

Interview on audio tours at the Art Gallery of Ontario

Audio tour guide device for "Surreal Things" traveling exhibition from the VNA, at the AGO

Date of interview: May 7, 2009

Interviewer: James Yoon

Subject: Erin Yu

General notes

- Erin visited the AGO on May 6, 2009 and used an audio tour guide device to lead her through the "Surreal Things" exhibition at the AGO
- Audio tour guide was on a mobile device, allowing users to input a number corresponding to an object or group of objects to listen to a single commentary track about said object(s)
 - Audio track numbers were displayed in a label beside an object or group of objects
- The audio device had no forward/backward controls
- Erin paid for the audio tour guide (\$5 on top of the entry price; as an AGO member, she had free entry, but still had to pay for the guide)
- Generally found the audio tour interesting
- Normally, Erin doesn't listen to use the audio tour guide
 - Primary barrier: cost

Effect on behavior

- On this trip, Erin listened to most of the audio tracks, to maximize the money she spent
- Erin found that the audio tour affected how she traveled through the exhibition space, in terms of pace and path
 - Found herself looking actively for the audio signs throughout the space
 - She paced herself through the space so that she could listen to the whole track
 - She lingered at objects longer just to listen to the whole track
 - Without the audio tour, she would have merely glanced at some objects, but the audio tour compelled her to stay longer, and she came through with a greater appreciation of the object
- She went through the museum space systematically by audio track number, to listen to the audio tracks in sequence (and depth-first where available)
- Because the audio tour device had no fast forward or backward feature, she:
 - would need to listen to the whole thing in case there was something interesting at the end
 - would have to go back to the beginning again if there was something interesting that she kind of missed and wanted to listen to more thoroughly (which she did)

Audio track content

- There was one audio track per object or group of objects
- Content-wise, there was some overlap between what was on the walls and labels and what was in the audio tracks
- Audio track consisted of commentaries and interviews by expert curators (at the AGO), and creators of the objects (artists, fashion designers, photographers, furniture designers, etc.)
- Erin found these very interesting listen to: gave context around the objects
- Interviews and commentaries relayed things she'd otherwise never know about: how, when, where the object was created; stories about why it was made in such a way, why a certain material was used, etc.

If the audio tours were free...

- If audio tours were free, Erin would pick it up every time, if just to listen to one or two tracks
 - But she'd listen to tracks for most of them anyways, unless it looked really uninteresting
- On return visits, she would still pick it up if she hadn't been through the tour exhaustively before, especially if there was something she wanted to listen to again (or wanted her friend to listen to)
- Even if she were going to the museum with a friend or group of friends, she'd still pick it up and listen to the audio tour
 - Her friends would most likely be interested in using it as well, but if they weren't naturally interested, she would ask her friends to use it too (but not to the extent of forcing them)