other museum professions often experienced museum educators' performances as unsettling or not taken seriously because of its fluid nature compared to, e.g., collection managers work (Rees Leahy 2011: 28).

Morgan, working as a museum educator at The Swedish History Museum, commented on the low status of museum educators and explained that it had to do with the fact that museum education is often the first position in a museum which an employee will come into, and is seen as a stepping stone to reach 'better' positions in the museum. He admitted that the museum's articulation of guided tours, as being a valued practice, does not correspond to how they are considered in reality.<sup>3</sup> Ester said that the museum often brought in extra personnel to do the guided tours. She stated that:<sup>4</sup>

All the museums that I know of have museum educators that come in per hour, there is no museum that I know of that has producers or administrative personnel employed per hour [...] all the thousands of kids who come here each year and are supposed to learn about history and get a positive experience and invest for the future, and all that we claim that to want, all that will be carried out by people who come in [and work] per hour. It's insane really.

Ester and Morgan's statement can be compared to what Graeme Talboys writes; that museum education is often regarded by other members of the museum community as not being a true job (Talboys 2005: 19). My informants' statement show that what scholars and museums want museum education to be and how guided tours and museum educators are positioned in the museum hierarchy, stand in stark contrast to each other. I will continue to elaborate on this below.

## Previous research

Since the 1990s significant advances have been made in the understanding of museum education. Researchers have predominantly focused on visitor learning, meaning-making, experience, responses to guided tour and other museum activities. In addition, various pedagogical models have been suggested in order to improve and evaluate learning (Black 2005; Bridal 2004; Illeris 2010; Hooper-Greenhill 1994, 2000, 2006, 2007a, b; Falk & Dierking 2000, 2012; Jackson and Kidd 2011). This discourse is particularly noticeable in the Swedish context (Synnestvedt 2008; Ljung 2009; Insulander 2010; Davidson and Jakobsson 2012). Scholars, nevertheless, seem to overlook what George Hein (1998: 135) claims; that the focus on visitor studies makes it difficult to understand museum education since the time visitors spend in museums is so short. Despite Hein's statement, visitor studies continue to dominate the discourse to the point that it has become the new orthodoxy (Macdonald 2011: 2).

An explanation for this focus could be that many scholars, explicitly or implicitly, suggest that museum education can be a tool to democratize society and a resource in promoting social justice, assist in integration and solve social issues (Henry 2006; Golding 2009; Silverman 2010; Skartveit and Goodnow 2010). Officially these ideas have come to permeate the work at The Swedish History Museum where researchers argue for a deconstruction of the museum's authoritarian voice. Museum education is explained as important in order to assist in critiquing normative mediations of archaeology and offer new kinds of perspectives and narratives, assist in public participation of heritage and to become a community friendly museum (Hauptman Wahlgren and Svanberg 2008; Hauptman Wahlgren 2010).

This discourse is affected by the New Museology's shift from researching methodologies into researching representations (Macdonald 2011: 1-5). Scholars in museum and heritage studies have recently tried to bridge the gap between methodologies and representations, but this has primarily been carried out in terms of collection, conservation and exhibition management (cf. Macdonald 2011: 1-5; Harrison 2011: 55-82, Smith 2006), and not in terms of museum education. There are, nevertheless, some pieces of research on museum educators' articulations of their own work (Baily 2006), but this, too, has focused on the relation between museum educators and visitors (cf. Hooper-Greenhill 2007b, Best 2012, Pringle 2009, Pringle

and DeWitt 2014, Baily 2006). There is also research on museum educators' identities and roles within the museum (Munley and Roberts 2006, Reid 2013, Henry 2006, Bailey 2006), museum educators' identities in times of crisis (Nolan 2009) and their roles during reorganisations of museums (Cunningham 2009; Henry 2006), as well as their professional development within institutions (Charman 2005; Bevan and Xanthoudaki 2008; Tran and King 2007). These kinds of discussions, apart from Berit Ljung's (2009) study, are not present in the Swedish discourse on museum education, and Eva Insulander (2010) even suggests that museum education is underdeveloped in Swedish research.

