



Whom does the object call for?

Encoding activism in exhibitions in Sweden

Giuseppina Addo

Media and Communication Studies

School of Arts & Communication K3

Second year Master thesis | 15 credits

Submitted: Summer 2021

Supervisor: Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt

Thank you God Almighty.

*This thesis is dedicated to my Sisters Without Borders.
Thank you for giving me the precious gift of friendship and sisterhood.
I love you very much.*

ABSTRACT

The museum of the twenty-first century is operating against the backdrop of ongoing social concerns pertaining to climate change, gender inequalities and racial tensions, and often exhibitions become the contact zones where those expressions are formulated. This research analyses how a democratic and inclusive philosophical perspective such as the *Tingens Metod* (or method of the thing) is executed by museum professionals. In doing so, Stuart Hall's model of encoding/decoding is applied as the theoretical framework in investigating the process of exhibition production. It is argued that occasionally resistant positions can emerge from the museum's ideological discourse and that key actors within the museum field yield different codes according to their own framework of knowledge and relations of production. This challenges the basic assumption in Hall's model that media institutions yield one singular preferred code into the system. Overall, it is argued that an object-oriented democracy has the potential of challenging power structures, albeit still contingent upon the choices made by museum professionals.

Key words: Encoding/decoding; *Tingens Metod*; exhibition production.

Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	5
<i>Background</i>	7
<i>Literature review</i>	11
FROM AUTHORITY TO PARTICIPATION	11
THE ENLIGHTENMENT CONTINUUM	13
MUSEUMS AS CONTACT ZONES	16
THE TINGENS METOD	17
THE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF MUSEUMS	19
<i>Theoretical framework</i>	21
MUSEUMS AS MEDIA MAKERS	21
ENCODING/DECODING	22
<i>Methodology</i>	25
RESEARCH PARADIGM	25
SAMPLE	25
LIMITATIONS	26
DATA COLLECTION - DIGITAL ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWS	27
DATA ANALYSIS	28
<i>Ethical considerations</i>	29
<i>Analysis</i>	29
THE TINGENS METOD ENCODING-DECODING MODEL	29
THE TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE	30
The museum furniture	30
Text panels	31
The museum space	33
FRAMEWORK OF KNOWLEDGE	34
Exhibitions as hot topics	34
The professional code	37
Mindset and elitism	39
RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION	41
Hierarchies of power	41
<i>Discussion and conclusions</i>	43
<i>Future research</i>	45
<i>Bibliography</i>	46
<i>Appendix</i>	49

List of tables and figures

Figure 1: Encoding/Decoding model, Stuart Hall (1973).....	23
Figure 2: Encoding/decoding model adapted from Hall (1973)	30
Table 1: Interview Sample	26

Introduction

The museum of the twenty-first century is operating against the backdrop of ongoing social concerns ranging from climate change to gender inequalities, to racial tensions, and often exhibitions become the contact zones where those expressions are formulated. Traditionally museums have been spaces removed from public debates as contested or controversial issues were actively avoided. However, what can be considered as “hot topics” are now finding their way into museological culture (Cameron 2010:1), which can be interpreted as an attempt on the side of museums to embrace a more active role within the public discourse. This shift appears to partly stem from the understanding that engaging with issues that matter to audiences casts museums as progressive, democratic and open institutions, thus more approachable to their audiences. However, the counter argument to that is that when museums take part in social justice conversations they risk becoming a lobbyist institution, instead of a space for knowledge acquisition. In attempting to navigate this very contentious balance it can be argued that for the sake of their own survival museums have no choice but to offer what their public seek, especially in a very competitive entertainment marketplace; not to mention that the very display of colonial objects makes those self-reflections, and debates on the thorny legacy of the European empire project, utterly unescapable.

As media producers, museums are interested in the way their message is consumed. Thus, by viewing exhibitions as a collective production process, parallels are drawn to how broadcasted television programs are created and how the process of encoded messages take place. Hence, by applying Stuart Hall’s communication model of encoding/decoding to the production process of an exhibition, the argument made is that just as television broadcasters museum professionals also operate within the technical infrastructure of the museum according to their own framework of knowledge and relations of production. Hall’s three sites of production offer a useful foundation in analysing the process of meaning making and exploring how dominant ideas take shape within heritage institutions.

As museums are attempting to become more inclusive and democratic, the study also aims to investigate how a co-creation method such as the Tingens Metod can practically take place. The Tingens Metod (or method of the thing) offers a perspective that is not centered on the curator nor the audiences, but solely on the artefact. Its philosophical underpinning is that objects possess relational properties and epistemic value, thus through their networked narratives different layers of stories can be unlocked, which can ultimately result in a multivocal and democratic museum environment (Tingenes Metode, website). Theoretically

the method stems from the work of Bruno Latour and his collaboration with Peter Weibel in the exhibition *Making Things Public: Atmosphere of Democracy*, where they sought to connect politics with science and art (Latour and Weibel 2005). Borrowing a phrase from computer science and coding, they asked “what would an object-oriented democracy look like?” (Latour and Weibel 2005:14). In this sense, by looking at things as assemblages, and not as atomised units, objects can be perceived as nodes of connections dependent on other things and people. Consequently, this relationality can evoke emotions, disruptions, agreements and even disagreements which, ultimately, opens the space for negotiations and dialogue within the museum context. In its multidisciplinary focus the Tingens Metod (TM hereafter) has the potential of gathering a vast array of voices as decision making partners who do not abide under structural hierarchies. This ethos is captured in the question “whom does the object call for?” (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt et al., forthcoming), which attempts to override any curatorial decision-making framework in favour of a perspective that calls for multiple narratives centered around the object.

The research stands at what could be considered a peculiar intersection between museum studies and media and communication studies. Interestingly, this position allows for a wider epistemological reflection on the ways in which knowledge takes shape within institutional settings. Hall’s encoding/decoding model paved the way for a critical reflection on how audiences receive and decode messages, however by focusing on the often-overlooked side of the production process, I argue that here too we can find negotiations of power and ideological differences that can impact the encoded text. Since exhibitions are the medium through which audiences encounter museums, investigating the process through which knowledge takes shape provides a useful matrix that can help understand how modern ideas of inclusivity and democracy are formulated within institutions. By doing so, the study aims to contribute to the wider, and necessary, discussion on the role of museums in society and their ongoing search for a unified identity that can both serve their didactic purposes on the one hand, and their need for audience engagement on the other hand.

The thesis is structured around the following parts: in the first section, starting from the background, the societal issue is identified by situating the study in the contemporary, and ongoing, philosophical question relating to the identity of museums. Consequently, a historical account is given regarding the origins of the European museum as the literature review explores the role of exhibitions and how they contribute to rendering museums bona fide media institutions instead of just heritage institutions. The second part situates the research within the appropriate theoretical framework, then the third part gives an account of

the methodological choice as well as a reflection on epistemological and ontological questions. In the fourth part ethical considerations are reviewed, while the fifth part foregrounds the analysis of the dataset by specifically focusing on Hall's structures of production, namely the technical infrastructure, the framework of knowledge and the relation of production. The final parts engage in the discussion of the analysis against the research questions posed, and concluding remarks are given as future research questions are suggested.

Background

Aiming to respond to the need of the evolving role that museums hold in society, in summer 2020 the International Council of Museums (ICOM) created the Committee on Museum Definition in order to offer a new updated version of the current definition. Since 2007 ICOM has defined museums as:

A non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment (ICOM, website).

The proposed definition was formulated to address the growing request of museums to become more open and inclusive spaces where healthy societal debates could be fostered. Thus, members were called to vote on a definition which could reflect this trend and, as such, the proposal saw museums as:

Democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the past and the future addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present. They hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people (...). Museums are “participatory and transparent”, work “in active partnership with and for diverse communities“ and “aim to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing” (The Art Newspaper, 2020).

The new definition caused major disagreements among the council, even prompting several members, including the head of the committee to resign (The New York Time, 2020). Some members deemed this vision unacceptable as it constituted a significant ideological shift akin to a museological political manifesto, while others deemed the original definition archaic and not reflective enough of the profound societal changes and cultural shift that museums were

called to respond to (The Art Newspaper, 2020). Overall, the incident reflects a deep internal chasm of interpretations pertaining to the very identity of museums institutions and their mission in contemporary society. The question at the heart of the debate is whether museums should be regarded as spaces that simply exhibit objects for didactic goals, or as institutions actively engaged in addressing socio-political issue.

The modern European museum originates from the Enlightenment era, as a product of a period which saw reason and scientific discoveries as instrumental for the civilization of European citizens (Bennett 1995; Hooper-Greenhill 1992). Drawing on from the Foucauldian notion of governmentality, Bennett (1995: 24) has suggested that museums became part of the nineteenth-century governments' strategies to regulate citizen by leveraging the power of the museum in mediating cultural experiences, in the hopes that the exposure would lead to a progressive modification of thoughts and behaviours. Thus, museums have traditionally been storehouses of knowledge and their prime currency still remains knowledge, as reflected in ICOM's original definition.

The knowledge offered by museums is viewed as unquestionable and absolute which is what has traditionally attracted audiences in the first place (MacDonald 2012) as visitors are directed towards the museum because of its knowledge offering. Within this space, knowledge is conveyed through a system of classification occurring "within an ethos of obviousness" as Hooper-Greenhill notes (1992: 5). This system of grouping is not rational nor is it void of power, but rather it is the result of curatorial practices. In shaping our knowledge of the world, museums retain the power to make decisions concerning objects as to when they should be viewed, how they should be viewed and what specific objects in their collections should be viewed (ibid: 7). As other scholars have pointed out, the presence of labels, the commentary around the object, the classification in relations to other objects offer a historical background, as well as a frame of reference through which the audience views the world (Pearce, 1992; Alberti, 2005). Thus, museums offer knowledge that is carefully curated and calibrated by virtue of the selection of its displayed and the relationship that objects hold within the network. Even in instances where there is an absence of text-heavy displays, the argument can still be made that visitors are called to reflect upon a curatorial choice and interpretation.

Museums are far from being neutral spaces as they are populated by individuals making subjective choices (Marstine 2006:2). However, the argument is not that museums should be objective and impartial arenas void of any ideological inclination, which would be rather impossible to achieve. The reflection, which is also the one brought forward by the new

museology movement of the late twentieth century, is that museums should be invited spaces where traditional practices are to be questioned, debated, and even, challenged. In his seminal work Peter Vergo (1989) calls into question the foundational assumption of the institution raising the argument that museums lacked self-reflection and that they needed to “to shift focus from method to purpose” (Vergo 1989:3). Indeed, the movement has contributed to making museums more inclusive and accessible to different interpretations of the world. As such, the postmodern museum aims to be democratic not only pertaining to its practices, but also in its agenda by shifting focus from being collection-centred to being visitor centred (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Runnel 2011: 260).

The transformational movement appears to be easily implemented in liberal democratic societies rather than autocratic ones, and perhaps this is one of the foundational challenges that ICOM is currently facing. As a liberal democratic society, Sweden is a country whose foundational ethos is rooted in the willingness to promote inclusivity and power sharing within publicly funded spaces such as museums. Before ICOM’s push for a new definition of museums, the question of how museums could engage with diverse communities and be a catalyst for social change was already addressed in certain museums. For example, in 2004 with the opening of the Museum of World Culture (Världskulturmuseet) in Göteborg, the aim of the museum was to become a dialogical space between Swedish and non-Swedish cultures to reflect the nation’s transformation into a multicultural society, and in the hopes to combat xenophobia and segregation (Widén 2011: 8). Such claims reflect a bold step with the institution fully embracing its role as an active agent for the promotion of liberal and progressive values. However, the path towards a democratic and polyphonic museum space in the Nordic context is still long. As Temi Odumosu reminds us through her work with Danish cultural institutions, there are real challenges when intervening in institutions and attempting to critique stakeholders’ traditional practices (Odumosu 2019:616). In her capacity as invited expert to help facilitate the debate on the colonial imagery in two major Danish cultural institutions (the Statens Museum for Kunst and the Royal Library of Denmark), she confesses that there is still an institutional unwillingness to curate a permanent space where Danish colonial history could be engaged with, which in turn exposes issues of access and institutional exclusivity (Ibid.).

Nordic museums appear to be aware of their own institutional shortcomings and some museums are willing to embark on a journey of power-sharing practices by experimenting with new modes of openness and dialogue. As aforementioned, the TM is a curatorial practice which aims to foster audience engagement by placing the object (or artefact) at the

centre of discussion. The method reflects the question of how museums can combine the desire for openness and inclusion with their core activities such as administration, research and dissemination (Tingenes Metode website). It is beginning to find a footing in the Nordic countries as it is currently being tested in Norway and in three museums in Sweden, namely Malmö Museum, Gothenburg Museum and the Technical Museum in Stockholm.

