

Perspectives on handicraft, tradition and heritage

”HEMSLÖJD”?

What is “hemslöjd”? A Swedish term translated in English as ”handicraft”, ”cottage craft”, ”art”, ”craft”, ”arts and crafts”, ”folk art”, or ”souvenir”, depending on whom you ask and the context of the question.

The leaders of the Swedish ”hemslöjdsrörelse”, or the ”arts and crafts movement”, recommend a definition that stresses authenticity, quality, certain valued kinds of materials, and methods, form, constructions, and colour. Slöjd is objects made mainly by hand, with the right tools, and with machines only as support in the first phases of the production. (Hemslöjden 1954:2/3:65). The members on the other hand seem to look at slöjd as something more concrete, as certain types of products, the organisation, its shops, while Swedish state authorities mostly has looked upon hemslöjd as an industrial branch. (Danielson 1991:280).

What many seem to agree upon as the most important defining criteria are use of natural materials, obvious remnants of work by hand, and forms and shapes of a certain age – what is generally referred to as ”tradition”. A simple folk definition much in use is that hemslöjd is all that what you can buy in the organisations’ shops. This means that also size and prize are important defining criteria. Slöjd are things that could be easily carried, transported, that has a substantial prize, signalling high value, but still is within reach for potential customers, without having to dig to big a hole in their wallets. These are criteria well understood by handicraft and souvenir salesmen in airports: ”airport art” is a global industry that produces memorable things as a service for travellers who forget about the ”old folks at home” until the last moment. Also use and function are important criteria: much slöjd could but should not be used. Although the possible use of the produced things is much praised, their prime use is as esthetical object for visual consumption.

... souvenirs?

It is interesting to compare with other close categories. Take for example ”souvenir”. In the local museum the person responsible for the museum store, stresses that their products must have local ties, historical connections, and if possible be copied on original objects in the museum. To her ”souvenirs” connotes plastic and ”made in Japan”. Interestingly, also the manager of Immenco, a Gotlandic souvenir company, stresses local ties and historicity as

important criteria for their products. The manager says that he has noticed that while tourists ten years ago bought collectors items, such as dolls, spoons, plates, with "Gotland" imprinted, they today are more interested in things they can use. The souvenir market has become more of a market for children, he says, and to them local and historical ties to Gotland are not so important.

From interviews with procurers and customers in the souvenir market in Gotland, a student in the Gotland University found that a good souvenir must be:

- easy to carry and not too big – it should be easy to pack in the luggage.
- made in a natural material suitable for transport, such as wood or fabric.
- not too expensive, but also not too cheap.
- Make an impression of solid craftsmanship – "hand made".
- Display a clear local distinctiveness and give an impression of old age and long tradition.
- In tune with other things people already have in their homes, and have a clear function.

Prize and size seems to be the most important criteria the student concludes. Bigger and more expensive souvenirs, with distinctive historical and local bonds, are in fact bought mainly by gotlanders themselves, as anniversary or wedding gifts to relatives, or to display at home as a mark of local identity.

The point here is that from the objects alone it can be difficult to tell the difference between slöjd and souvenirs. The most important difference in fact seems to be where it is sold. Slöjd is sold in exclusive and controlled contexts, such as museums, and shops connected to the handicraft organisations. Souvenirs are sold anywhere. More generally put, whatever is understood as art, handicraft, and souvenir, much of the difference belongs not to the objects, but to contexts: how the objects are looked upon and treated, where they are sold and so on. Slöjd, or handicraft, adds value to the object, cultural capital if you wish. Souvenir is a term that adds little or no value in cultural terms. On the contrary, it more often than not devaluates such value.

"Folk"

An important word that is a hallmark of the context of handicraft, but not of souvenirs is "folk". The notion of "folk" is important in the world of handicraft, although not always spelled out loud. In an 200 year old European usage, the word folk come to mean something that stems from remote, isolated areas, made by naive peasants, lacking education and

unaware of what they are doing in terms of art. The competence is passed on in unbroken tradition, from father to son, from mother to daughter. They belong to a collective, and are therefore anonymous. Their products therefore represent the people, not the individual, and shall be evaluated from a functional rather than an esthetical perspective. These widespread ideas must be understood in connection to what "folk" is not – "art". Take all common criteria for "high art" and reverse them – what you get is "folk" (Ronström 1990:14-15, Glassie 1992:14-15).