In this paper I discuss how museum educators talk about their performance and articulate the 'doing' of guided tours. The reason for doing so is, as stated above, that much research has paid attention to visitors' learning during guided tours, resulting in the educators' 'doings' being overlooked (Tran and King 2007: 133). I seek, therefore, to explore guided tours as a form of embodied knowledge and reflect on how knowledge about doing guided tours emerges and develops in the activity itself (cf. Bevan and Xanthoudaki 2008: 115). In focusing on museum educators' articulations about their performance I will not explore what museum educators mediate, how visitor experience the mediation or the performance. Nor will I explore how visitors and museum educators interact as this has been thoroughly researched in other publications (cf. Jackson and Kidd 2011; Macdonald 2006).

### **Theoretical and methodological approach**

This paper is based on two intersecting theoretical approaches: performance theory and theories on materiality. Performance theory is here considered both a methodological lens as well as a theoretical analysis. It assists in studying performances, but also in revealing how embodied practices are connected to, and affected by, cultural discourses and knowing (Taylor 2004: 381-382; Kemp 1998: 116). In this paper I draw on performance researchers writing on theatre and pedagogy, as this approach enables the researcher to observe, reflect, theorize and interpret actions as ways of knowing through one's own, or the other person's, body (cf. Schechner 2002: 4; Alexander 2006: 255-256). The museum educators' articulations on a guided tour are, drawing on performance pedagogy research, seen as an interpretative act that can unearth new conditions of knowledge and meaning (cf. Alexander 2006: 256; Pineau 1994: 16). The paper, thus, seeks to know what can be learned from guiding bodies and the articulations thereof (cf. Cooks and LeBesco 2009: 233).

During the fall of 2011 field research was initiated at The Swedish History Museum. It was composed of three phases; qualitative semi-structured interviews, participant observation and filming of the guided tours. Combining these methods allowed me to access the complexity in museum education that is often overlooked in studies focusing on observation (see also Tran and King (2007: 134) for a similar conclusion). Six museum educators (three women and three men) were part of the study.<sup>5</sup> In this study I refer to them by the pseudonyms Ester, Anneli, Gustav, John, Klara and Morgan to protect their anonymity.

The study commenced with qualitative semi-structured interviews. This assists in understanding how informants experience the guided tours, and it allows the informants to associate freely on issues of doing guided tours and on museum education. Talking about this can help in highlighting embodied knowledge otherwise rendered invisible (cf. Denzin and Lincoln 2000). The reason for this focus is, as performance theorists Richard Schechner (2002: 38-42) and Rebecca Schneider (2001: 100-101) write, that performances are complicated to study because they disappear as fast as they are made. Schneider (2001: 104) argues that performance becomes itself through 'messy and eruptive re-appearance' through repetition. She suggests that the archiving of performance resides in the 'flesh memory' and body to body transmissions (Schneider 2001: 106). It is the flesh memory and the knowledge imbued in it that I seek to unearth and, therefore, I asked my informants to explain how they were doing guided tours – in other words to talk about their performance and what it entailed. I specifically asked them to not comment on what they were telling the visitors.

In order to deepen my understanding of museum educators' articulations on their performances I conducted participant observation during guided tours. Participant observation is a method of open ended enquiry where the researcher seeks to explain cultural patterns by

following and observing the informants while doing guided tours (cf. Jorgensen 1989). I focused on what the museum educator was doing, excluding what the visitors were doing and saying. I followed the informants before, during and after the guided tours. I took notes focusing on what they were doing. The observations were, however, not the primary focus of this study but a method to discuss the museum educators' performance. Observing how the museum educators performed availed the possibility of expanding on the discussion. For this purpose I also filmed the guided tour. The film was, however, not analysed because, following Schneider (2001: 100-101), performances resist residing in material culture. Peggy Phelan (1993: 146) holds that performances cannot be saved, recorded or documented, and when documented she suggests that they become something else. Thus, instead of analysing the film I used it as a way to create a more in-depth discussion about doing guided tours with the informants and I asked them to comment on how they were performing while watching it.