I first encountered this experimental method during my internship when I reached out to the course coordinator, Professor Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt to enquire on the possibility of assisting her with some of the museum projects she was involved in. I soon discovered that the TM is a project supported by the Swedish Art Council and it consists of a four-year collaboration between the three Swedish museums and a cross border support from the Technical Museum of Oslo (Malmö Stad website). The project also includes the writing of a book project, an anthology edited and published by the Technical Museum of Oslo where each museum is required to provide a scholarly report on how the TM has been used within their institutions in order to expand and share knowledge on the method. The Malmö University research team headed by Professor Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt was tasked with writing two chapters for the book as the team had previously worked closely with Malmö Museums by providing workshops and lectures to the personnel. Part of my internship duties was to collect data on the museums in Malmö, but consequently it snowballed to include the Technical Museum in Stockholm and the Gothenburg City Museum. Consequently, I was able to interview Henrik Treimo, the Norwegian project manager who has been testing the method at the Technical Museum in Oslo in the past years and had published several works on the subject. The thesis is the result of my ongoing observatory work of Swedish museums as they attempt to move away from traditional ideas of curatorship towards a more equitable idea of “stewardship”. Stewardship, according to Joel Wurl (2005:72), views the archival material not as property, but as a cultural asset co-owned by the institution and the community of origin.

As such the research questions that the thesis aims to respond to are:

“In what ways can the Tingenes Metod elicit pluralistic voices within the production of an exhibition?” and in doing so “what are some of the power dynamics that influence the process of exhibition making?”

Literature review

FROM AUTHORITY TO PARTICIPATION

Historically the power of interpretation and framing has been in the hands of the curator. The object became what Pearce (1992) calls “material autobiography”, as the identities and interests of the curator became entangled with the objects. However, it would be erroneous to assume that the authority of museums relied solely on the expertise of the museum personnel. Visitors sought the knowledge of museums because of the status of museums and what they represented. Curators spoke with authority because of the place they worked and not necessarily who they were (Alberti 2011). Nevertheless, the symbiotic relationship between the museums and the curator is of great interest. While the former constructs a narrative of the world, the latter provides the language through which that story is to be told. In their dispensation of knowledge, museums become a “performative cultural site” (Goroain 2001:235) whereby the audience becomes a spectator of a performance written and narrated by the museum through the historical scripts of the collections and exhibitions on display, while the behind the scenes work of narrating the past is done by the professional staff of the museum. Goroain even likens some of the performative strategies of museums to that of the Church. For example, the maintenance of low-level lighting to protect artifacts from harmful illumination recalls the ways in which cathedrals create a meditative and reflexive state in believers; or the way artifacts are mounted to orient the gaze of the viewer harkens back to believers’ servile position as they worship the divine (2001: 247). Whether done purposefully or not, these are processes that have contributed to solidifying the institutional power of museums in society. If the museum is the church, then the curator is the priest who provides the main entrance point to the correct interpretation of the sacred text - the artefact. In addition to this, museums and art galleries, have traditionally enforced a “no-photo policy”, as well as limiting access to the “behind-the-scenes” of their production which have further contributed to creating an aura of mystery around them. Arguably this is done with the purpose of maintaining the status of the museum as the unique producer of high culture.

In contrast to the argument that sees museums as a hegemonic creator of historical scripts, Smith (2020), proposes a different view that insists on viewing heritage sites and visitors as co-creators of heritage. She defines heritage as “a process, an act of using the past to help make sense of the present and resource aspiration for the future” (Smith 2020: 5). Her argument is that museums are sites where people choose to go to feel and be emotional.

These emotions are then used to justify, inform or sometimes challenge the meanings that people bring with them and hold on to from their visit (Ibid.). The practice of heritage making is not imposed solely on the visitor, but also on the museum professional who challenges the hegemonic assumptions embedded in heritage management by negotiating the meaning and nature of social and cultural conflicts (Ibid.: 20). Thus, the process of heritage making becomes a participatory encounter between the institution and the visitor with visitors seeking the institutional knowledge of the museum, while museums rely on visitors' attendance to maintain their social relevance. However, it can be argued that as museums are finding themselves in competition with other actors in the leisure industry, they need to parlay their exhibitions to connect emotionally with their visitors in similar ways as other actors in the entertainment industry. This means also taking a bolder approach in conceptualising exhibitions that may be deemed controversial or heavily politicised in order to respond to visitors' emotional needs, or also opening up the spaces that have traditionally been "off-limit" in order to bring visitors into their sacred spaces so that bonds of emotional connections can be formed, and ultimately retain visitor's loyalty.

Within museum spaces communication is built through the consumption of content from visitors, and in order to increase their attractiveness museums need to engage with audiences in new creative and innovative ways. Drawing on the lessons provided by web-based platforms and their success in fostering a culture of participation, Simon (2010) lays out the argument that cultural institutions such as museums can also become more inclusive in their approach to stakeholders and audiences. She argues that museums are in the process of collective memory making and that communication should build on individual consumption of content to ultimately become a social interaction between museums and visitors. Similar to the logic behind social networking sites, Simon envisions five stages of social participation where museums can locate their visitors as they graduate the different levels of engagement (Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, u.d). In this sense, visitors approach the initial stage as "individual consumers", to gradually have "individual interaction" with the museum, and as the interaction intensifies, it creates what she calls a "networked interaction" with other visitors. Eventually the aggregated contributions turn into a "social engagement" (ibid.). Simon's work responds to the need that many cultural institutions have been plagued by the problem of exclusivity and are often characterised as hegemonic organisations operating with a top-down approach. This because as Enlightenment institutions, museums' power is exercised through the careful and ordered deployment of knowledge within an institutionally controlled and publicly monitored environment (Bennett 1995; Hooper- Greenhill 2000).

Simon's approach, however, does still convey a top-down institutional response to inclusiveness and openness as museums still hold intellectual control over the process of social participation and heritage making.

Nevertheless, even in its top-down institutional approach museums are still aware of outside influence and do not necessarily regard their practices as strictly hegemonic. In the Foucauldian understanding of hegemony, power is not imposed on individuals, but it is negotiated through social relations, as such the same framework can be applied to museum-visitor relations. For example, Mägi and Lepik (2019) argue that in producing exhibitions, curators are also subjected to the influence of museum partners and stakeholders as the need to receive approval from industry professionals, financial stakeholders or targeted audiences directs their curatorial choices. Moreover, since museums are increasingly facing financial challenges they have to attract corporate sponsorship by curating popular exhibitions, which means that from the earliest stages of the planning process museum staff bear in mind potential sponsors, and as a result of this, they constraint themselves in order to win their support (Alexander 1999: 30). In this framework, power is not a negative or oppressive force, but rather it is employed considering the different interests through the deployment of curatorial expertise. Still, the question remains as to what type of knowledge is being presented for debate since curatorial choices form the basis of every representation.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT CONTINUUM

Stuart Hall invites us to think of heritage as a discursive practice where nations construct their identities by selectively binding their chosen high points and memorable achievements into an unfolding "national history" (Hall 1999:4). Thus, heritage reflects the governing assumptions of its time and context as "it is imbued by the power and authority of those who have colonised the past" and those whose version of the history matter the most (Ibid). Hall argues that these assumptions are often viewed as natural, true and rarely questioned. Through the process of what he calls "selective canonisation" authority and institutional legitimacy is conferred to the selective tradition, thus rendering it almost impossible to revise (Ibid.: 5). Museums are actors in constructing the national identity and objects provide the narrative for such representation. A colonial object in the British Museum, for instance, tells the story not only of a nation's imperialistic expansions, but it also provides the framework through which colonised subjects are viewed in relation to the coloniser, and the narrative that is told concerning them.

Museums, for Witcomb, are caught between their traditional role as rational and civilizing institutions and their association with the “sins of the West.” She argued, ultimately, that just as museums cannot represent their collected world anymore through totalizing visions, neither can the world represent the museum through a totalizing vision of its past, present, and future (Witcomb 2003:18). As already established museums are very much concerned with outside influences as external stakeholders do shape the message they produce since visitors are not mere passive consumers (Mägi and Lepik, 2019; Mason 2006). In Hall’s notion of heritage, history is viewed as a static irredeemable past which provides the baseline for future narrations. However, it can be argued that the narrative with museums is in constant evolution. The benefits brought forward by the new museology is the ability to engage museums in constant self-reflection as audiences are invited as co-creators in the process of storytelling. Owing to their Enlightenment genealogy, museums are often engaged in the process of critique of history and are in permanent search of progress and development as demonstrated by ICOM’s search for a new updated museological definition. So, museums can be seen as “progressive” (Lord 2006) in the sense that the museum is constantly progressing out of its Enlightenment framing of universal truths and reason by critiquing those very premises while at the same relying on its Enlightenment roots to bring forward new developments and embrace societal changes.

It is still important to reflect on how and to what extent can participatory practices fully democratise museum spaces. As already mentioned, in Simon’s (2010) work, museums still hold institutional power. Moreover, it could be argued that in its progressive trajectory (Western) museums have gone beyond participation to now embrace social justice and community engagement as a broader social responsibility (Coghlan 2018: 796). The criticism levelled against this new perspective is that in its righteous attempts to advocate for democratic principles, the new museum assumes the position of a social reformer, which harkens back to the original philosophical underpinnings of the old museum as argued by Bennett (1995). In fact, in his analysis of the birth of the museum, Bennett positions museums as devices for the edification and inculcation of values considered to be beneficial for the functioning of society. The participatory practices that the New Museology advocates for are still conveyed as a top-down interventionism with the ultimate goal of reforming society. Robinson (2020: 484) calls this “the paradox and tyranny of participation”. In her reflection of participatory practices, she notes that:

Where ‘access’ and ‘social inclusion’ concerns are most explicit, the museum is least likely to yield its epistemological authority and is, instead, often reconfiguring its

institutional approach as one with explicit and planned social outcomes. In these instances, power remains centralised within the institution and participation becomes a vehicle for the reform of the visitor which, in its outcomes-driven logic, often runs counter to the original ideals of New Museology (Robinson 2020: 482).

As these participatory interventions are understood as a long-term strategy, the new museum retains more power (thus, more funding), since the focus of improvement is not the institution per se, but the visitor. Lynch and Alberti (2010:14) argue that the rationale behind many participatory initiatives still sees visitors as receivers and beneficiaries of museums policies for inclusion while maintaining the museum as an invited space. In many senses the argument is that the new participatory turn has not been successful at bridging the hierarchical separation between the institution and the visitor, but it continues to perpetrate the institutional power of the museum.

To understand why the full scope of the democratisation project has failed to realise, Ashley (2014) offers an analysis of the approach behind museums civic engagement. She argues that most museum's attempts at inclusiveness and audience participation amount to "democratisation of culture". This perspective sees the existence of a dominant cultural narrative to which the audience is invited to partake through various forms of engagement. This top-down approach enforces certain cultural norms that are thought to be beneficial to the public. For Ashley, real democratic outcomes presuppose an assertion of participants' agency and the freedom to use culture and heritage as a resource (2014: 263).

It is also important to note that full participation might not be a realistic goal as audiences require a certain degree of scaffolding which would still tilt the power balance in favour of the museum, not to mention that not all museum visitors are interested in participating in the process of creation.

Another alternative could be what Lynch and Alberti (2010) call "cultural democracy". This approach entails a genuine surrender of power from museums as they relinquish control over the method and products used in the collaborative process (Ibid.). The authors place radical trust as a fundamental component of the process, even if the outcome of those processes do not necessarily lead to polished end-results or consensus among participants. However, the challenge of this perspective is that for some museum professionals surrendering power to amateur visitors can be a daunting task. As Tatsi (2012: 76) notes, a significant obstacle encountered by museum professionals is the anxiety that they harbour towards participatory practices as their own professional standards, and therefore identity, might be damaged or weakened by amateurish involvement in the complicated process of

exhibition production. Genuine collaboration is a long-term (often arduous) commitment process which actively and consciously attempts to veer away from tokenistic practices by fully addressing conflicts that naturally arise from democratic participation. Moreover, true participation aims at neutralising the power imbalance between museum and participant which ideally should start prior to the conception of a museum project, such as an exhibition for example. In this regard the TM could provide a new framework for envisioning a participatory process centred around the agency of the object instead of the museum.

MUSEUMS AS CONTACT ZONES

Clifford's concept of "museums as contact zones" (1997) has been used as the basis for many collaborative programs. Contact zones refer to social spaces where cultures meet, interact and even clash with one another, in the context of asymmetrical relationships of power (in Boast 2011: 57). Thus, museums, particularly European ones, can be viewed as a form of "colonial contact zones" where pluralistic approaches and interpretations can take place. The museum of the twenty-first century is grappling with many concerns pertaining to indigenous rights, gender equality and climate crisis, and often exhibitions become the contact zones where those expressions are formulated.