Created in the end of the 18th century, the "art" and "folk" dichotomy today has become split up by yet another important term – "popular", or "mass-". These terms constitute a system of three opposite poles. They can be coupled into alliances in interesting ways. For example, while it could be debated if handicraft is art or folk, it is certainly not "popular" or "mass-". It is this couple that constitutes the base of museums, in opposition, or even reaction, to popular culture. Here is an instance where the folk and the people are effectively split up. Folk stands for the genuine and traditional, while the people stands for popular culture out of reach for the controlling eye and taste police of the museal institutions and organisations. (Bausinger 1980:26-27).

A brief look at the history of hemslöjd (folk handicraft) in Sweden.

How did all this happen? Let us take a brief look at the history of hemslöjd in Sweden.

A precondition for the creation of anything like folk handicraft, is of course the construction of "folk traditions" as reproducible commodified objects. Other preconditions are the existence of arenas that could be used for such displaying and distributing both the ideas and the objects representing the ideas, and audience willing to value these objects positively. In Sweden the notion of "Swedish folk craft" – "svensk hemslöjd" was established during the late 19th century, by academic scholars, in close co-operation with romantic writers and artists. A market for "folk objects" was born in Swedish urban centres in the second half of the 18th century. To meet the musical needs of the growing bourgeoisie a number of small and large arenas and venues for displaying folk handicraft were built. In the last years, the first producers found their ways to the first shops.

So, by the turn of the century all the preconditions were at hand. In 1899, the organisation for Swedish hemslöjd was born (Danielson 1991:241). The goal of the organisation was to "support the social and economical relevance (betydelse) of hemslöjd for the Swedish country-side households, with a wish to raise the quality of material, techniques, form and colour, by going

back to older handicraft and folk art traditions that were disappearing”
(Nationalencyklopedin:535).

In this first phase, we typically find young urban professionals as the main actors, in urban settings, often in fancy shops, or museums, aiming at an upper class or bourgeois audience. The actors typically aimed at demonstrating to an ignorant but friendly audience the great value of old and almost forgotten folk traditions. The idea was to use folk traditions to launch new national ideas, and to evoke feelings of patriotism among the urban bourgeoisie. It was through such things as folk handicraft that the abstract idea of “the nation” was translated into concrete objects and emotionally, even devotionally, fuelled. It is thus not by chance that one of these items – the ”dalahäst” – the Dalecarlian horse, a small carved and painted wooden horse, eventually became recognised as a Swedish national symbol.

From the very beginning the “message” of folk handicraft in Sweden was framed and shaped by the urban setting, the settings in which the objects were presented, the composition of the audience. Folk handicraft, as folk dance, folk music, etc became a part of a growing bulk of urban popular art and entertainment, although under other names, and thus marked by all the special performance practices and manners that belonged to such entertainments, which persistently have clinged to much folk traditions ever since.

A second phase begins in the early 20th century, when the idea of “folk” and “nation” became institutionalised, given form and content by a number of new organisations, systems, structures etc. An obvious example is The Nordic Museum in Stockholm, and of course Skansen, the worlds first open-air folk museum, and model for most of all those that were to come the world around. Museums, fairs and special handicraft shops were an instrumental part of this development. On many of these occasions we find “the folk” itself, peasant craftsmen appearing as themselves. But as before, in the background we find as the main actors a gallery of devoted urban educated professionals: teachers, doctors and the like. During this phase, handicraft organisations were formed all over the country, in Gotland this happened in 1925, as one of the last in the country (Melin & Bergdahl 1975:12f). In this phase, the overall horizon that gave meaning to all this was the nation. All the actors were Swedes, representing their villages, parishes, regions and of course also themselves as individual artists. Although not always overtly stated, the artists and the objects they created were consciously constructed and projected as symbolic representations of

the nation. All the displayed differences in form, style, colour etc among merged to a larger unified, albeit more complex national whole, “ a unity in diversity” of the time.

