Museums and galleries as performative sites for lifelong learning: constructions, deconstructions and reconstructions of audience positions in museum and gallery education

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Abstract

In recent years community-based voluntary adult education has been under increasing pressure from neo-liberal discourses concerning the problems and benefits of globalization. Learning in museums traditionally connects to 'soft' humanist ideals of lifelong learning such as popular enlightenment, personal development and active citizenship, similar to those of the Scandinavian tradition of youth and adult education. However, even museum and gallery education has difficulties in resisting the introduction of discourses that, through new and subtle techniques of power, act in favour of individualized and marked-oriented constraints. In this article I take a critical constructivist approach to studying audience positions in lifelong learning as it is found in contemporary museum and gallery education. I use examples both from my own research in gallery education and from the case-studies of lifelong learning in museums and galleries reported at the homepage of the European consortium *Collect & Share*. I frame the discussion by using three key concepts: construction, deconstruction and reconstruction.

Key Words: Lifelong learning, museums and art galleries, audiences

Introduction

Lifelong learning in the Nordic countries – empowerment or employability? [1]
The concept of lifelong learning is an ambivalent one. On the one hand it intuitively relates to positive ideas of progress and democracy for all citizens, regardless of social status and cultural disadvantages, while on the other hand it tends to be used in aggressive neo-liberal discourses of how Western societies should face competition in a global market.

In the Nordic countries the paradigm of lifelong learning is often seen as a further development of popular enlightenment, linked to social democratic ideas of welfare and equal opportunity. Educational offerings for adults such as evening schools, summer schools, workers' institutes, open colleges etc. have given the Nordic countries a comfortable top position in international statistics on attendance in adult education (cf. e.g. Rubenson 2004: 37). Furthermore, the unique Scandinavian tradition of folk high schools, organized as small communities and situated in the countryside, has become deeply embedded in our self-esteem and self-perception. These 'popular universities' offer no formal qualifications but rather 'learning for life' through shorter and longer programmes, usually focused on different forms of cultural education. [2]

From the perspective of classical Scandinavian educational understandings, the paradigm of 'lifelong learning' is therefore understood in humanistic terms as access for citizens of all ages to voluntary adult education according to personal choices and interests. The educational scopes are related to questions of *empowerment*: increasing personal autonomy and agency through the acquisition of knowledge and development of personal and social skills.

During the last ten to fifteen years community-based voluntary adult education has been under increasing pressure from neo-liberal discourses concerning the problems and

benefits of globalization. 'If we cannot be cheaper we have to be better' is one of the preferred slogans in the rhetoric of the Danish Prime Minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who thereby contributes to the feelings of insufficiency and anxiety that increasingly have come to characterize the Nordic self-understanding: 'We will fail. Our Scandinavian welfare model with social security and peaceful lives for everyone is not competitive enough, the Arabs, the Chinese or even the Polish will come and take our jobs away from us, we have to change, to get better, to get stronger'. Or, as ominously formulated in the OECD report *Lifelong learning for all,* '[..] the question is not whether the OECD countries can pay the price for lifelong leaning but whether they can afford not to' (OECD 1996: 87).

In neo-liberal discourses lifelong learning is no longer about empowerment through adult education on a voluntary basis, but about the introduction of a new constraint: a lifelong and highly individualized commitment to learn, to develop and to change according to the changing needs of the market (cf. e.g. Rubenson 2004). The educational scope becomes one of *employability*: to increase personal flexibility in accordance with the ever shifting demands of the workforce in the so-called 'knowledge society'[3].

If we look at the field of museum and gallery education, we can say that learning in museums traditionally connects to 'soft' humanist ideals of lifelong learning such as popular enlightenment, personal development and active citizenship, similar to those of the Scandinavian tradition of youth and adult education. But, as will be discussed in this article, even museum and gallery education has difficulties in resisting the introduction of discourses that, through new and subtle techniques of power, act in favour of individualized and market-oriented constraints.

Disposition and focus

In this article I will use a critical constructivist approach in the analysis and discussion of the construction of audience positions in contemporary museum and gallery education as it relates to lifelong learning. I will use examples both from my own research in gallery education and from the case studies in lifelong learning in museums and galleries reported at homepage of the European consortium *Collect & Share*. I will frame my discussions using three concepts: construction, deconstruction and reconstruction.

- By *construction* I mean the analysis of how audience positions are constructed to facilitate experimental projects and research in museum and gallery education in the pursuit of lifelong learning.