The 2010 Swedish anthology of conference papers engages with this very question arguing that museums should "become more self-conscious actors in society" (Svanberg 2010:9). The reflection is brought forward by museum professionals who are experienced in curating exhibitions that employ the use of controversial topics as a medium to reach out to visitors. In it the editor notes that: "museums may assume the role as forums in which issues relevant for society can be raised, addressed, debated and reflected upon in new and constructive ways" (ibid.). Museums have, in fact, traditionally been arenas where contested or controversial issues were often talked about in hushed tones and certainly not initiated within internal structures. However, what Cameron calls "hot topics" are now becoming part of museological culture (2010:1) which in part demonstrates that museums are becoming more self-reflective and actively participating in public debates.

The new approach stems from the understanding that audience participation and dialogue are fundamental in the process of exhibition making and that controversy provides the basis for collective dialogue. The trouble with such an activist approach, however, is that it turns museums into what could be seen as a lobbyist institution, instead of a learning institution. In fact, subjects-matters that traditionally preoccupy academia and museums are

replaced by topics that should be on the agenda of political organisations or the news media (Thønborg 2013:7). This is not to mean that controversial subjects should not be tackled by museums. On the contrary, there might be real benefits in using art and objects to spark conversations, and it can also be argued that the nature and history behind certain artifacts inevitably calls for such contention. So, in many ways, museums are forced to engage in the discussion of “hot topics”. However, relying upon provocation to lead community conversations might not always yield the desired results. As Simon notes, “if visitors expect to be shocked or provoked by content on display – as in contemporary art institutions – they may choose to internalise provocation instead of discussing it” (Simon 2010: 132). This is partly connected to the fact that the knowledge dispensed by museums is still viewed as reliable and authoritative, thus, without being exposed to a contrasting argument visitors might not be able to form their own opinion regarding the topic exposed or might even resist or reject the information provided if they suspect some form of “agenda setting” on the part of the museum. Additionally, museums cannot effectively measure and evaluate the impact that their exhibitions have on visitors as they do not possess the resources to undertake longitudinal studies on their visitors, or formulate relevant KPIs to capture specific results. Furthermore, it can be argued that even in their activist approach museums still retain didactic control over the type of lessons and values they wish to promote and instill in their visitors, which harkens back to the issue of governmentality raised in previous sections. In this sense, the activist museum is governing people’s conduct by guiding, shaping and leading them towards a more desirable (perhaps neo-liberal) outcome.

THE TINGENS METOD

The method of the thing (or Tingens Metod) has its origin in the philosophical perspective that things are relational and are understood as both object and assembly (Tingenes Metode, Norwegian website). As each object possesses epistemic value, through their network multiple narratives can be unlocked to provide multiple layers of narratives. Latour elaborated the concept within the exhibition space by conceptualising a narrative of an object-oriented democracy whereby the social environment is analysed through the lenses of the object and the actions prompted by it (Latour 2005). For Latour objects are part of assemblages held together by a network of relations, emotions, but also disruptions and disagreements. He suggests the example of the 2003 explosion of the space shuttle Columbia, which led to the different actors involved in the construction of the project collaborating

together to reassemble the pieces as they investigated the matter. Thus, in its multidisciplinary focus the TM has the potential of gathering a vast array of voices as decision making partners who do not abide under structural hierarchies. Giaccardi et al. (2016) attempt to conduct a TM inspired research project by exploring the concept of an object-centric ethnography of everyday items and how they exist in relation both to humans and other objects. In doing so the authors endeavoured to challenge anthropocentric assumptions of the world and instead shift the focus on how actions and decisions are generated by things. By placing the object at the centre of discussion diverse opinions can be solicited and participatory engagement can be fostered. Simply put, the central argument of TM is that knowledge should not be centralised, instead it should be shared equally irrespective of expertise and hierarchies. The method follows a hermeneutical approach which views knowledge as fluid, relative and culture bound. According to this philosophy knowledge is built from experience and interpretation which promotes the sharing of power between museums and audience as the object becomes free from institutional narratives.

Understandably, the drawback to this is that a full radical implementation of the method can potentially be disruptive to the institution of the museum. In reflecting on a TM based workshop conducted at Malmö Museum, Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and colleagues ponder on this very question: “How can we use things to call for widely democratic participation without losing museums’ stature as knowledge institutions?” (forthcoming). The object calling for expert knowledge can indeed bolster the status of the museum, however the issue arises when, in the pursuit of radical democratic participation, every voice and every perspective is viewed as factual and valid. What then becomes expert knowledge? What would the audience look for in a museum? These are indeed important considerations that the postmodern museum needs to reflect on. An object-based narrative in a museum space can indeed elicit thorny questions for instance regarding the colonial provenance of artifacts, or even the role that museums play in addressing global and local societal issues. The TM remains a philosophical approach and not a method with a guided outline of implementations, so its full scope is yet to be tested. Nevertheless, with its promise of shared authority and untokenized participatory practices, it does fall within the cultural democratic vision conceptualised by Lynch and Alberti (2010). In light of this, it is interesting to analyse the TM from an institutional perspective, rather than an audience perspective. As outlined in previous sections, participatory practices often face institutional obstacles, particularly on the part of museum professionals who might feel that their expertise is questioned (Tatsi 2011) and thus pose some resistance towards participatory practices. By analysing how the method

is implemented by actors positioned at the various institutional levels, we can gain a better understanding of the role that museums can play in facilitating or limiting its full scope, as well as analyse the potential of the method to shift power balances.

THE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF MUSEUMS

The day-to-day operation of museums involve many actors and a variety of interests and skills employed within the structures. In this section I outline the institutional actors involved in the production of an exhibition as this provides a better understanding of the contributions, power and limits that each role entails. In order to gain a better understanding of the internal structure of the museum I reference the 2002 white paper from the Smithsonian Institute which explores the relationship between the operating characteristics of museum organizations, as well as Kamien's (2001) article regarding the key roles involved in the production of an exhibition.

At the organisational level in every museum, the ultimate responsibility for exhibitions rests with the director, who is tasked with reviewing and approving exhibitions. These include long-term exhibition plans, specific exhibition ideas and final exhibition designs. In principle exhibition ideas can originate from many sources and while curators have creative freedom, there is an assumed criteria for selecting exhibitions that are fundable, that fall within the mission statement of the museum, that are actionable (in terms of availability of objects), and have the potential to draw an audience (Smithsonian Institution 2002). Most museums have an internal exhibition committee which reviews exhibition ideas and forwards those they consider viable to the most senior staff or director. A noteworthy consideration pertaining to the selection criteria, is the influence that a current or potential museum stakeholder (such as board members, elected officials, financial supporters) have on a proposed exhibition. This tie becomes even more evident in cases where the museum receives public funds. The potential response of government officials and corporate partners can exert a significant influence. The worry, of course, is that external sponsors might influence exhibitions by censoring the inclusion of certain objects deemed controversial. Still, funding or the potential for funding is considered in all decisions (Ibid.: 9). As mentioned previously, museums are having to rely on auxiliary commercial ventures in order to support their internal activities, and since state funding has decreased over the years, one of the ways to subsidize their income is through corporate-sponsored exhibitions. Theme-based shows and travelling exhibitions are potential blockbusters and can attract large crowds, thus

increasing advertising for potential corporate partners (Alexander 1999: 29). Undoubtedly, the move towards a more business approach has called for other types of actors who are outside museum specialty of education and conservation. Nowadays members of staff responsible for corporate outreach and fundraising can be found in the daily administration of museums, which shows the transformational change of the institution from an academic model to a business-like model.

There are key roles involved in the making of an exhibition some of which are identified by Kamien (2001: 115). Although these are presented as distinctive tasks attributed to a single individual, it is important to note that within the structural management, sometimes these can be incorporated in a single role, especially in small museums with limited budgets, or other times fall within a collective team responsibility. Nonetheless in general the roles consist of:

- The client

This is usually a director or an upper-level administrator. They provide the overall landscape for exhibit efforts. While this person may or may not have provided the creative vision for a specific exhibit, their support of that vision is imperative as they hold the final decision. Worth noting is the commercial language that the author has chosen for this role, which, I argue, fits the commercial turn that modern museums have taken. After all, the client, as a beneficiary of a service, requires that the service (in this case an exhibition) is delivered with the utmost degree of professionalism and care.

- The content specialist (curator, researcher)

They are responsible for providing the content and assure the accuracy of the exhibition. They are tasked with providing the object and archival material to support the content of the exhibition, as well as ensuring the overall communicative effect of the exhibition.

- The designer

Their primary task is to provide the three-dimensional frame for the exhibit's elements and the drawings or documents that will allow the exhibit to be built and installed as designed. Depending on how the team is conceived and managed, this may be a primarily logistical role, or one that helps define what content will be included and its interpretation for the visitor.

- Content interpreter (educator or developer)

The utility of this role is predicated on the notion that a scholarly view of the content is usually not the same as the visitor's view, and as such, it must be edited and translated for the visitor in order to understand the content. The questions content interpreters must ask are: What organization and selection of material, ideas, and experiences will make this exhibit content most accessible to its target audiences?

The assumption in defining clear roles and responsibilities is that individuals will contribute from the vantage point of their expertise, however this does not always guarantee success as they might be compelled to act according to their roles instead of the bigger exhibition project (Smithsonian Institution 2002: 19). Viewing oneself as an "exhibition-maker" instead of a strictly defined role creates a collective understanding of the final goal and the contribution that each person makes in order to achieve a successful outcome. In reflecting back to Treimo's experiment with the TM as he explores a multidisciplinary approach to exhibition design, it becomes evident that such a method could be instrumental in gathering disjointed elements (Treimo, 2019). Particularly given the fact that even in instances where hierarchies are limited or non-existent, the overall consensus tends to favour the curator.

When it comes to audience input, the new museological approach calls for audience inclusion in all stages of the exhibition process, such as before the design, during the design and after the installation. However, as the Smithsonian authors observe, museums are more likely to seek audience input by conducting a post-opening evaluation, rather than in any other key moments of the exhibition design (Smithsonian Institution 2002:22). This point is very important as it showcases the struggle that museums still face in sharing power with their audience and engaging in a full participatory cultural experience.

Theoretical framework

MUSEUMS AS MEDIA MAKERS

Early museums have published books, commissioned movies and incorporated the use of gramophones in order to provide commentary as part of exhibitions (Pavement 2018). This shows that museums have always employed traditional media technologies to communicate their message. Exhibitions, in particular, have been designed to convey ideas and communicate through the senses, whether visually (Kaplan 1995:38) or emotionally (Smith 2020). Museums are indeed media makers as scripting, designing and employing the use of

digital technologies, constitute a significant part of museological practice (Kidd 2014:3). For Parry (2007) museums are three dimensional, multi-sensory, social mediums in which knowledge is given spatial form. In this sense museums are defined and shaped by the media they use (in Kidd 2014:3). The value that museums bring is their ability to speak with multiple voices to engage with a variety of audiences. As argued in previous sections, museums strategically curate blockbuster exhibitions that can potentially draw in large crowds in order to secure business sponsorships (Alexander 1999) or appeal to specific targeted audiences (Mägi and Lepik 2019). This further consolidates the view of museums as cultural broadcasters.

As media producers, museums are interested in the way their message is consumed and retained by their visitors so by framing the communicative process as a transmission model, the museum can be viewed as the communicator who sends a message through a medium, for example an exhibition, to a viewer. In the traditional sense of the model, information is transferred from an authoritative source (the museum) to a less authoritative and less informed receiver (the audience). As already established, museums have privileged a learning paradigm that follows a unidirectional approach, recalling the hypodermic needle theory of early media and communication studies. The curator chooses the object and decides how the object is to be communicated to the audience, with labels and text panels functioning as contextual frameworks. However, in the communication field, this model has been abandoned in favour of other approaches that gives space for audience interpretation or alteration of the message. From this perspective Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding model offers a nuanced perspective in understanding the many ways in which social, economic and political context influence the production of the message and how it is consumed. In applying this model, museums are viewed as media actors engaging in the process of constructing a meaning that will need to be interpreted by an audience.

ENCODING/DECODING

In his seminal essay entitled "Encoding/Decoding in Television Discourse", Stuart Hall (1973) offers a theoretical approach into the ways in which media messages are constructed and subsequently received through a complex structure of power-relations. He suggests four stages within the communication process, namely: production, circulation, use (or distribution) and reproduction, with each stage being independent from the other, but overall constituting a "complex structure of dominance" as he calls it.

According to Hall, the television message is constructed at the production level and as it travels through the different stages of the structure, it is imprinted by institutional power-relations (Fig. 1). He argues that the institutional structures of broadcasting, with their network of production, organised relations and technical infrastructures produce a programme (Hall 1973:3). This programme is then influenced by the distinctive characteristics embedded in the broadcasting apparatus, such as institutional knowledge, professional ideologies, historical technical skills, assumptions about the audience, routine of production etc. For Hall, however, the television discourse does not occur in a vacuum. Images, stories and overall agenda are borrowed from the wider socio-cultural and political structure, so the audience functions as both the source and the receiver of the television message (in During 1993: 508).