Another feature was that folk handicraft was intensionally projected and staged as an individual art of especially gifted people. Most of them were old, therefor seen as especially competent in old traditions. It was in this period that the persistent ideas about the special values of certain types of objects styles, forms etc, from certain times and regions became firmly established, not only among the organisers, but also among audiences and the craftsmen themselves. In the first days there could be quite different opinions among organisers and craftsmen about what kind of items, and in what styles that should be made. These differences soon disappeared, as the makers themselves took over the attitudes towards their objects held by the educated urban professionals.

The third phase starts in the first half of the 20th century, when the institutions, systems and structures that gave birth to the national movement of the preceding century began to take over the organisation of handicraft production. Thereby folk handicraft became institutionalised and transformed into a means to display the nation not as an idea, but as a lived reality. The Swedish State soon became the principal patron of the organisation. 1922 the first ”hemslöjdskonsulent” handicraft consultant was employed, and since there has been two handicraft consultants in every region, one in ”hard” and one in ”soft” slöjd, and a special consultant for Sami handicraft (Nationalencyklopedien:535). The organisations own magazine ”Hemslöjden” started 1933 (Danielson 1991:11).¹ The makers and audiences that took an interest in folk crafts displayed in a local outdoor museum, a handicraft shop, or the like were new urbanites, people literally with one leg in the old peasant society and the other in the new industrial society. However, behind the activities, as devoted organisers, we again typically find educated urban middle class professionals.

The fourth phase of the handicraft movement begins after the Second World War. Now, the horizons providing meaning to the production of folk handicraft changed dramatically – folk handicraft became international. The new international format required new standards, larger organisations, a more elaborate “national folklore”, made by well-trained ”peasant” artists. All this called for more professional competence. 1963 the handicraft organisation opened its own school, Sätergläntan in Insjön, Dalarna (Nationalencyklopedien: 535).

¹ Published six times a year in approx. 19 000 copies.

An important part of the new format was still national representation. But, if earlier handicraft had been used to represent the nation to an audience of supposed “insiders”, compatriots, handicraft now became used extensively as national representation also to audiences of other nations. Thereby the meaning of the “folk” changed, from denoting mainly the lower stratum of a nation (for example “the peasantry”), to the entire population of a nation, “the people”. Two entirely different notions of “folk” were thus successfully merged: the romantic “folk”, and the socialist “people”. The resulting, often somewhat puzzling amalgamation of old peasant styles and newer working class styles, of romantic and socialist rhetoric and imaging, is still a prominent part of any display of “folk traditions” in most Western countries today.

A fifth phase begins in the 1980’s. The movement and its organisations went into a long-standing crisis, when the old forms for handicraft production lost their relevance, and when the sales in the handicraft shops dropped. Fewer and less active members, many of the shops closed, uncertain future, led to a search for new ideas, new forms, even a new identity of the movement, which has been prominent during the last ten years.² During the same period, the main key word in the discourse around handicraft and other remnants of “the old peasant society” changed from tradition to heritage.

This new word signals yet another drastical change in format and horizons. Today much handicraft production, although still labelled folk, traditional, national etc, in fact is becoming globalized. Not inter-national, since what is represented in this new phase is not primarily nations. Rather handicraft is now used to stage a kind of global botanical garden of artefacts, forms, styles etc, where objects becomes “brands” or “trade marks” of a geographical unit (a village, a region or a nation), a social unit (an ethnic or an interest group, a community), an esthetical unit (a style or trend), or an economical unit (a company, an agency etc).