- By *deconstruction* I mean the analysis of the forms of symbolic violence that are associated with such divisions and framings of audiences.

- By *reconstruction* I mean the always dangerous act of proposing alternative and hopefully challenging views on audience positioning in relation to the prevailing discourses of empowerment and employability.

I. Constructions

Museums as centres of learning
The concept of learning plays an important role in the construction of audience positions in contemporary museum and gallery education and in museology. As pointed out in a number of studies, learning is not a simple output of teaching in the sense that 'learners learn what teachers teach'. Learning processes involve cognitive, emotional and social dimensions as well as different levels of engagement and reflection (Illeris 2002, Hermansen 1997). The constructivist point of view on learning, which has in different ways been developed through studies like these, is that learners construct their knowledge in a quite independent and personalized fashion, connected to individual learning styles as well as to a broad range of socially and culturally embedded factors.

An important consequence is that educational settings should aim at stimulating learning processes by providing learners with access to many different paths to knowledge. To

consider themselves as 'centers of learning', museums and galleries should therefore provide more than displays on interesting themes; they should be able to connect these displays and themes to the life experiences of different groups of audiences. To promote learning, museums and galleries have to realize the sometimes surprising fact that many actual and potential visitors prefer to learn in ways and about things that are profoundly different from the staff's own preferences.

The construction of audience positions
The need for knowledge about audiences as learners has encouraged an increasing number of studies relating to learning in museums and galleries and learning through museum and gallery education. The American researcher George Hein has provided us with an overview of the historical development of visitor studies (Hein 1998). His inquiry shows how these studies have had different focal points in different historical periods, from the first behaviourist studies of adult visitors back in the 1920s and 1930s, to the development of programme and exhibit evaluation in the 1960s, to the naturalistic methods of qualitative, field-based studies. From his studies one can deduce that different research methods have contributed to different understandings of audience positions – from the almost undifferentiated 'general public' of early behaviourism to the complex 'learner typologies' of recent naturalistic inquiries.

Contemporary constructions of audiences can roughly be divided into two groups: psychological and sociological studies. Recent psychological studies have given us a complex and differentiated picture of audiences as potential learners by using parameters such as Jean Piaget's studies in developmental stages, Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, and David Kolb's learning styles (cf. e.g. Jensen 1999, Davis and Gardner 1999, Hein 1998). An additional influence on contemporary visitor studies can be found in sociological research concerning barriers to museum and gallery access which are related to economic, cultural or educational status. The famous study conducted in European art museums by Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel (1966) constitutes an important milestone for more recent sociological approaches to visitor studies, which have proved how disadvantage in relation to art gallery visits concerns a broad range of social factors, such as relations of class and education, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, lifestyles, gender, physical and mental disabilities etc. (cf. e.g. Bennett 1999, Hooper–Greenhill 1997, 1999, 2000, Gunther 1999, McGinnis 1999). A result of the combined psychological and sociological constructions of audiences is that the 'general public' of early visitor studies has been transformed into a myriad of variously defined 'audiences', 'potential audiences', 'learners', and 'participants'.

Audience positions in Collect & Share
A body of typical examples of the learning-centered trend in museum and gallery education is formed by the case studies reported on the homepage of the consortium of European museum, gallery and adult learning networks *Collect & Share*. Funded through the European Commission's 'Socrates' programme, *Collect & Share* invites museum professionals and others to report case studies of good practice in adult education on a searchable website with a special emphasis on projects which aim to benefit people who may be disadvantaged in society. The overall aim of the consortium is 'to promote good practice in learning and education for adults (age 16 or over) in or with museums, galleries, visual arts venues and practitioners'[4].

On the introductory page of the website one can see that the audience is here conceptualized as 'participants' and that the principal participant groups are constructed by the fact that they 'may be disadvantaged by social or economic factors, discrimination or disability'.[5] A more detailed characterization of the participants in the projects of *Collect & Share* is found when visitors at the homepage search for a case study in the database.[6] Here you are invited to search for particular projects related through the following constructions of the participants:

Age: *16-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56-65, over 65*

Disadvantage: *Physical disability, Economic disadvantage, Social disadvantage, Belonging to an ethnic minority, Migrants, Learning difficulties, Mental health, Unemployment, Racial prejudice.*

On the basis of these parameters educational projects can be selected to suit particular groups according to their presumed educational needs and to what the museum or gallery offers so that benefits are obtained for both parts in a mutual exchange.