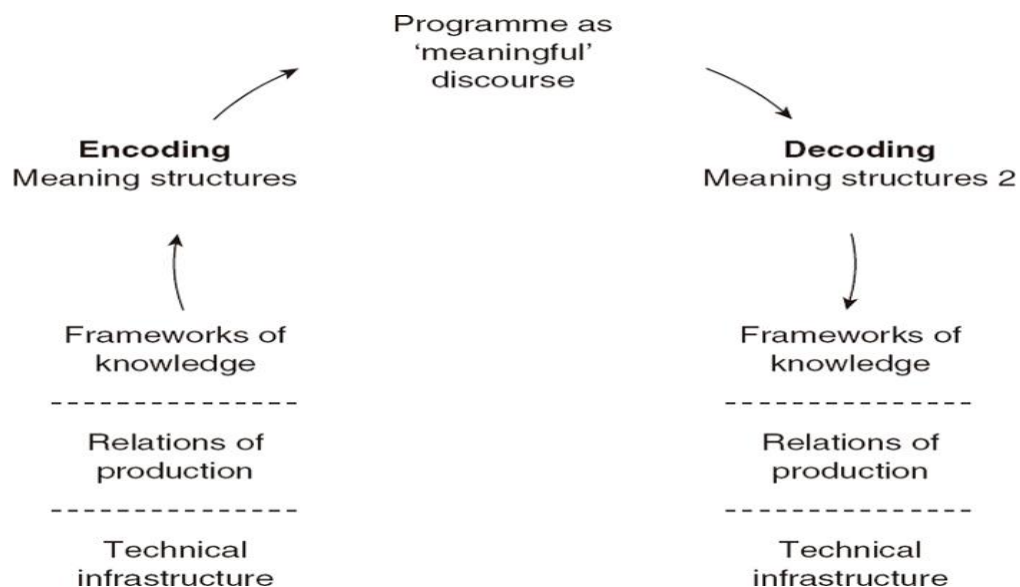


Figure 1: Encoding/Decoding model, Stuart Hall (1973).

According to the model a message becomes effective if it is recognizable by the receiver, which means that power relations at the point of production mirror those at the point of consumption. Conversely, misconstructions or misunderstandings in the message occur when there is a contrasting difference between the two sides of the communication exchange. To understand how different audiences interpret the same message Hall conceptualised three hypothetical positions from which decoding may occur. These are: dominant/hegemonic, negotiated and oppositional positions.

In Hall's model the message is encoded in a singular institutional code, however Ross (2011) challenges this notion by suggesting that encoding occurs at the production level along the same lines they are decoded at the distribution level. So, in our case, the variety of museum personnel working on the production of an exhibition would approach the task with a dominant, negotiated or oppositional position according to their own set of values, ideologies or assumption regarding the audience that would experience the end result. After all, it is important to acknowledge not only the institutional diversity within a museum but also the diversity of voices involved in the production process of an exhibition. Some of the voices may enforce dominant discourse while others challenge them (Worthington 2008: 347). Hall developed the encoding/decoding model in an attempt to challenge the long-held assumption that the television message was structured along a linear pattern of sender-message-receiver paradigm. In applying Hall's model to the museum context, we can also perceive that the message behind exhibitions originates from a set of socio-political and ideological influences, which consequently determines its interpretation.

Exhibitions originate from a curatorial concept that requires the collective force of the museum apparatus to produce. Just as television broadcasters, museum professionals are connected to the ideological apparatus of the institution, and operate according to those framework of knowledge, relations of production within the technical infrastructure of the museum, which means that ideally the museum exhibition should yield what Hall calls a "preferred reading" which is framed as hegemonic. In Hall's view the preferred meaning is a cohesive singular ideological approach, but once again Ross (2011:11) critiques this view by arguing that Hall conflates responses to a preferred meaning with a response in relation to ideological meaning. As he notes, a socialist reading of a socialist text cannot necessarily be deemed hegemonic (Ibid.). This point is highlighted by Morley (1981:5) who applied the model in the Nationwide audience research and asserts that hegemony is indeed an abstract concept as dominant meanings are constructed from cultural processes which are not critically analysed by Hall. Morley also recognised the issue of "class essentialism" as decoding cannot be traced solely to socioeconomic positions.

Despite the model's orientations towards subjective interpretations of the media texts, it still offers a valid framework in analysing museums cultural dominance as media producers and their communicative approach in relation to the audience. The aim of this thesis is not to study how museum audiences receive and interpret exhibitions, but rather analyse the production part of the model by exploring the various actors involved in the production of a

TM-based exhibition, with the aim to better understand how they relate to the production as well as the ways in which power can be shared.

Methodology

RESEARCH PARADIGM

The key features of research lie in its ontological and epistemological assumptions, as the social world we live in informs the everyday choices we make in how we view the world and consequently our own paradigms in relation to research. In the interest of transparency and self-reflection these are to be made clear from the onset. Reflecting on the social settings of media institutions and in the investigation of the specific sites of production, namely the technical infrastructure of the museum, the framework of knowledge and how actors relate to each other through modes of power, it becomes clear that the research paradigm better suited at investigating this process is interpretivism. The interpretive approach emphasises meaning as socially constructed and it aims to describe, understand and explain areas of social life by first gaining access into the world and learning how the inhabitants conceptualise it (Blaikie and Priest 2017: 99). The guiding logic of this paradigm is that social realities are produced and reproduced by social actors, as such it requires constant engagement and interpretation. In this sense knowledge is socially constructed and framed as the result of social, cultural and political hierarchies found in the museum.

SAMPLE

As already stated, part of my internship duties was to collect data on the museums involved in the TM project. The interview started with stakeholders from the Malmö museums, but consequently it snowballed to include the staff working at the Technical Museum in Stockholm and the Gothenburg City Museum. Consequently, I was able to interview Henrik Treimo, the Norwegian project manager who has been testing the method at the Technical Museum in Oslo in the past years and had published several works on the subject. Given the Covid-19 restrictions, all interviews were carried out via Zoom between the months of November and December 2020 and eventually a total number of 10 respondents were interviewed. The table below gives a summary of the stakeholders interviewed with their fictive names as well as the geographical location of their museum (Table 1.).

Table 1: Interview Sample

Role at the museum	Names	Location of museum
Director	Jenny	Southern Sweden
Curator	Anton	Southern Sweden
Curator	Albert	Southern Sweden
Educator	Hannah	Southern Sweden
Collection manager	Ingrid	Southern Sweden
Documentation and collection	Anita	Southern Sweden
Curator	Maggie	Northern Sweden
Educator	Sara	Northern Sweden
Curator	Carina	Northern Sweden
Curator	Henrik	Norway

LIMITATIONS

In the interest of transparency, it is important to reflect on the limits of this study. Given the relatively small sample I would argue that they are not representative of the overall Nordic museum scene, but rather they can be viewed as representative of the museological practices of the stakeholders involved in the project. As the study was carried out during the Covid restrictions, I was unable to physically visit all the museums mentioned and observe how stakeholders produced their exhibitions. I was able to briefly pay visit to a completed exhibition at Malmö Museum before it eventually closed due to lockdown measures. During my visit, I saw their exhibition called *Sailor's Memories* which had been produced following a TM approach. Some of the interviews in the analysis refer to this exhibition, however all

the other exhibitions mentioned are entirely based on the recollection of the interviewees which, in part, limits the knowledge of how the TM is employed in other museum contexts. In hindsight a full participatory observation would have enabled me to conduct a more robust enquiry on museum practices. Nevertheless, the precious contribution of stakeholders' perspective still offers a useful way to understand exhibition processes from within the cultural institution.

DATA COLLECTION - DIGITAL ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWS

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced many scholars within the social science field to reconceptualise their approach to research as physical access to respondents has posed significant challenges. Nevertheless, spatial distances have been bridged by digital communication platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet. Undoubtedly, the current social climate has given space to video communications which has allowed researchers to still carry out ethnographic research. Video communication still allows access to verbal and nonverbal cues by providing an equally authentic experience to in-person interviews (Sullivan, 2012), and compared to other asynchronous and synchronous interviews it provides a more personable interaction and greater spontaneity (Howlett 2021:4). However, the tradeoff to traditional in person interviews are the technical issues that often arise and some initial anxiety about being only able to engage with the headshot of the interlocutor, as well as a degree of self awareness caused by the constant self reflected image in the video. In the specific context of this research this mediated approach would have still been the preferred way regardless of the lockdown measures as some of the museum stakeholders were based outside of Malmö. Notwithstanding the technical obstacles, Zoom interviews fall within the category of qualitative interviews as they provide valuable insights into the complexities of human experiences, attitudes and behaviours (Bauman and Adair 1992:9), which ultimately gives the researcher the opportunity to understand a community or a particular issue. The responses from participants produce detailed situated accounts of lived experiences (Varis 2016:55) which serves to investigate the research question.

In approaching the museum personnel I designed a range of semi-structured questions with a set of descriptive questions regarding roles and responsibilities as entry points into the conversation. All 10 respondents were given the same set of questions, however, during the conversation different points were highlighted and engaged with more deeply depending on the interviewee. As already mentioned the research team at Malmö University had an existing

and ongoing relationship with Malmö Museum and within the TM project as a whole. However, my position was somewhat peculiar as I had not taken part in any of the previous activities, nevertheless, the added value to it was that I approached the interviews as an outsider looking in which allowed me to perceive the encounter from a fresh and objective perspective.

The interviews were carried out in English, and as a non-native Swedish speaker, I reflect on Spradley (1979) perspective on the role of language within ethnographic research. He argues that language is a tool for constructing reality and that different languages express realities by categorizing experiences in different ways (Ibid.:17). Looking back at interactions with my respondents there were moments during the conversations whereby language barriers interfered with the dialogue as some interviewees struggled to convey in English a particular word or concept in English. Although these were technical points and did not pose significant challenges to communication, one wonders if a native Swedish speaker would have perhaps been able to build a different rapport with the respondents. Nevertheless, I believe that the responses provide a faithful recollection of the interviewees' perspectives on the subject. In the appendix I provide an example of an interview with a museum staff.

DATA ANALYSIS

The guiding hypothesis in this research is that since museums can be viewed as media institutions, applying Stuart Hall's television model opens the space to investigate how messages are encoded in the production of exhibitions through the different actors involved in the process. In Hall's model the production level is composed by three principal fields: the technical infrastructure, the framework of knowledge and the relations of production. As such, by bracketing the dataset according to these fields clear connections between the model and the process of exhibition making can be drawn. According to Blaikie and Priest (2017:26), this deductive logic of inquiry allows hypothesis to be tested as the theory emerges from the empirical work. Questions relating to the respondent's role, their daily operations, and their own perspective on TM were tagged for the framework of knowledge, while questions relating to the production process and different hierarchies vis-à-vis other actors were tagged for the relations of production. Finally, information regarding the materiality of exhibitions, the various items needed were tagged for the technical infrastructure.

Ethical considerations

There are a number of ethical considerations which I reflected upon before embarking on the research, chiefly among them the issue of consent and anonymity. All respondents were given a consent form downloaded from the Malmö University website which contained information in both English and Swedish regarding the aim of the project and how their personal data was to be used. Regarding the issue of anonymity, although fictive names have been provided in order to protect the identity of the interviewees in the analysis, I recognise that given the public nature of museums and availability of staff information on institutional websites, anonymity might not be guaranteed altogether. The interviews collected did not necessarily center around personal political viewpoints, thus they do not cause any liability for the institutions that the participants work for or their safety. Nevertheless, where possible, I have attempted to avoid making explicit references to the name of the museums.

Another ethical consideration concerns the data protection of respondents. As mentioned in the previous section, all interviews were conducted and recorded on Zoom. The audio recordings were then downloaded and transcribed on my personal computer. After the process of transcription was completed, the file was deleted from the cloud system while the transcripts are still being kept as they will provide usefulness for future research within the project.

Analysis

THE TINGENS METOD ENCODING-DECODING MODEL

Within the museum space all actors are connected with each other as they collaborate to produce the exhibition. However, depending on roles and responsibilities, each actor possesses a distinctive relation of production towards the exhibition, as well as framework of knowledge. The technical infrastructure, on the other hand, represents the museum space itself, including objects, museum furniture and the various technical and technological apparatus embedded in its space. In Hall's original model encoding occurs at the stage of production. However, in agreement with Ross (2011), I argue that this does not necessarily produce one singular form of coding. On the contrary, in my view each actor approaches the task with their own set of framework of knowledge and relations of production, which may

result in a dominant, negotiated or oppositional position. In the television structure power is conceptualized as a hegemonic and oppressive entity originating from the institutional hierarchies. In the museological sense power takes the form of knowledge through a Foucauldian framework of governmentality (Bennett 1995; Hooper- Greenhill 2000). In this model, power is mobile, multidirectional and interwoven in social relations (Mägi and Lepik 2019) as actors partake in the process of meaning making knowledge is then fed back into the circuit once it is decoded by audiences (Fig.2).