Doers, knowers and makers

The development outlined above indicates several major changes in the global economical and cultural systems. Some of these changes can be summarised in and analysed by a simple model. In relation to their motives or goals, the actors in any field or arena can take at least three typical positions. Most actors’ prime motive is simply to make things. These we can call “doers”. To be

² Today the Swedish handicraft movement has around 20 000 members. (www.hemslojden.org)

able to make their things doers have to obtain enough resources and competence (knowledge), but these are seen and treated as means to reach the goal, to make things. Abstract, theoretical knowledge that does not relate directly to the production, often play a subordinate role. For the typical doer, quality and authenticity is anchored in the making itself and the experiences that evolve from it: “As long as it feels right it is right”

For another type of actor the goal is precisely the abstract knowledge, research - to find answers to questions about when, where, how and who. We can call them knowers. The typical knower is of course the academic researcher, but in reality many knowers are amateur-researchers that do not belong to Academia. The result of focusing upon knowledge is that much activity consists of and circles around words. Typical knowers perform most of their activities by their desks, and in archives, libraries, classrooms and conferences. Quality and authenticity is anchored in scientific procedures, which makes exegesis an important activity, i.e. discussions about how sources and materials should be evaluated and interpreted. The result of such discussions, often presented as central results of many years of research, can from the perspective of the doer seem uninteresting and apart, due to the lack of obvious relations to the making of things. The differences in perspectives that stem from the different positions of these two types of actors, have in many countries become institutionalised in special schools for doing and for knowing.

To a third type belong producers, managers, salesmen, entrepreneurs of different kinds, actors whose prime motive is to distribute and sell the results of the activities of both doers and knowers. We can call them “makers”. What for doers and knowers are goals, are for makers more often than not means to reach other goals, such as raising attention, spreading messages, attracting audiences, making money. In the typical case quality is related to how successfully these goals are reached and therefor quality is translated to quantity: “whatever attracts more people and bring in more money is good”.

Shifting power

Doers, knowers and makers are three positions that actors can take in relation to a musical field, and should not be seen as abilities/properties/traits of individuals.³ The three positions make up a

³ Of course, one and the same individual can flow between all three.

system and a model that can be used for description and analysis of processes of change in the control of and power over the expressive forms that make up the centre of the field of handicraft.

An interesting example is the displacement in the power over the “Middle Ages” that has taken place since the 1980’s. Earlier the Middle Ages belonged almost entirely to knowers, because their control over the access to the firsthand-sources, such as the unique and precious medieval books, incunables, in special research libraries. Knowledge about the Middle Ages thereby became severely marked by the special interests of knowers, and filtered through their perspectives. The type of knowledge needed by potential doers to enact other versions of the Middle Ages was not produced, but instead a lot of from their perspectives uninteresting debates about interpretation and origins. During the 1980’s and 1990’s, the hegemony of the knowers was broken by the collective efforts of large numbers of medieval enthusiasts in many parts of the world. This was accomplished mainly by publishing source materials on the Internet. Thereby the sources became directly accessible, in transcription or facsimile, to a growing number of young people interested not in knowing, but in doing. By adding easily understandable and very concrete “do-it-yourself” instructions to the original texts, they became usable as a kind of handbooks for potential medievalists.

As a result of this, during the medieval week in Visby you can find medievalists performing music, songs and dance in totally new styles, in homemade clothes of medieval type. In the medieval market last year I met a man who since two years made a living on making and selling clothes exclusively from the 1360’s. He had found – on the Internet – enough sources, in text and pictures, to start a production of “authentic Middle Age clothing” which turned out to be quite profitable. In the same market you could buy armour, chainmail, pottery etc all made by young enthusiasts by hand, in natural materials, with old and supposedly “authentic” methods, paying much attention to style and form – that is handicraft.

Thoinot Arbeau’s “Orcheseographie” first published in 1589, is one of few sources to dance modes of the late middle ages and renaissance. During more than three centuries it was available only to limited circles of dance professionals and researchers.⁴ But in the 1990’s the entire work was scanned and made available on the Internet by several persons independent from each other, but linked to the international Middle-age-movement, with one of its centres in the world-wide

⁴ Between the 1880’s and 1970’s the book was published in several limited editions.

organisation Society for Creative Anachronism, SCA. Most of these young newcomers to the field, “Scadians” or “medievalists”, seem to have little or no interest in source interpretation and criticism, but all the more in how to perform the described dances. To meet these needs, the new Internet editions of “Orcheseographie”, as well as John Playford’s “The dancing master” and many other sources of this kind, have been expanded with simple instructions, many of which seem to be modelled upon the “getting started” section of software manuals. On the sites there are also links to sites with appropriate music, advice on style, clothing, shoes and much more. As a result of this fast development, during the annual medieval week in Visby, Gotland, Sweden, it is now possible to find young enthusiasts dressed up in medieval-style clothes, dancing their home-made versions of dances of which most have not been danced at all for many centuries, to their own home-made songs, or to any music that happens to be available to them. What is in their minds is not to create authentic replicas of the original dances, nor to instigate a medieval dance revival, but rather to dance and have fun.