An additional option for the visitor to the homepage is to search for projects by 'project types'. Through this search one can get an idea of which kind of improvement the different projects have been aiming at, and one can also get a quite accurate idea of which types of projects have been most popular among the professionals. For example, if you ask for information about case studies that facilitate 'accessibility', you will have 52 different examples to consult; a search for 'improved life skills' will generate 24 responses; while a search on 'work skills' only gives four examples of case studies, and 'foreign language learning' only one[7]. This distribution tends, I think, very roughly to strengthen my point from the introduction, namely that museum and gallery education projects related to perspectives of social inclusion and personal empowerment such as 'accessibility' and 'improved life skills' are generally preferred by educators to projects more closely related to traditional market demands of competitiveness and employability such as 'work skills' and 'foreign language learning'.

What we should not forget though, is that education, even when connected to the best intentions of social inclusion and personal empowerment, is also always related to some form of disciplining power. Therefore I find it necessary that educators should be very aware of the disciplining techniques that can be related to learning-centered museum and gallery education and how these techniques differ from other more traditional forms. I will return to this issue in the following part of the article.

II. Deconstructions

Symbolic violence

Deconstruction is a form of analysis that aims to make us aware of how the construction of spoken and unspoken binary oppositions functions as a leading principle for dominant Western understandings about the world. In this understanding dividing practices such as the construction of participant positions and learner typologies are useful tools of order and understanding, but at the same time, they inevitably exercise a symbolic form of 'violence' by concealing more subtle and complex forms of differences. In this part of the article I will use a deconstructivist approach to discuss how different constructions of audience positions have the inevitable consequence of drawing more or less visible lines between those who are included and those who are excluded from educational settings.

My point of departure is the concept of 'education'. A simple deconstruction of this concept shows how it is linked to discourses, which are clustered around the binary oppositions of 'education' and 'non-education' with 'education' as the positively marked, institutionalized concept and 'non–education' as the unmarked and chaotic opposite – the one that has to be kept out and repressed. If 'education' is good it automatically follows that 'non-education' is bad – it is a state of 'otherness' which has to be taken care of.

In an article inspired by the French philosopher Michel Foucault's genealogical analyses, Lynn Fendler from the University of Wisconsin-Madison has traced different constructions of the educated subject from Greek antiquity to the present day, and she finds that at least three of these constructions can be related to tendencies in Western modernity from the Enlightenment to the present day (Fendler 1998). Fendler analyzes three forms of discourse, which she calls 'Objectification of the subject', 'Self-discipline', and 'Education of desire'. In the following I will discuss Fendler's concepts in relation to dominant constructions of audience positions and I will argue that these positively marked constructions relate to unmarked, alienating positions of what has to be 'kept out':

Objectification of the subject

The discourses that belong to this notion are related to schooling in its early modern form based on behavioural change through the teaching of physical behaviour as a necessary requisite for the acquisition of factual knowledge. Nevertheless the modern aim of this objectification is not only to 'train' subjects through exercises, but to promote reflexivity by making 'the subjective self take the control over the subjective self' (Fendler 1998: 51). In these discourses the

'educated subject' is a 'seeing and thinking person' capable of reflecting both on objects in the world and about her or his own point of view.

In the construction of audience positions the objectification of the subject can be related to the idea of the 'general public' in descriptions of museum visitors dating back to the nineteenth century. Here the audience is constructed as an almost undifferentiated mass of people that has to be controlled and taught through the didactic organization of museum settings and by the staff (Hooper–Greenhill 2000: 26–27, 129). The reflective aim of museum and gallery education is the establishment of what one could refer to as *the disciplined eye:* the eye that looks at objects at a controlled distance and thereby creates a rationalized and reflexive relationship between reflective subjects and distanced objects.

The unmarked other of the disciplined eye is the unreflected, uncontrolled chaos associated with visitors who do not know how to behave in museums and galleries. The not-educated visitor-subject is the person that does not reflect about his or her subjective self *as* a visitor. As Tony Bennett observes, an important instrument of discipline becomes the direct marking of the bodies of the public through the proscriptions of codes of behaviour: 'no swearing, no spitting, no brawling, no eating or drinking, no dirty footwear, no gambling' (Bennett 1994: 27). In order to keep 'the mob' under control, museums and galleries are constructed as 'a space of observation and regulation in order that the visitor's body might be taken hold of and be moulded in accordance with the requirements of new norms of public conduct' (Bennett 1994: 24).