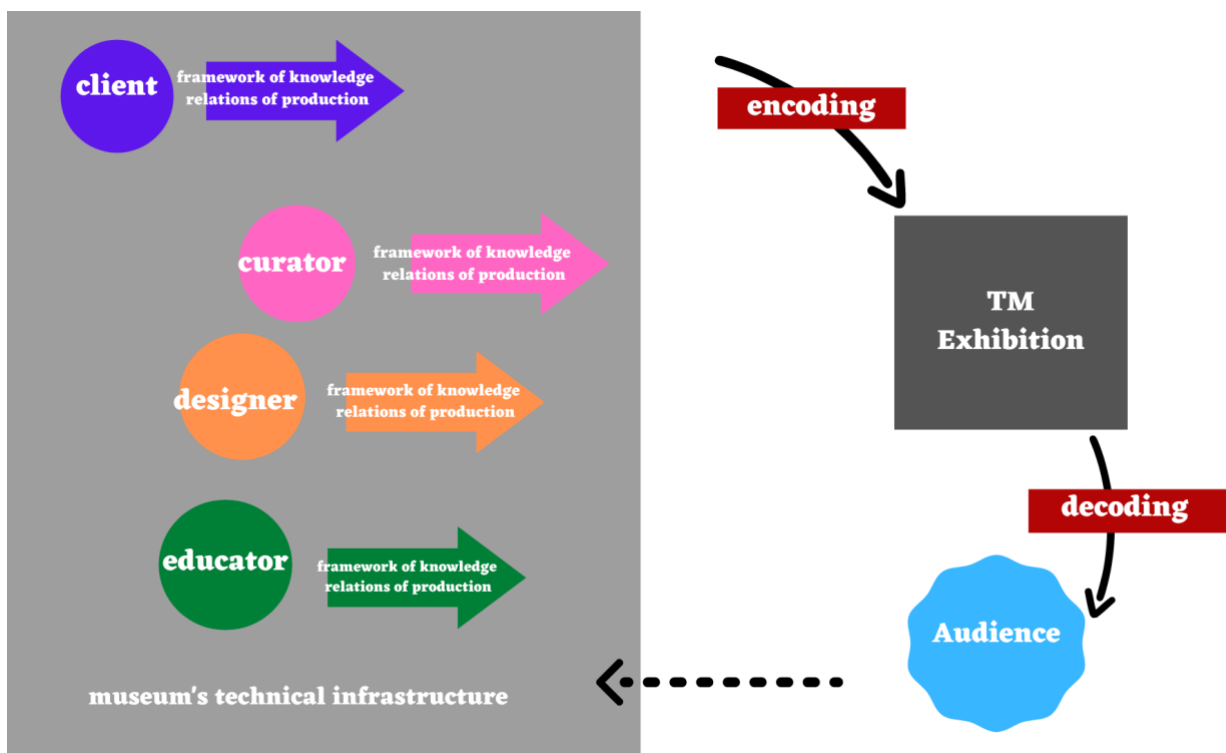


Figure 2: Encoding/decoding model adapted from Stuart Hall (1973).

THE TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The museum furniture

In analyzing the museum's exhibition production process through the prism of Hall's encoding/decoding model, we can view the technical infrastructure as encompassing the technological and technical apparatus needed for the construction of an exhibition, as well as

the physical museum space itself. In the television arena this constitutes the production design, which includes props, costumes and set arrangement; the sound design, which features the musical scores and sound arrangement; and technical tools such as camera, lighting and microphones. In the museological sense the technical infrastructure is represented not only by the artifact, but also by the overall exhibition furniture, namely glass cases, wall panels, stanchions, as well as technical tools such as projectors, sound and lighting. These are what Hall defines as the “material substratum” (1973:2) and they constitute the “museological mise-en- scène” as they represent important items that frame and elevate the visual story-telling of an exhibition.

With regards to lighting in particular, it is important to note that its role goes beyond the functional purpose of providing illumination. Lighting design provides a dramatic impact on the visual aesthetics of an exhibition determining how it is perceived and experienced by an audience. Lighting orients the gaze towards specific characteristics of the object by revealing fine details of its materiality, its shape, its colour and aspects that the curator deems relevant to showcase. Goroain (2001:247) points out to the dramatic effects of museum lighting by drawing parallels with that of the Church, arguing that it contributes to a meditative and reflexive state akin to how believers experience the religious space. As one of the first noticeable elements in a museum, the contrast of high and low level lighting immediately anchors the audience to the artifact and calls the viewer to draw closer by inviting the eye to further explore and linger over details and peculiarities. In the absence of the tactile recognition of the artifact, as these are often placed behind the protective barrier of glass cases, lighting overcomes this separation by supplementing an alternative sensory engagement. Thus, unlike Goroain (2001), I argue that lighting is not used as an oppressive force hovering over the heads of museum audiences, but rather it is employed as a collaborative tool designed to buttress the story’s mood by setting the atmosphere for how the exhibition narrative should be engaged with.

Text panels

Another important element within the technical infrastructure of the museum is the communicative appeal that text panels serve. Many curators reveal the challenges that their museums are currently facing as they find themselves competing against other actors in the entertainment industry for the “Saturday afternoon spot”. The prime audience for many Swedish museums are young families who might be pulled in many directions in deciding where to invest their weekend afternoon. This compels museums to position their

communication strategy to appeal to young audiences as well. As one of the educators expressed:

Since we decided to be every little genius's favorite place, then we have been very much focusing our marketing on the little geniuses. So I think that the adults, the parents and grandparents, who often are those who bring the little children to the museum, expect the children to be entertained. Yeah, maybe not educated...the amusement park or the cinemas...That could be as well expensive for a family to go to. And among these people who are willing to put money to go to amusement parks or cinema, there are many people that don't know about us and they have other fears about what the museum is, they have no expectations of the museum being fun, maybe. Maybe it's full of stuffed animals or maybe it's just paintings on the wall. Everything that Technical Museum is not. (Sara, educator).

The curator's words reveal the need for an exhibition to communicate beyond the confines of a "museological studio". After all, exhibitions are not produced so they can be detained behind museum doors. Even in its early iteration, exhibitions were intended for public viewing, and not limited to the consumption of a selected few, and if we draw on its etymological meaning, an exhibition is, in fact, created so it can be shown to a public audience. As such the metrics often used to gauge its success is the number of people that have participated in its viewing. In a saturated and competitive infotainment marketplace, heritage institutions are required to create communication material that can convince potential audiences to make a monetary and temporal investment in its space. Exhibition titles and themes function in similar ways as the headline story that appears in television news by teasing and baiting the audience to approach the museum space in order to gain knowledge about a particular subject. As such text panels and all the marketing material produced by the museum need to convey in creative ways why audiences should visit the museum and pay particular attention to the headlined exhibition. This signals that museums conceptualize knowledge as an affective engagement. In accordance with Smith (2020), I also argue that museums are spaces where people choose to go to feel and be emotionally connected, as such communicative strategies are required to communicate in direct and indirect ways the emotional benefit that are achieved when encountering heritage spaces, and also dispel any fears about the space "being boring" and "full of stuffed animals".

The museum space

Television programs are often demographically segmented as producers curate programmes with a specific audience in mind. For instance, it is common for a television show to be geared towards housewives or children specifically, however, unlike television, museums endeavour to appeal to all factions of the population irrespective of their gender, ethnicity or age. The underlying logic is that by entering into the museum space, audiences can experience a variety of exhibitions that will cater to all needs. In many senses the multiplicity of exhibition spaces under one museological roof recalls how television channels operate. As audiences wander through the museum space they often “change channels” as each gallery hall presents its own unique broadcast, which is set to offer a distinctive cognitive experience. Moreover, another shared similarity with television broadcast is in how museum spaces undergo significant transformations as exhibitions are installed and disassembled depending on the storyboard, thus recalling how television sets are rearranged in between segments.

Overall, the museum space functions as a blank canvas lending itself to the discourse of the object. In this sense exhibitions become visual scripts codified in the visual grammar of the museum’s technical infrastructure. In Hall’s view a raw historical event cannot be conveyed without being interpreted, signified and filtered through the aural-visual forms of the televisual language (1973:3). Likewise an artefact to hold meaning, ought to be filtered through the museological lense by becoming a “story”, as such the museum space aids in this communicative process by situating it within the museum’s visual and aural discourse.

As seen thus far the technical infrastructure is defined by the “museological mise-en-scène” which, with its technical and technological properties frame and elevate the visual storytelling of the exhibition. Within this space we also find functional items, such as text panels which have the unique purpose of conveying technical information regarding the exhibition to audiences already present within the museum spaces. While marketing materials, such as pictures, function as emotional connectors inviting new audiences in the heritage space. The museum space itself is the blank canvas through which the narratives of the objects are conveyed, as each element within its technical infrastructure frames different components of the story.

FRAMEWORK OF KNOWLEDGE

Exhibitions as hot topics

As already established through their exhibitions, museums create a visual discourse and embed in them values and objectives they deem important to convey. This process is ignited from the very moment the museum director, “the client”, commissions an exhibition. Curators and educators in particular are very mindful of the “museological agenda” and attempt to enforce it as they work together in the project. As one curator told me:

The museum’s role, of course, is to observe, preserve, and to educate. I would say that that is what we do. But you could also say that we could be activists. We could have agendas. Which means the National Museum of Science and Technology has to encourage children to choose to learn more about natural science and technology and choose that kind of education when they get older. Yeah, so that’s an agenda...to interact to make people react. It could also be to make people aware of things around them (Albert, curator).

As a curator at the National Museum of Science and Technology, Albert views education as a fundamental value for museums, as such he is concerned with finding effective ways to relay the didactic message of the museum. It can be argued that since audiences do not speak the same language as the museum, therefore in the interest of avoiding any “systematically distorted communication”, the curator needs to arrange items through a logic of meaning and connections, while the educator’s role is to ensure those connections are well understood and accessible to audiences. Museums’ prime targets are schools, as such the symbiotic relationship between the two institutions ensures that on the one hand schools can gain access to cultural education programs where students have the unique opportunity to learn in a practical and interactive manner, while museums retain the didactic expertise and authority on those subjects. Conversely, the construction of meaning becomes the result of a museological production in which objects are selected, arranged and viewed through a “museological prism” in order to yield a code which ultimately holds a high cultural narrative. This is perhaps what Albert refers to as “museum agenda”. As school children get more acquainted with object displayed, they might internalise some of the museum communication relating to science and technology and, in seeing this representation, choose to, perhaps, direct their educational path towards the STEM field.

From the onset it appears that the narrative that the museum constructs is formulated within an ideological and hegemonic context, which fits well within Hall's televisual model. According to the model, the museum staff operates within the institutional, political and ideological domain of the museum to encode a message that, in Hall's view, "has already been signified in a hegemonic manner" (Hall 1973 :16). Thus, the model's assumption is that a dominant-hegemonic coding should be the de facto reading. However, in agreement with Worthington (2008), I argue that it is important to note the diversity of people operating in the museum space who code the exhibition according to their own framework of knowledge. As such, it can be argued that there is not one singular voice forming a museological agenda, but rather a chorus of voices each leveraging their influence according to their own proximity to the production of the exhibition. This is rendered even more evident when applying the TM approach to the exhibition process. One curator from Northern Sweden disclosed a personal experience concerning an exhibition called "Evil design" produced to challenge the narrative surrounding the fashion industry. In creating it they had aimed to foreground some of the less scrutinised ethical issues that are part of the legacy of design and innovation. In asking why such exhibition was deemed controversial for the museum, she replied:

Because you criticize design and you talk about these things you don't want to talk about. You don't want to talk about the fact that your jeans have been made by Chinese workers, who work 14 hours a day, (he) can never go out in the evening, never in the morning, have six hours sleep every night. They are slaves and you buy the jeans and we all know this and we still buy the clothes and we don't really care. But the designer doesn't want that story to be told in a design museum. They want to be told how wonderful jeans they make. So that's a very easy way of explaining it. But it was really controversial, so it is dangerous to question the whole ground of the soul and heart of collections. See what's happening now in England a lot with the Black Lives Matter and all the brutish museum and all these questions, which is really very dangerous, and that is because there is talk about the relations of these objects and then say this object has another relation that you never mention. And you only mention this story and you just try to wipe out that story, but that story is very much alive and it's part of this object's story, and that story has to be told. And Tingens Metod is really a way of trying to tell those stories. The stories that the museum doesn't really want to hear (Carina, curator).