The guided tours were carried out in various exhibitions displaying archaeological histories. In this paper I will, however, not focus on each and every exhibition or how/if the museum educators mediated the exhibitions' messages. I will, however, discuss how the museum educators explained their relationships to the exhibition on a more general level. Through the informants' expressions it was clarified that they considered the exhibitions as transforming and changing the performance (see also Mitchell 2006: 395; Barad 2003). The exhibitions were seen as having agency and the ability to perform and interact with the museum educators (cf. Barad 2003: 828). The exhibitions are, therefore, in this text considered as social agents in and of themselves and subjects in a web of relationships (cf. Barad 2003; Mitchell 2006: 391). An exhibitions' ability to act depends on how it is constructed or designed, thus, an exhibition can be regarded 'as performance', borrowing Richard Schechner's (2002: 38-42) term, explaining how institutional discourses are coded into an exhibition and actively matter in the becoming of the guided tour. In this case, the exhibitions come to matter through the museum educators' alignment with them (cf. Barad 2003: 808-809).

When discussing guided tours I have adopted performance scholar Richard Schechner's (2002: 225) way of structuring performances into three phases: the pre-performance phase (preparations, training, planning), the performance phase (warm-up, staging, cool-down) and the post-performance phase (critical response and archiving of experiences). In the text that follows I will discuss articulations related to what happens before the guided tours and investigate the preparations. Thereafter I will discuss the initial meeting with the visitors, the interaction with the visitors in the exhibition, as well as the relationship of the educators to the exhibition. Following this appears a discussion on cool-down and archiving of experience as well as a concluding discussion.

### **Before the guided tour**

As stated above, previous research on museum education has focused on museum educators' encounters with visitors, and this has resulted in the pre-performance phase and especially the preparations being excluded from investigations. I argue that the preparations, which the visitors do not see, are one of the most important parts of museum education. Preparations and rehearsals are, in theatre- and performance research, frequently discussed (cf. Meyer-Denkgräfe (2013) for a discussion). It is stated that 'the best museum theatre practitioners pride themselves on the depth and breadth of their research' (Rees Leahy 2011: 28). One reason for thus exclusion, as Peter Jackson (2011: 12) writes, is that it has been defined as theatre with educational claims and, therefore, seen as something in-between theatre and education. Despite being ignored, the preparations hold a key to understanding the entire pedagogical project. During this process the guided tour is researched and facts and values are interpreted and the guided tour is, furthermore, absorbed both physically and mentally (cf. Schechner 2002: 237-239).

My informants described the preparations in similar ways and articulated it as 'reading up on the exhibition.' This included getting to know the exhibition in terms of design, mediated message and displayed objects. It also entailed watching others. The informants explained that when preparing for a new guided tour they watched others doing the tour in the exhibition. They revealed that there was a semi-formal apprentice system where new museum educators were

encouraged to follow and watch more senior ones. This is the sort of body to body transmission that, drawing on Schneider (2001: 103), includes archiving the performance in the museum educators' flesh. Diana Taylor (2006: 83) comments on this and writes that a performance is never for the first time, suggesting that a performance is realized in the present but has a history that links its execution to the past. In the present study the guided tours were linked together through the act of watching and imitating and in doing so the museum educators were upholding and creating a tradition for how to do guided tours. Moreover they communally set the boundaries for the performance. During my observations I noted many similarities in how the museum educators used the exhibition spaces and how they moved in the rooms also giving evidence of transmissions and archiving of performances.

The museum educators' preparations also involved consulting books, articles and other scientific material. Material connected to the exhibition was also assembled like exhibition texts, catalogues, articles and different minutes from meetings. My informant Klara often asked the curators to explain how an exhibition was designed and its purpose so that she could understand it better.<sup>6</sup> The reason for investigating material connected to the exhibition was due to the fact that museum educators were seldom, or never, part of curating exhibitions.

Although this might seem arbitrary to point out, it has significance and is connected to the many misconceptions about museum education. It is often, among the public and even among other museum professionals, seen as a practice where the museum educators memorize a script that others have written. This is also something observed in non-Swedish settings (cf. Best 2012). Museum education is not seen, in contrast to other museum professions, as a site where knowledge is produced. I would even suggest that the academic discourse on museum education by focusing on problematic representations, the lack of content knowledge, and complicated statements during guided tours (cf. Lionnet 2001; Macdonald 2006; Axelsson 2009; Desai 2000) contributes to this critique.