There are many similar examples, where Internet provides not only an easily accessible channel to original sources, but also to “cook-book” recipes for how to make the best use of them. The knower’s loss of control over the sources generally means loss of control over the definitions of content and meaning, which gives the doers new conditions and possibilities. This is a part of massive trend in many parts of today’s Western societies that may be summarised “from informative to performative” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). Many have pointed to how museums, schools, TV, radio etc, in recent years have come to centre around the sensual, emotional and experiential, rather than the earlier so central intellectual capacities. And when emotions and experiences are foregrounded, objects are transformed into instruments for the experiencing subjects, the consumers. When beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, the object is reduced to a tool for the emotional experience of the individual. The objects are interesting as long as they keep producing emotional experiences, which create a drive for raised levels of esthetical expression. Then esthetics, not ethics, moral or knowledge, become leading principles of how to evaluate life. These shifts - from knowers to doers and makers, and from knowing, doing and making, to the results and effects (emotional experiences, performances, profits, raised attention etc) - represent a new order in the power structures around the production and managing of knowledge that without doubt will have many consequences in the future (Lundberg, Malm & Ronström 2000).

Also the development of handicraft in Sweden can be described as shifts in the power relations between the three positions, shifts from knowers to doers, from doers to makers, and from knowing to doing and making. As already noted, the concept of a Swedish folk handicraft tradition was coined in the late 1800's century on initiative of knowers. The content then developed as results of long-standing negotiations between knowers and doers. By the late 1900's the concept had become petrified into a national symbol, and as such it survived well into the mid 20th century. In the late 20th century the old forms of handicraft production lost much of their relevance. The many new forms that new born was kept out of the old organisations, thus not considered as true or authentic folk handicraft. With the many new doers, producing what by definition must be seen as handicraft, but in reality is actively outdefined from the handicraft field, followed the emergence of a type of makers new to the handicraft field: private business men, managers, agents, organisers of fairs and markets, and last but not least, professionals involved in heritage production, such as tourist agencies, ad designers, image and brand creators, cultural politicians etc. What now seems to be going on is makers taking over the control over the arenas and media central to the field. Through this development also handicraft has become a part of a growing worldwide "attention economy" (Goldhaber 1997a, b).

Driving forces and effects

Folk handicraft today is deeply embedded in at least three different economies. One is the "normal" money economy, where handicraft objects, as parts of the global hegemony of capitalistic market economy, are sold and bought as just any kind of commodity. Another is the symbolic economy, where the currency is cultural status or value, cultural capital. A third is a fast growing attention economy, where the currency is such visibility that can produce attention. These economies interact in interesting ways. In a money economy visibility is a means to make money. In an attention economy money is a means to buy visibility. Neither money nor visibility can ensure growth of cultural capital. On the contrary, too much money or visibility can lead to a devaluation of cultural capital. In a money economy profitability is to produce long series that can be distributed widely ("broadcasting"). In an attention economy profitability is reached through production of difference. The distinctively different is visible only if produced in small numbers. Folk traditions, including handicraft, has become a major vehicle for producing and dramatising differences of all kinds. This has made fairs and exhibitions especially important for investments in attention economy. But, as attention is a very competitive market, paradoxically it will end up producing differences that are similar (Lundberg, Malm, Ronström 2000).