Carina 's recollection presents a new perspective on Hall's encoding process in postulating that the three positions, namely dominant, negotiated and oppositional, are not only found at the consumption level, but also at the production level. The TM at its core calls for the expansion and inclusion of different voices within the museum space, and in doing so it challenges the idea that there is one dominant preferred interpretation of an object, which allows space for more than one encoding. Further, this exhibition specifically, brings forward Clifford's view which sees museums as "contact zones" (Clifford 1997), providing a forum where ideas are discussed, challenged and also rejected.

Similar to the first example, another museum in southern Sweden included the "hot topic" of sexual assault within one of its exhibitions called "Sailor's memories". After coming across a Facebook group page of victims and survivors of sexual assault in the nautical industry, the museum director requested that a #metoo panel be included in the visual ensemble of the show. When I asked the thought behind the decision, she replied:

I am interested in social justice issues and so on. I used to work with that at the governmental office, I used to work with the police...so I always make sure to write in the directives that curators get, that they should work with social injustice issues, or gender issues...well, it's always gender issues. This is where it came from. The curators that I work with know this...But the idea of the "mee too" that was (name of the curator)'s idea. She said "do you know that there was this hashtag for people working at the sea?". Then she found this really good piece (Jenny, director).

In the first example is it clear that the exhibition was encoded from within an oppositional ideological framework. This is rendered clear by the backlash received from the museum's stakeholders. However, in contrast to this, the inclusion of a "hot topic" in the second exhibition did not receive such resistance, on the contrary it was initiated by the museum director. This conundrum exposes some of the flaws within Hall's model, namely how to conceptualise a dominant encoding. This begs the question: in relation to what is the reading dominant to? If a museum decides to include a "hot topic" in its discourse, is it really enforcing an activist approach if said topic has already been widely accepted within the society? After all the #metoo campaign has drawn positive support by many people outside the movement and has arguably led a collective discussion on women's safety in the workplace. By contrast the "Evil design" exhibition was well ahead of its time in tackling the issue of ethical fashion, and was perhaps too critical of some of the stakeholders who are connected to the museum, which ultimately explains why it received such resistance from within the institution.

In later works Hall defines “preferred reading” as being institutionally framed, clarifying that “the domains of ‘preferred meanings’ have the whole social order embedded in them as a set of meanings, practices and beliefs’ (Hall 1980: 134). Thus, it can be argued that in the exhibition tackling workplace sexual harassment, the museum is adapting its framework of knowledge to align with that of its audience. This lays bare the fundamental argument within Hall’s model that the framework of knowledge is part of a circular loop involving both the media institution and the audience as these function as both the sources and receivers of institutional messages. As I was told by Maggie, a curator at the museums in Stockholm it is very important that museum professionals stay connected with what happens in society. She said:

I think I would stress this ambition to work to invite people to have more new perspectives in exhibitions or in working with the objects collections and things like that and also let people participate in the narrative of the industrial heritage and things like that (Maggie, curator).

The curator’s perspective reflects Hall’s idea that producers draw topics, treatments, agendas, events, personnel, images of the audience, from the wider socio-cultural and political system of which they are only a differentiated part (Hall 1973:3). Likewise, museums draw specific topics, images and ideas directly from the social, cultural and political landscape. So, in this case curators gain knowledge by tapping into current topics that meet the interests of their audiences.

The professional code

We can see the role of what Hall calls a “professional code” taking a stronger case within the museum context as not only does it account for the professional quality of the exhibition, but also in how ideological, and perhaps elitist, framing imbues the text. For Hall the production process is framed throughout by meanings and ideas, such as knowledge in use concerning the routines of production, institutional knowledge, as well as knowledge about the audience in order to respond well to their needs. But, as seen in the previous section, knowledge in the form of technical skills are also required in order to effectively design and source materials required for the exhibition. Which means that to some extent museum professionals have to operate within a hegemonic framework by accepting some of the cultural and institutional practices of the museum. However, unlike television professionals, I argue that curators (especially the ones that have acquired more seniority over the years) can take creative risks and perhaps even resist some of the dominant institutional framing. In applying the Tingens

Method they are indeed allowing space for a variety of divergent ideological leanings to be encoded throughout the production process. This is also the point discussed by Ross (2011:12) as he attempts to expand Hall's model by conceptualising a version of the model that sees several preferred readings at the encoding level depending on the level of interpretation.

The risk in allowing a multivocal, and even, resistant (or opposing) encoding during production is that it could erode the very existence of heritage institutions, which is a concern I raised with Carina in our interview. In her reply she said:

I don't think it will ever go that far (laughs) I don't think! And I don't think it is anyone's interest (to dismantle the social relevance of museums). I think we must widen the story we tell we must be more open to other stories and in the Technical museum I said we have to be open to the fact that the collection is very much part of this climate crisis we are in now. Because every invention during the 20th century, which is part of the collection is very much part of the whole modernization and the whole sustainability crisis and we can't just make an exhibition about innovation and not say that, and they have made hundreds of exhibitions and never said that. So, it's not possible anymore to be like that. It's just not serious anymore. We have to be able to say the technical revolution, the technical innovation, everything is very exciting in many ways and also be very much part of a situation that is a completely disaster for the planet. Many museums they don't do that so quickly and they have to process that (Carina, curator).

In her reply, the curator highlights the fact that by broadening the perspective through the TM audiences can indeed access the full account of an object. In fact, layered interpretations have not often been included in museum discourse, but in looking at both exhibitions it reveals that attempts are being made to acknowledge debates and discussions taking place outside the museum walls. As such what constitutes a hegemonic position is never static, but it is historically contingent, socially conditioned, and dependent on the museum staff. Museums, like any media institution, are very sensitive to the changing tide of public opinions and are cognisant of the fact that for the sake of their own survival and social relevance they ought to make space for variety of discourses, which means that their framework of knowledge does not originate in a vacuum. In reflecting back at her exhibition Carina observes that Swedish museums have undergone deeper structural changes over the years as now museum professionals take bolder stances and allow for the inclusion of thorny discussions in the exhibitions they produce.

Mindset and elitism

In producing an exhibition museum personnel weigh in several considerations pertaining to budget, logistics, object availability and other elements. As seen previously, some museums leverage the power of exhibitions as a corporate sponsorship strategy (Alexander 1999), and while they are aware that audience feedback is important, some curators do struggle with incorporating audience perspectives within the production process. As the museum director in Southern Sweden told me, it is often a question of mindset and power shift:

Well the biggest challenge is what I have told you. The very biggest challenge is for the curators, the museum staff to get the right mindset and to stick to it and not sort of get lost on the way. And I am not saying that as a bad person and that I don't like my staff. I love my staff. They are really good. And when I do these things by myself, I have to constantly remind myself not to choose the easiest way out and you always have to remind yourself with the method "no no no, hang on a minute. We need to think about this, and we need to ask these people (visitors) what they know" So that is the biggest challenge with Tinges Metod and with all methods that are about co-creating because it is easy to fix it yourself you know? (Jenny, director).

Jenny's words reflect some of the challenges that museum staff face as they are caught between a more liberal and open perspective on the one hand, and a traditional conservative approach on the other hand. Museums are negotiating ideas of openness and audience inclusion, but are also anxious of the outcome of such liberalisation. This point is echoed by other scholars who have explored the concept of curatorial anxiety (Tatsi, 2011). A co-creating method such as the Tingens Metod calls for museum staff to adopt a new framework of knowledge which in many ways challenges the one expertise model that has been employed as the *modus operandi*:

I mean it gives me new perspectives (the TM). You know, things that I wouldn't have thought about, but of course it can happen (the audience to take control)...and I also think that one thing that is very difficult for the people working at the museum is that suddenly somebody else owns the subject, instead of you. So you cannot, with your knowledge and your expertise, you cannot say this is what it's important because somebody else will come and say, but I don't care, because this is what I want you to do. And that means that you, as an expert might be reduced and that might feel hard for some people. I believe that Tinges Metod is the perfect way of working, you

know, and maybe the best way of working is a little bit of both to combine different methods (Anita, head of documentation and collection).

As aforementioned, museums have traditionally been viewed as high culture institutions nestled in elitism. In their daily endeavours they operate as hegemonic creators of historical narrative through the scripts written by curators. However, the participatory turn compelled museums to take a less authoritative approach, and while many museum professionals agree with the premise that democratic and co-creating engagements can expand the process of meaning-making, many professionals find it challenging to relinquish power to audiences altogether. As such they engage in participatory practice which results in tokenistic “democratisation of culture” (Ashley, 2014), instead of “cultural democracy” (Lynch and Alberti, 2010) which would entail a genuine surrender of power on the part of the museum. Moreover, it can be argued that the “professional code” assumed by museum personnel allows them to operate within the hegemonic code of the museum and, as a consequence, reproduce dominant discursive practice.

Museum professionals are associated with the defining elites by their own position within the ideological apparatus of the museum, as well as by the structure of access which privileges and selects a specific type of personnel possessing educational attainment and cultural capital. Therefore, it is unsurprising that curatorial expertise is still posed at the nexus of many participatory practices and audience takeover is still viewed as a threat to the museum’s framework of knowledge. To some extent the TM is not immune to curatorial resistance or, in this case, curatorial mindset as Jenny explained. Thus, it can be argued that there is a spectrum in which the method operates. The more radical version of the TM entails a complete surrender of curatorial power in favour of an object-led inquiry where power structures are questioned and challenged. Conversely, the lite version sees the focus shifting from the object to a curatorial-led operation where tensions can be quelled and potential disruptions can be reined in.

As seen thus far the framework of knowledge constitutes the ways in which museum professionals approach the production process. This perspective is made up by their mindset, their professional code, their experience, as well as topics they draw from outside the museum space. These, in return, form a code which can align or can contrast the institutional message, essentially what the museum decides as “preferred meaning”. The argument made is that the institutional code (or preferred meaning) cannot always be perceived as it is in constant negotiation with the discourse outside the space of museums, and as such hegemonic positions are socially, culturally, and politically conditioned.

RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION

Hierarchies of power

So far the analysis has explored the technical infrastructure of museums, as well as how the framework of knowledge impacts the encoding process. In this final part we explore how each individual actor within the organization relates to each other and to the production process. In explaining the organizational structure, the head curator of one of the museums in southern Sweden laid out the following:

We have a hierarchy. You have the director of the culture department, you have the library the archives, the youth clubs and the museum. So, under the culture department there are many different institutions and under these institutions, (name of museum) and its main director, follows the aims and the target of the culture department. Under the different directors you have different departments and I am connected to the exhibition department. (Name of the colleague) to the collection department, then you have the education department, then entrance personnel department (etc.) So, you can see the different professions the different backgrounds, we are 100 employees in the museum, so it is a huge museum with different visions (Anton, curator).

Within the logic of the museum organisation, the relations of production are the collective social relationship that the various actors engage in. These are formed by division of labour as well as hierarchies. Drawing upon Kamien's (2001) conceptualisation of the key roles within exhibition production, I argue that the role of the client goes beyond the museum director to also include institutional actors adjacent to the museum, such as the Swedish Art Council for instance. As an institutional body operating independently from the museum, it sets cultural policy goals and supports heritage institutions through grants. Thus, although the council is not directly involved in the process of exhibition making, it dispenses its power through monetary means. Within the production structure asymmetries of power can be found at higher levels as well as lower levels. For example, at the lower level this can be perceived by looking at the relationship between directors and curators as exhibition plans are first laid out. As Anton further explains:

So we have very clear steps that we follow in the organisation. First of all there are, what you would call in English a directive from the director. So we have our first plan

where you have important information about the team, the budget, time plan, purpose, aim of the exhibition. And it follows some frames (Anton, curator)

The relationship between a director and a curator is clearly asymmetric as in many cases curators do not choose the theme of an exhibition. Themes often originate from a director's vision for the museum, who works in tandem with political stakeholders to create a social cohesive message. For instance, many respondents talked about the upcoming pride festivals and how exhibition themes are set to fit within that vision.

Further, asymmetries of power can also be found at the ground level between curators and designer as museums often outsource the artistic and logistical components of exhibitions to freelance designers. In this case curators provide a brief detailing their vision for the installation and in other cases, if there is an ongoing partnership, designers might have artistic freedom in how they execute the vision. In describing the relationship between designers and curators, one curator explained:

It's very different process, and I think that the best is if you have or think you have a very good idea. "I want it to look something like this and I want people to feel this when they enter this room", if you have that idea very clear, maybe when you try to find the designer, you should try to find a designer that is interested in (the project) and is easy to work with and who wants to. Because many of these designers are also a little bit what can I say? Eccentric, arty people kind of, you know? You know what I mean? and they get really offended if you have input on what they're doing because (they would say) "This is my job", "I know how to do this". And so you have to be careful depending on what you want to because sometimes you don't have a very specific idea and then it's very good. If someone from outside comes and gives an ideas. I mean, it's a give and take process and in the best case, it's working fine and sometimes I think it's not working so well, but that's the way it is.