All my informants, as if responding to this misconception, were careful in describing how they prepared the guided tours and exemplified the wealth of material that they consulted. The description was a reflection of how they did not want to be perceived by other museum professionals and the public – as lacking content knowledge. Anneli stated that not being able to answer the visitors' questions was a painful process and she prepared meticulously so this would not happen.<sup>7</sup> Other museum educators also shared similar stories and Ester told me that when she started to work as a museum educator she had a tendency to overdo the research. She stated that she was nervous and afraid that she would not know enough about history or be able to answer visitors' questions. She soon realized, however, that 'all that I had read and learned, and all the details was not requested by anyone.'<sup>8</sup> Ester later learned what John explained to me during the interview, that the preparations were 'about learning how to do a guided tour' not about memorizing facts.<sup>9</sup>

Learning how to do a guided tour, as articulated by my informants, entailed getting to know the exhibition and how the educators could work with the material culture. All my informants explained that an important part of the preparations was to create an embodied connection to the exhibition. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett refers to this as the body knowing its orientation in space, suggesting that there is a particular phenomenological relation between, in the case of the present study, the museum educators and the exhibitions (1999: 14, 16, 26). Gustav's explanation of how he prepared himself connects to what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes; he said that he could take a couple of hours 'to build a relationship to each room in order to create different views, to get opinions about things and really get to know the exhibition.'<sup>10</sup> In conversation with Gustav, and with the other informants, it became clear that they considered the exhibition, drawing on Barad (2003: 820), as an active agent that participated in the very process of shaping and structuring the guided tours.

This process of orientating himself and working with the exhibition and negotiating its material demands was part of structuring and rehearsing the guided tour. My informants explained it as creating 'frames', 'rhythms', 'ways' or 'traces'. What they tried to convey to me was that they created, and tried to predict, ways of moving through the exhibition together with the visitors. In doing so they created the tempo of the guided tour while at the same time tried to understand how they were affected by the exhibitions' material demands. In other words, the preparations is about trying to estimate where they are going to stop, what they are going to say

at that particular place and how long it is going to take. The museum educators nevertheless left it open for negotiations, and Gustav said that the 'rhythms' were cemented only after the initial meeting with the visitors.<sup>11</sup>

In creating 'rhythms' the museum educator had to work with the exhibition and negotiate its material demands. The exhibitions' demands on the museum educators became especially clear through Gustav's statement and he said that 'during the preparations I prepare myself as if the exhibition will control me [during the guided tour.]'<sup>12</sup> Gustav also stated that 'the exhibition space will come to set the framework for how my guided tour will be carried out'<sup>13</sup>. The exhibitions' material demand on the museum educator was also articulated by Anneli, who said 'that a [exhibition] room is some kind of frame for what can and cannot be carried out.'<sup>14</sup> Gustav and Anneli express that they submitted to the exhibitions' agency.

Anneli said that the exhibitions directed how the guided tour would be carried out: 'there is basically one way to walk [in the exhibitions] and the course has already been decided on. It has already been decided on what kind of knowledge to begin with and how to continue.'<sup>15</sup> Anneli stated that 'the exhibitions' design and structure can really carry the whole guided tour but sometimes the structure can also make it incredibly difficult.'<sup>16</sup> Other informants also struggled with the exhibitions and John told me that 'it feels like I always make it work somehow although the places [in the exhibitions] are not ideal.'<sup>17</sup> All my informants, in one way or the other, expressed that the exhibitions acted against them and that the exhibitions often resisted to being used in the way that the museum educators wanted to use them.

The exhibitions were not designed primarily for the purposes of doing guided tours, although this is one of the main, if not *the* main, activities which takes place in the exhibitions. The museum educators were, furthermore, not part of designing the exhibitions. The layout, can, therefore, be regarded 'as performance' of institutional attitudes to museum educators – a material product that communicated and performed relations and positions of museum educators within the institution. A result of this is that every guided tour also bears witness of, and continues to act out, these relations and positions. I will continue to discuss this when focusing on the museum educators' performance in the exhibition, but first I will turn to a discussion of warming-up.