Self–discipline
According to Fendler, educational discourses of self–discipline are related to the rise of modern psychology in the first decades of the twentieth century. In this understanding the educated subject has the power to govern itself through identification with an objective need for teaching. Faith in the power of education has become much more subtle: 'the power relations of governing include not only behavior but "mentality" or the "soul"' (Fendler 1998: 53). In these discourses the educated subject is a person (usually a man) that by himself knows where he belongs in society and what his needs are. In her discussion Fendler adopts the Foucauldian concept of 'governmentality' to describe the new form of self-discipline that is expected from the educated subject: '[j]ust as modern knowledge was a kind of reflexive objectification – the subject perceives the subject – governmentality is a kind of reflexive governance – the subject disciplines the subject' Fendler (1998: 53). In the discourses of self-discipline, consciousness about one's own abilities, aptitudes and needs become a prerequisite for education.

In this understanding the construction of audience positions is related to classifications of different groups according to their knowledge of – and respect for – the ritualized practices of the museum or gallery. The 'educational museum', which addresses the masses through proscriptions of behaviour and didactic displays, differs from the 'aesthetic museum' – a kind of museum that became especially dominant in the fine arts in the twentieth century and which addresses the experienced public in search of sophisticated knowledge and undisturbed contemplation (Duncan 1995: 16). In the case of the aesthetic museum the 'general public' is substituted by an almost unspoken differentiation of audiences ranging from unschooled novices, who do not know how to behave in the uninformative settings, to knowledgeable experts capable of managing themselves according to their 'feeling for the game'. The aim of museum and gallery education, if anything, becomes one of exposing the presumably disciplined and humble eye of the newcomers to impressive experiences and making them strive towards the *connoisseur's eye* of the expert as the almost unattainable aim of their perceived need for education.

Much more than the disciplined eye, the connoisseur's eye is marked by its exclusiveness which is related to 'natural' faculties such as sensibility and taste. Because the self-discipline of the educated subject is related to the recognition of one's need for teaching, the unmarked other of this discourse becomes the subject who has no natural taste and who therefore appears as unteachable and 'hopeless'. As Bourdieu's studies on distinction have shown, the elitist claim for natural taste combined with internalized self discipline is so powerful that large groups of the population declare of their own accord that they have no taste and consequently do not frequent museums or galleries (Bourdieu 1979). The unmarked other of the connoisseur's eye becomes the unteachable and rude eye of the 'tasteless'.

Education of desire
In these discourses 'the teacher or student participates actively in the construction of an identity that is compatible with the desire to be educated' (Fendler 1998: 55). The subject is expected to like to learn, to be both motivated and positive and to enter into a close alliance with the educator. The need for teaching is subjective and deeply felt: '[b]ecoming educated [..] consists of teaching of the soul-including fears, attitudes, will and desire' (Fendler 1998: 55). The educated subject feels responsible for her own learning processes and identifies with the necessity of becoming involved in a never-ending developmental process according to her shifting personal needs and to the demands of rapid societal changes. Governmentality is internalized as a 'natural' desire to adapt, and contrary attitudes are defined in terms of individual rather than structural problems. In this way education based on the desire to learn conceals power relations in favour of intimate forms of relationship.

The construction of audience positions is closely related to constructivist learning theory in that it focuses on the transformation of audiences of participants responsible for finding their own paths to learning. The educational aim of the 'constructivist museum' (Hein 1998) is the desiring eye of individual involvement and presence combined with a willingness to share personal experiences in educational situations. From the perspective of the desiring eye educators will consider themselves facilitators of participants' own learning processes and they will expect the participants to engage in projects concerning not only the museum collections and exhibitions, but a range of topics and problematics related to their personal life experiences. In this sense 'education of desire' has strong connections to the previously mentioned idea of museums and galleries as 'centers of learning', where audiences can choose between a range of educational offerings, according to individual interests and needs.

The unmarked other of the desiring eye is more difficult to identify than the other two, because discourses related to the education of desire are generally very inclusive and open to individual interests and diversities, as can, for example, be seen in the case studies of Collect & Share. In a certain sense, education of desire is about following your own interests and the disciplining power is directed at the subtle guiding of those interests through different forms of counseling rather than through direct formulations of right and wrong, good and bad. Learners are thereby forced to act by making strategic moves more rather than by making direct refusals. What is actually kept out of the discourse is the learner who according to the prevailing discourses of participation 'acts against his or her own interests' through unwillingness and resistance. His or her eye will probably be marked by words such as 'passive', 'irresponsible' and/or 'excluded'.