The relations of production are also expressed in the ways in which actors are formally and informally connected within the social and economic production sphere. The designer, in this case, operates from a different production site outside the museum and might be removed from the hierarchies within the museum structures, nevertheless they are connected through the nodes of labour. Within the logic of the TM a multidisciplinary perspective can be achieved as different actors within the museum structures are brought together as hierarchies are lowered in favour of a democratic process where all voices are equalised. However, I argue that this ambition is not always possible to implement, especially within big institutional settings where job titles, roles and vision are well cemented within the structure.

Referring to Hall's model we can see that messages are produced through a complex structure of dominance because at each stage they are imprinted by institutional and social power-relations (in During 1999: 507). This means that in striving to create an object-oriented democracy through the TM, asymmetric relationships of power still need to be accounted when producing an exhibition.

Discussion and conclusions

Within the museum discourse, Hall's model serves as a way to understand the politics of signification that heritage institutions engage in, rescuing it from a traditional perspective that sees meaning as universally transferable and free from distortion. On the other hand, the TM invites museums to reorient their traditional curator centered approach in favour of a pluralistic and object-led narrative in which knowledge becomes the product of experience and personal perspectives, and above all free from institutional power structures. In applying Hall's model we can perceive the process of encoding being situated at the intersection of the technical infrastructure, the frameworks of knowledge and the social relations in which actors participate in. At the production stage the technical infrastructure represents the museological *mise-en-scène*, with the physical space, artefacts, props, text panels, and overall museum furniture and tools functioning as the medium via which the message is delivered. To convey meaning the museum object has to be codified through the visual grammar of the technical infrastructure in order to become what Hall calls a "story", thus the museum space provides the first entry point of the construction of meaning. The framework of knowledge constitutes the ideological leanings and frames of reference of the personnel, as they partake in the process of exhibition making each actor instills his or her own value code into the system. Finally, the relations of production represent the social realities of exhibition making as they are underpinned by dynamic power structures. Within the logic of a TM approach, knowledge is generated from the convergence and dialogue of different roles and practices as multiple actors negotiate their autonomy by foregrounding the interest of the object in order to unlock the different narratives trapped therein. However, in my view this does not always occur as roles, job titles, visions and financial resources create asymmetric power relations, which further reinforces institutional hierarchies.

Nevertheless, I argue that the encoded message is not *de facto* hegemonic as sometimes what can be seen as "activist message" can be encoded by one of the actors in the production space. This partially depends on the freedom that curators have and their ability to negotiate

with higher stakeholders. Drawing on from Gramsci's earlier work, Hall suggests that hegemony is not an external force imposed by the dominant elite, but rather a constant struggle of negotiation and consent. While Hall's model sees this happening at the consumption level of the model, I suggest that this can occur much earlier in the process at the production level. Furthermore, in challenging the foundational premise within Hall's model that hegemony should be viewed first and foremost as ideologically oppressive to the masses, in this thesis I argue that what constitutes a hegemonic or preferred encoding are culture bound and historically specific as actors draw direct inspiration from the socio-political landscape. I provide two examples of exhibitions which seemingly present an activist encoding as they both include topics relating to social justice. In the first exhibition which features the topic of sexual harassment I argue that such the encoding should not necessarily be perceived as activist or resistance since the socio-political context in which the exhibition is made does not engender loud forms of resistance or counter hegemonic discourse. By contrast the second exhibition centered around ethical fashion could be read as activist as it sought to challenge some of the underlying assumptions about design present in the museum. Hall's model is conceptualised as a circuit influenced by the wider socio-cultural and political environment, as such an activist topic can originate from outside the museum to then become "hegemonic" once it finds social acceptance with the masses. A revision of the Marxist idea proposed by Gramsci views hegemony as achieved through negotiation and willing consent of subordinate classes (Hall 1982: 85-86). This is useful in articulating how media institutions such as museums are established in the production and reproduction of dominant ideologies while at the same time allowing space for dissenting voices. Reflecting back on the research questions which set to look at how the TM elicit pluralistic voices within the production of an exhibition, I argue that the method has the potential of opening up spaces for dialogue as different stakeholders can yield their own unique encoded message. However, structural relations of power and hierarchies will determine the impact of those codes within the exhibition. Traditionally museums have operated from a conflict-avoidant framework of daily practices, where sole focus was dedicated to the production of knowledge. However, current social and cultural dissensions have compelled museums to actively engage in public debates forcing them to reflect on their own role. On the one hand museums should not be seen as lobbyist institutions engaging in issues that are better addressed from the desk of policy makers, on the other hand it can be argued that museums have no choice but to engage in social justices discourses. This was made even more evident in summer 2020 after the killing of the unarmed black man George

Floyd at the hands of a white police officer, which inspired a series of global anti-racist protests forcing museums to take a clear institutional stance and reflect on some of its own collections and their links to a colonial past (BBC, 2020). It can be argued that institutional changes are the result of generational shifts in attitudes and that museums, for the sake of their own survival, have to take active steps in fostering open, inclusive and, even uncomfortable conversations. Since the participatory turn museums have experienced ongoing changes and the recent tectonic shifts within ICOM, suggest that museums' role and identity will experience further changes.

Future research

The modern museum is engaging in the ongoing process of democratisation and openness of its curatorial spaces by embracing co-production and participatory engagement practices. While openness and inclusion has been traditionally viewed from an audience perspective, this research provides a brief foray into how democratic and pluralistic ideas can be fostered or challenged within heritage institutions. In reflecting on the book “Progressive Museum Practice” George E. Hein (2016:11) notes that social problems will not be solved by themselves, but they will need to be addressed through direct and sustained social and political action, and that faith in educational institutions can direct society towards a greater social justice and a more equitable share of the benefits derived from progress in science and technology. This view offers a perspective that sees museums as educational institution that have the moral obligation to fully embrace progressive values not as an empty gesture of virtue signaling, but because this creates a more equitable society. Hence future research should investigate this pivotal change by particularly focusing on the internal struggle of negotiations and consent around thorny subject matter such as restitution of colonial objects and discussions on planetary wellbeing. The current trends are an indication that museum audiences are interested in engaging in a collective and robust conversation on social justice with museums taking an active lead in such debates.

Bibliography

- Alberti, S. (2005). Objects and the Museum. *The History of Science Society*, 96(4), 559-571.
- Alex, M. (2020, August 6). From The New York Times:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/06/arts/what-is-a-museum.html>
- Alexander, V. (1999). A Delicate Balance: Museums and the Market-place. *Museum International*, 51(2), 29-34.
- Ashley, S. L. (2014). 'Engage the World': Examining Conflicts of Engagement in Public Museums. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 20(3), 261-280.
- Bennett, T. (1995). *The birth of the museum: History, theory, politics*. London: Routledge .
- Blaikie, Norman; Priest, Jean. (2017). *Designing Social Research: The Logic of Anticipation*. Wiley & Sons.
- Boast, R. (2011). neocolonial collaboration: Museum as Contact Zone Revisited. *Museum Anthropology*, 34(1), 56-70.
- Cameron, F. (2010). "Risk society, controversial topics and museum interventions: (re)reading controversy and the museum through a risk optic." In Cameron, Fiona & Kelly, Linda (eds.). *Hot Topics, Public Culture, Museums*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge University Press.
- Clifford, J. (1997). *Museums as Contact Zones*. In *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. (James Clifford, Ed.) Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Coghlan, R. (2018). "My voice counts because I'm handsome". Democratizing the museum: the power of museum participation. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 24(7), 795-809.
- Giaccardi, Elisa; Speed, Chris; Caldwell, Melissa; Cila, Nzli. (2016). Thing Ethnography: Doing Design Research with Non-Humans. *DIS*, 4, 8.
- Goroain, C. (2001). Performing the Museum. *Studies in Art Education*, 42(3), 234-248.
- Hall, S. (1973). Encoding and decoding in the television model. *Stencilled Paper No 7* ., 1-21.
- Hall, S. (1999). Un-settling 'the heritage', re-imagining the post-nation. Whose heritage? *Third Text*, 13(49), 3-13.
- Hall, S. (1982). The Rediscovery of "Ideology": Return of the Repressed in Media Studies. In T. Gurevitch, M. Bennet, J. Curra, & J. Woollacott (Eds.), *Culture, Society and the Media* (pp. 56-90). London: Methuen.
- Hooper-Greenhill, E. (1992). *Museums and the shaping of knowledge*. London: Routledge .
- Hooper-Greenhill, E. (2000). Changing Values in the Art Museum: rethinking communication and learning. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 6(1), 9-31.
- Howlett, M. (2021). Looking at the 'field' through a Zoom lens: Methodological reflections on conducting online research during a global pandemic. *Qualitative Research*, 1-16.
- ICOM. (2021, August 10). From ICOM: <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>
- Kamien, J. (2002). An advocate for everything: Exploring exhibit development models. *Curator*, 44(1), 114-128.
- Kidd, J. (2014). *Museums in the New Mediascape Transmedia, Participation, Ethics*. London: Routledge .
- Latour, B. (2005). "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik, or how to make things public." In *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*. (B. L. Weibel, Ed.) Karlsruhe: MIT Press & ZKM Center for Art and Media .
- Latour, Bruno Weibel, Peter . (2005). *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Karlsruhe, Germany: MIT Press.

- Lord, B. (2006). Foucault's museum: difference, representation, and genealogy. *Museum and Society*, 4(1), 1-14.
- Lynch, Bernadette T., Alberti Samuel J. M. M. . (2010). Legacies of Prejudice: Racism, Co-production and Radical Trust in the Museum. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 25(1), 13–35.
- Macdonald, S. (2012). Museums, national, postnational and transcultural identities. *Museum studies: An anthology of contexts*, 273-286.
- Mägi, Reet and Lepik, Krista. (2019). Governing Modes of Permanent Exhibitions in Fostering Museum-Visitor Interaction Creating a New Permanent Exhibition at the University of Tartu Natural History Museum. *The International Journal of the Inclusive Museum*.
- Malmö Stad. (n.d.). Retrieved August , 2021 from <https://malmo.se/Sa-arbetar-vi-med.../Kultur---projekt-och-satsningar/Tingens-metod.html>
- Marstine, J. (2006). *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Mason, R. (2006). *Culture Theory and Museum Studies*. In *A Companion to Museum Studies*. (Sharon Mac-Donald, Ed.) Oxford : Blackwell.
- Metode, T. (2021, August 10). From <https://tingenesmetode.no/tingenes-metode>
- Morley, D. (1981). "The Nationwide Audience" - A Critical Postscript. . *Screen Education* . , 39, 3-14.
- Odumosu, T.(2019) What Lies Unspoken, *Third Text*, 33:4-5, 615-629.
- Pavement, P. (2018). *The Routledge Handbook of Museums, Media and Communications*. . London: Routledge.
- Pearce, S. (1992). *Museums, Objects, and Collections: A Cultural Study*. Leicester : Leicester University Press.
- Robinson, H. (2020). Curating good participants? Audiences, democracy and authority in the contemporary museum. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 35(5), 470-487.
- Ross, S. (n.d.). The encoding/decoding model revisited. *ICA Conference*, (pp. 1-17). Boston.
- Runnel, Pille and Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, Pille, . (2014). *Democratising the Museum: Reflections on Participatory Technologies*. Frankfurt am Main; New York: Peter Lang.
- Simon, N. (2010). *The Participatory Museum* . Santa Cruz, CA: Museum 2.0.
- Simon, N. (n.d.). *The Participatory Museum*. Retrieved August, 2021 from <http://www.participatorymuseum.org>
- Smith, L. (2020). *Emotional Heritage Visitor Engagement at Museums and Heritage Sites*. London: Routledge.
- Smithsonian Institute. (2002). *The making of exhibitions: purpose, structure, roles and process* . Washington : Office of Policy and Analysis.
- Spradley, J. (1979). *The Ethnographic Interview*. Waveland Press.
- Tatsi, T. (2012). Identity Struggles of Museum Professionals: Autonomous Expertise and Audience Participation in Exhibition Production. *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*, 5(2), 65-80.
- Tøndborg, B. (2013). The dangerous museum. Participatory practices and controversy in museum today. *Nordisk Museologi*, 2, 3-15.
- Treimo, H. (2019). *Sketches for a methodology on exhibition research*. In *Exhibitions as Research*. (P. Bjerregaard, Ed.) London: Routledge.
- Vergo, P. (1989). *The New Museology* . London: Reaktion Books.
- Vincent, N. (2019, August 19). *The Art Newspaper* . From <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/what-exactly-is-a-museum-icom-comes-to-blows-over-new-definition>

- Widén, P. (2011). National Museums in Sweden: A History of Denied Empire and a Neutral State. In P. A. Elgenius (Ed.), *EuNaMus, European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen*, Bologna . Bologna: Linköping University Electronic Press.
- Witcomb, A. (2003). *Re-imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum*. . London: Routledge.
- Worthington, N. (2008). 'Encoding and Decoding Rape News: How Progressive Reporting Inverts Textual Orientations',. *Women's Studies in Communication* , 31(3), 344-367.
- Wurl, J. (2005). Ethnicity as provenance: in search of values and principles for documenting the immigrant experience. *Archival Issues* 29(1):65–76.