### **The initial meeting with the visitors**

During the field study I observed that all my informants either arrived at the museum just before the guided tour, or walked from their desk where they were working, to meet with the visitors. When I asked my informants if, or how, they warmed up before the guided tour they simply answered no there were no warm-up. Gustav stated that:

Normally I would say that I do not prepare each and every guided tour because I give so many of them. Preparations can include keeping track of time, like the time is five too, so that I can go down and start the tour. It does not include more preparations than that.

What Gustav explained was that the guided tours usually start every full hour and warming up included keeping track of time and taking the stairs, or the lift, down to the entrance of the museum to meet with the visitors and that there was no special ritual preceding the guided tour. Performers working at theaters usually have very organized and ritualized warm-ups allowing their bodies to be in the state of readiness for the physical exercise that the performance entails (cf. Schechner 2002: 239; Meyer-Dinkgräfe 2013: 103). The museum educators did not, however, warm-up and I suggest that this can be connected to Ester's statement on that no one wants to do the guided tours. It is possible that this could be a consequence of how guided tours were valued in the museum. Another reason for them not to warm-up was that some museum educators were paid for the time that they performed in front of the audience – warm-up was, thus, not something that they were paid to do.

Although the museum educators stated that they did not warm-up in any special way there were, nevertheless, actions that could be seen as such and the one thing that marked that they were going to do a guided tour, and that also marked a difference from any other activities, was that they hung a nametag around their neck. As such the name-tag marked

their bodies as museum educators and was also a marking of their bodies as being ready for the guided tour.

Another aspect that could be seen as a warm-up, although not articulated as such, was the initial meeting with a group. Gustav said that it was important for him to get down to the entrance a few minutes before the guided tour to befriend the group. He said that the few minutes of talking to the group made a difference in 'how the group could be handled, because one creates a relation to them, to become friends with them, before we enter into the exhibition.'<sup>18</sup> Although Gustav articulated the situation as being about the visitor I would, nevertheless, suggest that this was part of warming up.

I observed the museum educators during this process and noticed that all of them behaved in a similar way as they entered into the entrance hall of the museum. Their body language changed; they became more upright, raised their eyes and gazed out over the open hall. All the informants approached the person working at the desk, chatted to her casually, and then moved on to find the group that they were going to perform to and talked casually to them for a few minutes.

All my informants stressed that the initial meeting with the visitors was the most important part of the guided tour. Gustav told me when we watched the film of his guided tour that 'I always talk with the teacher or the leader of the group in order to create an idea of who they are, what they want.'<sup>19</sup> Morgan told me when we watched the film of his guided tour that he liked to be there to meet the group and 'to sound out the mood and listen in on what the teachers want'.<sup>20</sup> All the informants said that by talking to the visitors, learners and the teachers they created a perception of the group. Anneli stated when we watched her film that the initial meeting was when she made inquiries of the level of knowledge and the purpose of their visit.<sup>21</sup> The informants told me that the information that they received was used to renegotiate the structure of the guided tour in terms of what they were going to mediate and how they were going to perform.

### **Interacting with visitors**

After the initial meeting the museum educator accompanied the visitors into the exhibition. In this museum the guided tour lasted around 50 minutes and was structured in different phases; an introduction followed by about five different stops in the exhibition (lasting between 5-10 minutes each), and ending with a formal conclusion whereby the museum educator accompanied the visitors back to the entrance. The guided tours were lecture-oriented, not uncommon for museums in general (cf. Tran and King 2007: 133). Yet they were not didactic and non-responsive, something that Tran and King (2007: 133-134) has noted that scholars falsely present guided tours as.

The observations revealed that the interaction in the exhibition started off in a didactic way, but my informants told me that there was a reason for this as they sought to establish their role as a leader. Subsequently they allowed the visitors more space to interpolate. Before this could happen my informants expressed that it was important to implement a sense of a framework so that the 'cooperation' could work. The word 'cooperation' sometimes replaced the term guided tour and this explains how the informants regarded the guided tour. Doing a guided tour was to them not about a one-way communication but a relational situation. Jenny Kidd (2011: 208) writes that this kind of guided tour, where the visitors are allowed to interpolate, requires a highly skilled performer that is open to rearrangements. At the same time, Kidd (2011: 208) writes, museum educators must be prepared to have their authority challenged. Kidd's statement can be related to my informants' description during the preparation and how they prepared to be able to answer all question possible and suddenly alter their performance if needed.