New young people and the internalization of power structures
In my research on gallery education I have been concerned with projects dealing with young people's encounter with contemporary works of art (cf. e.g. Illeris 1999, 2005). A particularly interesting result of this research is that young people aged 14-19 generally act in a very competent manner in their encounters with complex, interactive art forms such as installation art, interactive videos, and site-specific art. In contrast to older visitors who often try to use a disciplined or a connoisseur's eye in their encounter with contemporary art forms, the majority of the young people adopted a desiring eye by throwing themselves into direct experiences with the artworks and by taking individual responsibility for their own learning processes. In a written account Dina, a girl from upper secondary school, states:

> Even though trying to get something productive out of the artworks seemed overwhelming at first, it actually became really interesting when you forgot to use your common sense for a while and just let your thoughts take over. You just can't compare contemporary art to the art we are used to. [..] I mean, it's entirely up to the individual what they can or will get out of it. It depends completely on the individual human being's attitudes and morals and there is no simple answer. *(Quoted in Illeris 2005)*

This attitude of 'forgetting to use your common sense' and acceptance that 'there is no simple answer' made one educator talk about the young people as 'the perfect audience' (Illeris 2005). Another side of young people's 'perfect' approach to contemporary art is, however, that their

claim of independence makes them very critical towards any form of traditional teaching. As documented in a report from another recent Danish project, what was perceived as 'the lecturing attitude' of some of the educators was reported in very negative terms by the young people. In an interview Sofie, also from an upper secondary school, states:

> Then we went around to take a look at the artworks you know, and then she presented us with an… an analysis and an interpretation just like that, bang, bang, bang… this what it is about. This is what the artist thought. And it was, you know, it was almost like…sitting in…in class…It was just plain teaching, there was no, 'What do you think?' *8 (Hjort and Larsen 2003: 6)*

When analyzed in relation to recent Danish research on young people's attitudes towards learning the idea of the young people as 'perfect audience' becomes particularly interesting. Following the line of thinking of the German youth researcher Thomas Ziehe, the Danish researcher Birgitte Simonsen has conducted empirical research on the 'new forms of consciousness' that characterize young people of today and the break with the problems of education and learning that have prevailed in recent decades. Whereas teachers used to fight against a passive attitude among students, today's young people are prepared to be active and to take control of their own learning processes:

> Earlier, teachers tried to get the younger generation to take on responsibility for their own learning. The difficulty was in breaking down a passive and expectant attitude to the teaching situation which was an obstacle to border-crossing teaching. Today pupils are actually taking responsibility for their own learning. They regard it as their own fault if they do not succeed in something and think that they should manage it all themselves. When this observation is combined with the lack of compromise in choice of interest, a picture is drawn of a generation that is in the process of taking on responsibility for a completely new structure of independence and responsibility [..] (Simonsen 2000: 149).

Young people of today seem to accept the fact that education is an individual matter that engages all aspects of the learner's personality. They take responsibility for their own learning and thereby fulfill the dreams of constructivist learning theories. They also adopt a desiring eye – in my project I have found that they actually *demand* to follow their own paths to learning by refusing to accept knowledge taught by an educator in the traditional way.

But Simonsen also points to the unmarked side of contemporary education of desire: due to an increased sense of individual responsibility (they think they should manage it all themselves) the new young people are unwilling to make social compromises (they do not want to take knowledge from the teacher) although they also express an anxious attitude (What if I can't make it? I have only myself to blame).

The above discussion points to the fact that 'the perfect audience' of contemporary gallery education seems to be the subject that adopts a desiring eye and who is capable of acting responsibly towards his or her own learning processes. Most of the young people in my project actually acted in accordance with this picture, and thereby confirmed the success of the forms of discipline and the ideals to which it relates. If we see empowerment as a question of taking responsibility for their own learning processes, young people are very advanced and independent. But, as Simonsen discusses, when it comes to the negative 'unmarked' side of the construction, young people of today feel they do not have anyone else but themselves to blame if things go wrong. Very much in line with the anxiety produced by neo-liberal discourses of individualization in lifelong learning, today's young people have internalized the power structures of the educational process and see it as an individual problem if they fail. In terms of employability the desiring eye is a welcome requisite in a flexible workforce that willingly takes individual responsibility for problems and challenges that might be created structurally.