Appendix

M. interview – curator at the Tekniska Museet in Stockholm

50 minutes

Transcript

JOSEY

Basically I want to start with asking what are your day-to-day tasks at the Tekniska Museum, and I know that you are you probably working from home at the moment but usually what does your task entail?

M.

I'm I am a curator and I mostly work with exhibitions now, but I also have this project about Augusta nuclear plant that is the one that we're talking about in this book, and I have also a background working with documentation, projects and more like issues concerning the industrial heritage as a whole and I have also made another project about this nuclear plant several years ago.

And there are some books and articles and things like that so, but now this nuclear plant is going to be tore down and that's actually It was a planned action because we have this regulation in Sweden that's all nuclear sites that are close down need to have documentation. but this one was one of the first one in Sweden and it closed was closed down in the 70s.

But now it's the time for this to happen. Ther's been a discussion for several years to make it like a historical site, listed building, but it's not going to happen 'cause of lack of experience is to preserve a building like that. Then we got this opportunity to make a new project around Augusta and that's what we are talking about in in the book too. We look on this site as a ting. So we are trying.... We are still bit searching for how we're going to attack this elephant.

But we are doing interviews and we are doing a documentary film and we will also make some kind of an immersive experience with the 3D technology to cover the site and make it possible to visit it when it's not there. It's also a place that is very difficult to visit for most people. And that's also a way to preserve it in a digital way.

JOSEY

How are you using specifically TM? As you said it is big elephant to tackle. So has this helped you in a way to go through the process of picking which aspect of the of the project to look at?

M.

Yes, I would say so, but as we are in the process I cannot tell you all about it, but um. In in the selection of interviewees and then also about what kind of questions would be possible to focus on and also maybe to challenge ourselves to look at a thing in new ways. Yes I would say so and we hope that we are going to get new stories and new perspectives and to get new ways of seeing this thing and also about the time period that it represents.

JOSEY

Yeah, has it been difficult? Would you would say?

M.

it's a little bit difficult 'cause I mean a site like this is a very special place and it's also this objective that the nuclear energy the nuclear production has also a kind of a stigma, right? Yeah, everybody has

an opinion. But there are not so many people that know much about this technology and the risk as a professional or something like that. But you have an opinion. You have a kind of a relation to something that you think are a nuclear site (is all about)

JOSEY

Yeah, and the people working in the nuclear sites have a different perspective.

M.

Overall, I mean they were working there in the 50s and 60s and 70s, so it's a long time ago, but they are usually very interested in this technology they have continued (to work) in in the area for maybe 50 years or something like that or have worked in in other plants after this one.

And they also have an image of how it was to work there that goes back to when they were young and it's a long way. But then, this technology was very new and they were participating in building up something really new, really cool. It was like the AI technology for that days, yeah

JOSEY

Yeah, yeah! I know you said you are encountering challenges in this project. Would you say that those are the same challenges that you encounter in your curatorial work with other projects? Or do you think that there's something very specifically challenging or specifically different about working with the TM

M.

I think it's particularly specific with TM for this case, for this project.

JOSEY

How so?

M.

I mean earlier in this project when we have collaborated with other museums in Sweden, as you know it has been very much kind of "meta" project and workshops and very theoretical and everybody came from the museums and we knew about artifacts and how to look at objects and history and things like from a museum point of view. But now we are trying to do this more...In the real project in a practical way. Yeah, it's a whole different story. It's new problems, new questions, and so.

JOSEY

Yeah. Do you mind sharing some of the challenges that you faced? If it's not too personal.

M.

Yes. But I mean it's like I said, I think it's difficult to just choose the people to talk to because it's very much....It's easy to think about. Then you're going to talk to the radiation experts and then to the engineers and to the energy expert and things like that, but we also have these people who were living in the area and maybe children who has never been there.

I think that related to other projects that I've been working with, for example this one with this nuclear site we have some kind of an image of What people we are going to approach, now we have to think outside this box. And also I mean the times we are living in right now with the coronavirus, that's also a really big challenge because you have to do everything in a digital way, and lot of people that you would like to talk to are elderly and they are not so used to this way of talking to.

JOSEY

Right, which brings me to the next question about democracy. 'cause one of the layers of the TM is that it adds democracy to an institution like a museum, that otherwise can feel very authoritarian. What do you think about this aspect of democracy?

M.

I Think that this is very good...It's very good ambition, and I mean the museum, the collection is in some way owned by the people. Yeah, so it should be a representation of the Swedish people or the

people in Sweden in the National Museum of Science and Technology, but it's also difficult because I also think that people want a museum to be kind of an authority.

JOSEY

Yeah It's a bit of a contradiction, isn't it?

M.

Yes, it's good to have a museum that knows the facts. If it's right or wrong, or which age we're talking about, was it.

JOSEY

In in terms of management of the museum in terms of the stakeholders in terms of people that are running the day-to-day activities of the museum, do you think this is a sort of dilemma that they're facing?

M.

Maybe, but we also have to be honest that we....I mean we make choices, we do the interpretation and we are talking to people in a way. So of course the museum set the tone, yes. We would like to invite and include, but we also have to realize that we are doing this in a way that it fits us.

You know, maybe we cannot change everything in in directly. We have to take it in small steps.

And I mean, if you if you get knew stories to the when we're doing acquisitions and two artifacts that we show in the in the museum or in the on the web and things like that, that's also a value to us.

JOSEY

Yeah, in so it's in terms of value then how can TM help in this gradual transformation of the museum from being too authoritarian into being a museum that it's open and inclusive, how can TM help in this process?

M.

I think it can help because it can make us professional in the museum to challenge ourself to reach out more and to take help from people around us. But it can also give us the opportunity to just to communicate to people in a new way. And maybe if it's like that, if museum anyhow needs to have this authority and that's also an interesting point.

JOSEY

Yeah you still want to be a term, a point of reference I guess.

M.

yeah, yeah, yeah

JOSEY

So, in terms of the audience, What do you think they look for when they enter into a museum?

M.

I think they look for ...I mean in our museum It's a lot of people that have visit us in when they are children and then they come back with their own children and things like that. And they remember that this is the place where they had a good time. Yeah, so it's it quite entertaining lot of....What you can do at the museum, but I think that also that it has to be fascinating, fascinating stories fascinating things to do and it also has to have some kind of relation to yourself, because I think in deep way, we want to know more about ourselves.

JOSEY

So there's Speaking of that as a as a curator. I think one of the things that you said is that you are challenging yourself, you are challenging your position of power. Because one of the things about TM

is that the object is at the center of the conversation, but still as a curator, how do you view your role as the person with power, the person who is selecting the object?

Do you think that there's some sort of power tension between wanting the object to speak for itself, and you speaking for the object?

M.

Yeah, I can try to answer you. I think it's difficult because often our objects they are not talking speaking for themselves . They are quite difficult to understand if you're not an expert or....It's not like the everyday objects or something that everybody know what it is. I mean I have the power in the selection of the objects, but I can also try to let people in in the discussion what what's on the label and what we're talking about when we are making tours and meeting people and children and things like that.

But it's also difficult because I know we had a group they were interested in like craft making embroidery they used our collection and made new interpretations of it. They have made maybe 100 examples of this, but it's also I mean It's difficult to just put something from them into an exhibition So we we want to collaborate and to invite people, but I mean when we really have to decide, it's. It's easier to make it as you like it from the museum

JOSEY

That is really interesting. Yeah. And it's something that maybe museums always have to work with, like we want to work with the public but yeah but how radical can we take it?

M.

Exactly!

JOSEY

Yeah, that's yeah, that's interesting. So what process do you usually follow as a curator? How do you go about curating an exhibition? I am more interested in the in the steps that you take, especially now that you're working with a whole different method?

M.

It differs very much like now I'm working on with an exhibition dealing with this Corona crisis and the innovations and technology that's important in this case. It started with a field research project. Yeah, so we met people from different places and made interviews with them. Things like that, but it can also be like an idea that popups from me or from somebody else at the museum, or maybe even from people outside the museum. And we have a kind of a model for projects, so It's quite formalized.

JOSEY

OK, and usually how can you tell that an exhibition has been successful or not?

M.

I mean, it's of course, it's from the other people to decide, but we can tell it from media reports and from visitors and checking the social media. Did they talk about this Instagram or things like that and also from teachers. Would they like to come to visit this exhibition with the classes? And also from the from the heritage circle

JOSEY

Yeah so from the feedback. But this feedback does not always come right away right?

M.

No.

JOSEY

Is it hard to work as a curator with a method that doesn't always give you instant feedback?

M.

It's hard and it's also can be like that you have a question or something that you want to discuss in the in the exhibition and maybe when the exhibition opens People are not really ready to talk about this, but maybe a year after or two years after then It's on everybody's lips. But maybe that is also one way it has to be, but when we when we are dealing with TM, I think we're still looking for the answers. What is? what can it be? What happened when we use this method? it's still being explored, it's kind of an experiment.

JOSEY

So in a sense it challenges you as a curator, the museum as an institution, what about the public?

M.

In one way we want to invite public and people to participate in our work and in another way we want to really maybe say something about our time or another time...And who can decide if this was a something that has some kind of a quality and in the long term.

JOSEY

So in terms of the knowledge of this method, how would you describe it somebody who has never heard of it, or somebody, maybe a colleague, who hasn't really approached this idea of the TM, how would you describe it to him or her?

M.

I think I would stress this ambition to work to invite people to have more new perspectives in exhibitions or in in working with the objects collections and things like that and also let people more people participate in the narrative of the industrial heritage and things like that

JOSEY

So who are the key stakeholders be in this In the narrative of industrial heritage? Who do you see as key stakeholders in this?

M.

It could be a lot of people could be young and old and very skilled and very much beginners because everybody has maybe some kind of a relation and I cannot Tell that in advance it could be artists, it could be students. A lot of people.

JOSEY

This this big elephant that you mentioned this nuclear plant. Why was it selected as the first the first canvas on which to work the TM?

MAGDALENA

I think that was more like a coincident because It happened just during that time when we were doing this and then we thought that maybe we can try this on a big object. A big and difficult object, but it's not visible to people. What's the conclusions from that?

JOSEY

Yeah, it's certainly different compared to the other project that I've been seeing.

M.

But It's something that also relates to the discussion about sustainability that is so much important in the work at the Tekniska museum but also everywhere else. it has something to do with the welfare states of Sweden and Sweden as a country being a big producer of electricity but also of steel and forestry and things like that. That uses a lot of energy.

And it was also some kind of a pioneer technology that that was very...And Sweden was very proud of one day, once in a time. But now we are, we want to forget about it.

JOSEY

It's certainly pulling a lot of conversations

M.

And there are risks there are possibilities

JOSEY

When is the time frame by the way?

M.

We had to postpone a little bit now because of the coronavirus. So for the project it's like 2022. But for the Commission of the plant, I think it's 2023 or something.

It has so many angles in the side. it's the political and the economy and the heritage question and the technology and just the people's everyday life and everything like that. It's sustainability and nature and yeah....

JOSEY

One of the things that I am observing about this method is that in some way, It's a bit on the at the mercy of, for lack of better terms, I would say it is be at the mercy of the of the curator or the person who's in charge of handling the project. Because I guess my question if there was another curator, would you say that they would follow a similar approach to yours or would you say that they will bring a whole different perspective to how this is handled?

M.

I don't know, maybe it's difficult to guess, but I I would like in that case I also think that it's good to have maybe a little bit different aspect because to have more dynamic and feel that you are pushing forward in a new way.

JOSEY

My last question is related to audience engagement. How this method different from other forms of audience engagement?

M.

It's not a big difference actually, because It contains methods that we have worked with for many times, but maybe now we stress it TM and that we really want to do it in this way and maybe that's good for us and for the audience. And we also often work with focus groups and we participate with the special groups or individuals or associations and things like that in in in different ways, maybe children... So it's not a big difference.

But it's the difference is that we talk about it in this way.

Now in we talk about as It deals with different relations to something and different perspectives and stories, some things like.

JOSEY

Would you say that it's more practical, or that it just has a different label?

M.

I think it has a different label, but I think it's going to be for the good.... I hope so.

But I also think that it's important for us to develop the museum media, the exhibition media all the time.

JOSEY

In what sense?

M.

To do something in the in a bit of a different way for the exhibitions, for example all the time.

JOSEY

yeah different approaches

M.

Exactly.

JOSEY

I also think that it will be very interesting, if this becomes the method of choice, it will be very interesting to see how the future generation of curators will be trained in this method

M.

Right, yeah, absolutely

JOSEY

OK, well that was all the questions that I have. Thank you for your time Magdalena

M.

Thank you