Considering the guided tour as the 'cooperation' suggests that the role of the museum educator also changed depending on how the cooperation was played out. John said that 'I have different roles depending on what purpose the group has with the visit'<sup>22</sup> Ester verified this and said:<sup>23</sup>

You are a teacher, but you are also the host of a building, a museum [...] you are also an entertainer and performer. One also have to be damn interesting all the time, even more so than an ordinary teacher who works at a school as I have to capture and maintain the interest of people who I meet during a very short time.

Ester explained that she really tried her best to figure out what the visitors hoped to gain from visiting the museum so that she could accommodate their needs. My informants elaborated on this in various, but similar, ways and Klara said that 'museum education is to be able to adjust to the group,'<sup>24</sup> John said that it was important to 'meet the visitors where they are'<sup>25</sup> and Morgan told me that his role as a museum educator was 'to be a speaking-partner' or 'someone that listens' and 'a bridge across the unknown.'<sup>26</sup> The present study, much like Tran and King's (2007) and Best's (2012) studies, show a complexity in how the informants' explain what guided tours entail. The word 'cooperation' was in other words used as a way to describe and stress that the guided tours were something that they were doing together with the visitors. The informants' articulations exemplify that the guided tour is, drawing on Barad, not a fixed practice but something constituted in the very doing and in its becoming (cf. Barad 2003: 828). The 'cooperation' is also connected to the discourse of visitor engagement found in museum educational research and I argue, drawing Cooks and LeBesco (2006), that it is important to investigate how discourses play on museum educators' embodied practices, especially as they play a part in how the 'cooperation' was upheld during the performance. During the observation I noticed that the museum educators had a habit of asking questions as a way of engaging with the group. I made inquiries for why they asked so many questions and Klara told me that the reason was so that the visitors could be part of interpreting the exhibition. Instead of Klara offering the answers she wanted the visitors to find the answers themselves.<sup>27</sup> Gustav was of a similar opinion and when watching Gustav's guided tour on film he elaborated on why he asked so many questions:<sup>28</sup>

So it does not become a monologue, and because you want to get away from the traditional and older view of how museum education is carried out, where a person tells you things and holds a monologue, and tells you that this is interesting and this is not interesting [...] one wants to depart from this, not only because it is boring but because it is considered as conservative.

Asking questions is, therefore, a way to invite the visitors to take active part in the learning process, avail them with possibilities to interpret the exhibition and make history together with them and a method to make sure that the visitors understand what the museum educators are mediating. At the same time it is also a critique of previous teaching methods in museums. Gustav's, and the other informants', way of talking about museum education was influenced by the idea of the post-museum, where visitors participate in interpreting history (cf. Hooper-Greenhill 2007b; Henry 2006; Black 2006; Bevan and Xanthoudaki 2008). This idea was also dominant at this institution where it is argued that the museum needs to work to include people in the conversation about the past (cf. Svanberg 2010; Hauptman Wahlgren 2010; Svanberg and Hauptman Wahlgren 2008). Asking questions about performances produces an understanding of how discourses are embodied in guided tours and how museum educators alter their performance in critique of, or response to, these discourses.

### **Performing in the exhibition**

The exhibitions' role in the performance was brought up in several instances, especially in terms of how the exhibition contributed to shaping the performance. When I watched the film together with the informants they predominantly talked about how the exhibition was a hinderance to them. The informants stated that they struggled with making the exhibitions work with them. Yet, it was not something that I observed when participating in the guided tours. Contrary to their statement I noted how they worked with the exhibition trying to make the exhibition work for them. This reveals that what a researcher observes when studying a guided tour is only a fraction of the complex relation to the exhibition, something that Tran and King (2007) also concludes.