III. Reconstructions

From a (de)constructivist point of view, being a member of an audience or a participant in educational projects is not something given, something you *are,* it is a social construction, and

– even when it is directed towards social inclusion and personal development – it is a result of some form of symbolic violence, whether the disciplining power is perceived as coming from outside the subject or from internalized forms of governmentality. In this sense the desiring eye of contemporary learner–centered pedagogy has just as strong disciplining functions as the disciplined eye of the authoritarian pedagogy or the connoisseur's eye of the pedagogy of taste.

In this final part of the article, I will try make some points about how I think that the knowledge of symbolic forms of violence generated by deconstruction might be used in contemporary museum and gallery education. My aim will not be the construction of a new educational model, but rather to point to certain tools of reflection, which we as educators could consider taking into account in our projects together with the participants. My leading questions will be these. How can we construct museum and gallery education in relation to lifelong learning whilst maintaining a humanistic educational goal of personal and social empowerment, when we take into account the knowledge that education, including its learner-centered forms, always includes power relations and symbolic forms of violence? And how can we resist instrumentalizing discourses of adaptation and employability related to lifelong learning? I will discuss these questions under three headings: shared metareflection, performance and empowerment.

Shared metareflection
First of all, I think it is necessary to use the strategies of deconstruction as a tool for more complex forms of reflection about learning processes in museum and gallery education than what we might be used to. The term *metareflection* has been developed in constructivist learning theory where it is used to describe a way of thinking where you reflect about the way you reflect (cf. e.g. Hermansen 1997: 137-142, Illeris 2002: 261-263). Following this thinking, the Danish Professor Lars Qvortrup defines metareflection in education as 'the faculty to observe preconditions for and development of competencies' Qvortrup (2001: 109). In this sense metareflection in education actually constitutes rather more than the prerequisite for didactic thinking that is nowadays taken for granted, namely that teachers are expected to reflect extensively on the goals of the educational activities they promote. In respect of contemporary educational practices though, I will argue that metareflection cannot be considered a privilege of the teacher alone, because, as discussed earlier in this article, learners increasingly demand to take part in the organization of their own learning processes. Therefore, an important strategy in late-modern education should consist in the promotion of transparent or *shared* metareflection where all participants are given the opportunity to understand, comment on and eventually change the preconditions for the learning situation from an informed position.

In museum and gallery education, shared metareflection can be seen as a strategy of relativization, which allows educators and participants to work together to question and challenge naturalized assumptions about teaching and learning – for example, the assumption that audiences that act as engaged, responsible and critical participants according to the expectations of the educator, are somehow better and more valuable than audiences whose way of acting is more conventional and passive. Through shared metareflections about different cultural and historical constructions of 'the perfect audience' and 'the perfect educational situation' and about the means and goals of museum and gallery education, learners might be able to challenge, or at least to widen, their conceptions of how to approach the situation. Because of its relativizing function, shared metareflection constitutes an important premise for empowerment through lifelong learning in museums and galleries by giving all participants the possibility to understand, and eventually to change, the ways in which they might think they are expected to join the educational situation.

Performance
In my own research I have used metareflection as a prerequisite for reconceptualizations of gallery education by introducing the concept of performance (Illeris 2003). Inspired by anthropological approaches to performance from the 1970s by researchers such as Richard Bauman (1977) and Barbara Kirshenblatt–Gimblett (1974), and by a recent article by the Swedish researcher Karin Becker (2004), I have proposed an understanding of the educational

setting of museum and gallery education not as a ritualized practice, but as a situated event. While the idea of the museum as a ritual, as discussed extensively by Carol Duncan (1995), demands obedience to the 'script' of the museum, the museum as a performance emphasizes the theatrical, the play and the metacommunicative function. Performance 'consists in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence' (Bauman 1977: 11). In my conception of gallery education as performance the script and the distribution of roles are ideally decided from time to time according to the 'play' you want to perform or the 'game' you want to play. Instead of talking about the educator or the participant as fixed roles, the encounter is conceptualized as an exchange between relationally constructed 'positions'.