Often fairs and exhibitions are used as a kind of exchange bureaus. They produce great visibility for relatively low costs that can lead to high attention, which in turn can lead to higher status and eventually also recognition. The visibility can be sold, as can the attention be re-directed. Both state institutions and private companies are interested potential buyers.⁵ A big company can buy visibility for money that is then distributed to artists, in exchange for redirecting attention to the company. Individuals and organisations with cultural capital can sell their services to fairs and exhibitions (for example as opening speakers, guests of honour etc), which in turn might raise the visibility and attention for the festival as such as well as for the artists. Often individual artists perform as representative for a collective of some kind, an ethnic group or an interest group, a local community, a region, or a nation. The visibility and attention that the artist can achieve, can easily be transferred to this collective, which makes fairs and exhibitions an important potential resource for groups that considered themselves underprivileged, and therefor strive to raise their status and recognition in society.

Fairs, exhibitions, or with a more modern word – festivals - are effective arenas for distribution of messages and communication of symbols and signs, and can in this light be seen as expressions of the kind of changes in late 20th century that often are summarised as “postmodernity” - on the one hand a stress on mixes, bricolage, eclecticism, crossover, blurring of genres and categories, on the other a purifying, reifying and labelling of expressive forms and styles, to produce fast and clear-cut messages. With the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman a prime effect of festivalisation can be described as a strive for “greatest possible impression on shortest possible time” (Bauman 1994), or with words of the Russian semiotician Boris Uspenskij “largest possible number of signs in smallest possible space”.⁶ The effectivisation and maximisation of precisely those factors that produces visibility and attention, is what festivals an important part of an attention economy. An important reason behind the increased use of festivals by individuals, groups and institutions, state, communal and private, is their hopes for raised visibility and attention capital.

The arenas and means used to display handicraft not only reflect ideas, but also produce, distribute and dramatise ideas. All this makes such arenas to instruments for both control and change. They are first of all instruments for control of esthetics, ethics, values, symbols,

⁵ Beer companies are main sponsors of many music festivals, such as the international folk music and dance festival held annually in Rudolstadt, Germany, and the big rock festival in Roskilde, Denmark. Such sponsoring can be expected to become more common also in Sweden, only not by beer or liqueur companies.

⁶ Lecture at Gotland University College, Visby, autumn 1999

representations etc of the presented objects. The organisers thereby become controllers of political and ideological power. And as already noted, while formerly in the field of handicraft, knowers and doers have been at the centre of such power, today it is the makers who have taken control over of much of the field.

Heritage

A central word in any cultural field today is heritage. Heritage is a funny little word. Often it is written large, as an exclamation: HERITAGE! As “Our Swedish Heritage” it gets a sacred nuance, a church, which we must step into bowing, and with our wallets ready to pay heritage-collection. (cf. Sandström 1990). That heritage is valuable is self-evident. But what it means is not at all self-evident. Different fractions in the heritage business and museum worlds fight for their definitions. Fundamentalists mean that heritage is everything we inherited from our ancestors, without discrimination. More moderate falangists emphasise selection. One falang points to the especially beautiful, nice, rare or valuable, another to the especially important or meaningful, irrespective of beauty or value (Bohman 1998). These differences make heritage an uncertain affair: It is unclear what it is, how it is produced and distributed, which values it has, why and for whom it has to be protected, who is to decide and to pay for it all.

What is heritage?

A widespread notion is that heritage is objectively existing, with an objective value. The problem is that not everybody yet has understood this. The explanation to the tremendous growth in heritage production the last decades is then that cultural historians, museum curators, antiquarians, at last have succeeded to convince the right people that heritage is a must.

Another widespread explanation starts by noting that the interest for history has been fast growing in most Western societies the last decade. ”Heritage is everywhere” – we have become obsessed with the past, David Lowenthal writes in his influential book The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History (1997) A common explanation to the phenomenon points to the economical business cycles. A hypothesis is that in times of economical growth people loose their interest for history, and become more interested in the future. When times get rough their interest is more directed towards the past (Bohman 1997:43). The idea behind is that when people feel that their roots to the past is threatened or cut off, for example by fast and great changes in society, the strive to recreate these roots symbolically, in the form of “old traditions” or “our heritage”, which then are used as a kind of handles to hold on to, so that the world still seem to hold together as in “the old

days”. Behind this hypothesis is often an idea that people today have lost their place of being, which has made history, identity and roots all the more important. This idea is often spelled “placelessness”: the number of good places to leave is growing, but the number of good places to come to, and come from is diminishing. This has created an existential split between the young and the old: young people are supposed to be well anchored in time but not in space, while old people are supposed to be well anchored in space but not in time. At the bottom of this line of arguing there is a provoking must: we got to do something about the break-down of all old good values before it is too late, and to save what is possible to save. Heritage!