The way that the exhibitions affected the museum educators became clear when Klara and I watched her film.<sup>29</sup> She carried out a guided tour in an exhibition with sliding doors sensitive to movement. Behind, and next to, her were multiple TV-projectors that showed different images. The exhibition's movements constantly demanded the visitors' attention. Klara said that 'it is difficult to concentrate on the showcase when so many things are moving at the same time'. I asked if she tried to fight it and she answered 'Yes, I try to fight it and sometimes I even have to stand with my arms stretched out so that they watch this [the showcase] and not the things that are moving'.<sup>30</sup> Anneli touched on this during an interview and she mentioned that the exhibition 'could be a hindrance as much as an opportunity'.<sup>31</sup> Not everyone was, however, disturbed by the exhibitions' feature and Gustav stressed, when discussing his film, that he favored places in the exhibitions where there was 'plenty of things to look at'. Gustav said that the exhibitions contributed to 'upholding the interest' among visitors, and that it assisted the performance. Gustav also said that 'I gladly share the attention with some of the objects [on display]'.<sup>32</sup>

Drawing on Barad (2003: 820-828) I suggest that exhibitions should not be viewed as a fixed essence or a passive product, but as an active part in the becoming of the guided tour. What this means is that the informants, in different ways, expressed that the exhibition helped them, but also hindered them, during the performance. The exhibitions' agency was in some cases articulated as so powerful that it competed with, or overshadowed, the museum educators' performance. Consequently, this is something that needs to be considered to a greater extent when producing exhibitions in order to facilitate museum educators and create good working environments.

### **After the guided tour**

50 minutes is a long time for a guided tour, and a long time to uphold the visitors' attention. Ester said that 'it is quite stressful to be on stage several times a day but it is also a great relief as it entails a total presence in the moment'.<sup>33</sup> Ester and Anneli explained that it was important, when they were doing guided tours, to focus and to be in the 'now' otherwise they would easily lose the visitor's attention.<sup>34</sup> They also explained that to be in the 'now' required intense focus and that they were exhausted after the guided tour. It was, nevertheless, not only the longevity of the guided tour that made them exhausted, but the way that they used the body. Anneli explained that she used the body to underline arguments to the point that it became a physical exercise.<sup>35</sup> Morgan commented on how he inserted the body in the story and I also observed that their gestures were used in very specific ways. They would mimic the objects on display with their hands, outlining shapes or showing how certain objects were used. Gestures were also used to emphasize important words or give attention to visitors' questions. In doing so, the conversation, and story that they told, were condensed and compressed – becoming matter in, and through, the museum educators' bodies.

The bodily tension, as experienced by the museum educators, takes some time to leave the body, yet a cool-down, like a warm-up, was not included in the museum educators' daily routine. Or, more correctly, it was not something that they took the time to carry out and it was not something that they were paid to do. Studies show that cooling-down involves being assisted out of non-ordinary states of being (Schechner 2004: 190). I observed that the museum educators did not take their time to do this – they either left the museum or went back to their deskwork. Given the difference between the state of performance and the ordinary state it is essential to have a developed and identified means of returning to the daily mood. A cool-down is a time to restore balance and to avoid performance hangover that otherwise follows the museum educator into other activities (cf. Meyer-Dinkgräfe 2013: 102-13). The non-existent cool-down, I argue, could be regarded 'as performance' of institutionalized attitudes to guided tours, in which guided tours are not considered as a valued practice.

### **Post-Performance and archiving experiences**

Research into theater performances holds that the post-performance phase is an important period when performers archive the experience or contemplate the performance (Schechner

2002: 245-246). My informants, nevertheless, told me that there was no interest or support from the museum to evaluate, document or discuss the guided tours other than to evaluate the visitors' experiences. Any consideration of how the guided tour could be improved was something that they had to think about outside office hours. The transient nature of the performance could be the reason why the performances were not archived and considered to a greater extent. One of my informants, Morgan, exemplified this when he referred to the museum's careful scrutiny of exhibition texts, whereas consideration of what the museum educators said or how they performed was not something that was discussed to the same degree according to him.