In this way I use metareflective strategies to problematize, *pace* Foucault, the individualization and intimization[8] of education as it relates to the prevailing 'education of desire'. When museum and gallery education is understood as performance even the 'plays' of the disciplined eye or the connoisseur's eye can be performed, if that appears to be the most appropriate way to approach the situation, as can of course the individualized approaches of the desiring eye. Furthermore, through this understanding educators will be free to consider their role in a more open way than is usual. As stated by Robin Usher, an Australian professor in adult education, to be able to work in a postmodern reality 'teachers have to problematize their conventional role as "enlightened pedagogues"': '[t]hey need to avoid taking themselves too seriously even when they are engaged in education for social transformation' (Usher 1998: 64). To think of museum and gallery education as a game where every position is a role to be played – even the exposed objects or the building – opens the way to much freer and less ritualized ideas of how an educational setting should be.

Empowerment
Finally we must ask ourselves how we can use these reflections in the service of empowerment understood in humanistic terms of personal development, social inclusion and active citizenship. Here, I think that a central issue is to insist on a continuous questioning of power relations. Even in playful and humorous relationships, such as the ones discussed above, questions of power cannot be cancelled or ignored. When, for instance, one adopts the position of the educator one adopts a position of power that can easily be used to reproduce and strengthen existing divisions and relationships between positions in the educational setting. But to 'empower' in educational settings, according to my view, is not only to adopt a learner-centered attitude where everyone follows his or her own path to learning without constraints. Neither is it to intimatize learning to the point where profound personal changes according to prevailing ideologies of individual autonomy become the goal of every setting. To 'empower' is to give all participants – including the educator – possibilities of informed choices by exposing, discussing and trying different positionings and possibilities.

Another important question that should be asked in relation to lifelong learning is whether we have to consider learning in museums and galleries as mainly an individual or a social project. As discussed in the introduction, neo-liberal discourses strongly emphasize learning as an individual responsibility to increase one's personal amount of 'human capital' in relation to employability. This approach can in some regards be related to the education of the desiring eye in learning-centered pedagogy, and even in young people's understandings of learning as an individual responsibility. In contrast, the more traditional humanist approach emphasizes a strong role for socially oriented community-based education where, as in the case of Nordic folk high schools, learning is mainly understood from the perspective of its social dimension. In this understanding empowerment is not only about taking personal responsibility for one's own learning processes but also about improving the general quality of life in the community. In the case of the museum and gallery education this means that we must consider education as not just an individual benefit, but as a social activity embedded in the surrounding social settings.

Finally, I want to quote Robin Usher who states that even if we always perceive education as a form of betterment 'it does not follow that there is only one kind of 'betterment' and that we always know what it is in advance' (Usher 2000: 64). On the contrary, if we are able both to recognize, to problematize and eventually to play with the positions in the educational

space according to the needs and ideas of the participants in the actual situation, museum and gallery education might even be able to empower itself through resistance to market-oriented individualizing discourses.

Notes

1   This article is a revised version of a key note paper given at the conference *Lifelong Learning in Museums and Galleries: A life-changing experience,* Moderna Museet, Stockholm 15-17 June 2005. All translations of Danish quotations into English are my own.

2   The folk high schools are non-formal educational institutions created in the second half of the 19th century to provide courses for peasants. The schools function as small communities where everybody – teachers and students– live together (www.hojskolerne.dk).

3   For those with a broader interest in Scandinavian adult education I recommend Knud Illeris's book *Adult education and adult learning* which has recently been published in English by Roskilde University Press (Illeris 2004)

4   http://www.collectandshare.eu.com/whatis/index.aspx

5   http://www.collectandshare.eu.com/studies/index.aspx. At my last visit to this page at 1 February 2006, this introduction had been changed as part of a general renewal of the site.

6   http://www.collectandshare.eu.com/studies/search.aspx

7   The numbers refer to a search made by the author in June 2005. Some case-studies have been translated into two languages. Each translation appears as a separate case study in the database, meaning that sometimes the same case study actually gives two responses.

8   The concept of intimization derives from intimacy. It conveys Foucault's sense that since the nineteenth century governmentality has entailed a certain kind of individuality. What I want to emphasize here is that contemporary cultural policy participates in the lives of individuals by, as it were, inviting and ordering a concern with the intimacy of personal relations and experiences so that the realm of the personal is opened up for reflection and investigation by individuals themselves. Thus, for example, individuals may be selected as employees for their competences in personalized social settings as opposed to their mere mastery of technical or bureaucratic skills.

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