Archiving performances is an important process of uncovering professionalism in museum education. Helen Charman (2005) writes that teaching in museums is largely intuitive and involves practical know-how. She stresses the need to make this into professional knowledge. I suggest that archiving performances are part of documenting and discussing the knowledge so it can contribute to the development of museum education at the institution. Part of this process, drawing on Alexander (2006: 253-254), Taylor (2006: 83) and Schneider (2001: 104-106), is acknowledging the history of the guided tour as archived in the museum educators' flesh and furthermore access and discuss this knowledge as well as make provisions for preserving it in other ways than in the museum educators' body. A greater understanding of the performance process, also gained when archiving it, could assist in elevating the museum educators' status within the institution and assist in developing the guided tours further.

## Conclusion

In order to better understand what can be learned from guiding bodies there is a need to theorize museum educators' performance and articulation thereof. In an attempt to do so I have discussed different phases during the performance and I have sought to, through the museum educators' articulations, theorize the often intuitive know-how of guided tours. I have highlighted how museum educators consider guided tours as being in a constant state of becoming – something particularly evident in the relation to the visitors but also to the exhibitions. My informants expressed how the exhibitions shaped their performance during the preparations and during the staging of the performance. They also stated that they often had to submit to the exhibitions' agency. Consequently, there is a need to acknowledge how institutional attitudes work through material culture and how this come to matter during the guided tours. If museums take museum educators awareness more seriously the knowledge could also benefit exhibition-making processes enormously.

In this paper I have discussed the preparations, the aftermath, and the archiving of the performances and this focus should be understood as a response to the academic discourse on museum education that has focused predominantly on visitor encounters and learning. I suggest that a greater focus on these phases is needed in order for a more comprehensive understanding of museum education and for an expansion of the scholarly discourse in museum education, but also in order to work for the museum educators' wellbeing.

I have also, in this paper, sought to discuss the doing of guided tours, the performance, as a site where museum education is created and recreated, as a site where knowledge is produced about museum education and as a site where knowledge is transmitted and upheld over time. I have tried, through the articulations of the museum educators, to unlock this knowledge and attempted to theorize the intuitive knowledge and that which is often rendered silent.

Received: 17 November 2013

Finally accepted: 20 February 2017

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the museum educators at The Swedish History Museum for their participation in the study. I also would like to thank Åke Wibergs Stiftelse for financing this study.

**Notes**

- 1 Betänkande av Kulturutredningen SOU 2009:16, <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/11266/a/120332>, Accessed 23 januari 2012
- 2 Ester, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 16 November 2011.
- 3 Morgan, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 9 December 2011.
- 4 Ester, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 16 November 2011.
- 5 Previous to this study (2009-2010) I was employed as a part time museum educator at this museum. I, therefore, know the informants very well and I also have an embodied understanding of doing museum education at this museum.
- 6 Klara, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 16 November 2011.
- 7 Anneli, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 31 October 2011.
- 8 Ester, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 16 November 2011.
- 9 John, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 8 December 2011.
- 10 Gustav, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 8 November 2011.
- 11 Gustav, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 15 November 2011.
- 12 Gustav, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 8 November 2011.
- 13 Gustav, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 15 November 2011.
- 14 Anneli, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 31 October 2011.
- 15 Anneli, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 31 October 2011.
- 16 Anneli, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 31 October 2011.
- 17 John, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 8 December 2011.
- 18 Gustav, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 15 November 2011.
- 19 Gustav, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 8 December 2011.
- 20 Morgan, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 9 December 2011.
- 21 Anneli, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 10 December 2011
- 22 John, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 8 December 2011.
- 23 Ester, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 16 November 2011.
- 24 Klara, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 6 December 2011.
- 25 John, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 8 December 2011.
- 26 Morgan, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 27 October 2011.
- 27 Klara, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 6 December 2011.
- 28 Gustav, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 8 December 2011.

- <sup>29</sup> Klara, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 8 December 2011.
- <sup>30</sup> Klara, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 8 December 2011.
- <sup>31</sup> Anneli, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 31 October 2011.
- <sup>32</sup> Gustav, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 8 December 2011.
- <sup>33</sup> Ester, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 16 November 2011.
- <sup>34</sup> Ester, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 16 November 2011.  
Anneli, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 13 October 2011.
- <sup>35</sup> Morgan, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 27 November 2011,  
Anneli, interviewed by Cecilia Rodéhn, digital recording, Stockholm 31 October 2011.

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