Relations

There might be something to some of these ideas, but on the whole they must nevertheless be rejected. Heritage is not anything objectively existing, but produced by certain people, in certain contexts, for certain reasons. Heritage is politics in the words literal meaning: “the process to **obtain** and execute power in the public.”⁷ Thus, what we are discussing is not at all heritage, but heritage politics, through ideas about a common past and conscious use of history **obtain** and execute power in the public. What is focussed is not any longer questions about origin, age, conservation, protection, etc, but instead ideas about how the past can be used and reused, by whom, and even more important, questions about who create and disseminate these ideas and take power and control through them.

When people in the heritage business describe what they are doing they point to restoration, conserving, exhibiting, etc. But more accurately their business can be describes as a kind of magic. In the Disney film “Peter Pan” there is a small flying creature “Tingeling”. In the beginning of the film, Peter catches her and shakes her so that a magic golden powder falls on the three children – Look the can fly! Also in the heritage business there are Tingelings. Just catch one of them, shake, and the golden powder will transform almost anything from ordinary everyday things, or even junk, to valuable heritage to be preserved to coming generations.

Thus, heritage may point towards the past, but has much more to do with today and the future. That is way we must leave questions about what heritage is behind us, and instead start to ask questions about how and why it is produced, and maybe most importantly, what it does. From such a perspective the American folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has begun to sketch out

⁷ Swedish National Encyclopedia, entry ”politics”

a theory about heritage production, in her book “Destination Culture”. Heritage is a new type of cultural production with special qualities, she writes:

Heritage not only gives buildings, precincts, and ways of life that are no longer viable for one reason or another a second life as exhibits of themselves. It also produces something new. If a colonial past, a past of missionaries and forced acculturation, threatened to produce “de-culturation”, the heritage industry does not so much reverse that process, even though the discourse of reclamation and preservation makes such claims. Rather the heritage industry is a new mode of cultural production and it produces something new. There is no turning back. If heritage as we know it from the industry were sustainable, it would not require protection. The process of protection, of “adding value”, speaks in and to the present, even if it does so in terms of the past. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:150)

Let me continue this strand of thinking and discuss some closely related points, all of them circling around how we can understand the heritage industry, its production, distribution and consumption.⁸

- Heritage production is a discriminating and separating process that establishes boundaries: social and cultural, in time and space.
- Heritage production has a close and problematic relation to social and cultural diversity.
- Heritage is a value-added, or value adding industry (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998) Heritage production presupposes, changes and transfers values, economical, cultural and attention capital.
- Heritage production transforms its objects, by turning them into exhibits, by esthetisation, objectification and homogenisation, by heightening the objects density and difference, and by raising their visibility, locally and globally.
- Heritage production erases memory and establishes history.
- Heritage production is a political process that establishes power over the past, the present and the future.

Heritage production creates boundaries.

Heritage separates the present from the past. Heritage production creates different kinds of clocks and makes them go at different speeds. The clock of Historical time stops at a given moment, but the clock of the objects used to give form to the frozen moments continues to tick. History stops but heritage ages. The general problem is that “history may not repeat itself, but heritage must!”⁹.

⁸ Cf the outline of the project “Heritage politics”, <http://www2.hgo.se/kulpoldisk.nsf>

⁹ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, lecture in Visby 16/3 1999, Gotland University.

Heritage separates effectively the present from the past, and history becomes another country - "they do things differently there (Hartley 1953, Lowenthal 1985). But at the same time it is the unsynchronisation of clocks, that makes it possible to, through heritage production, set off a complicated play with time, that works in different directions and at different paces.

Heritage production is closely but problematically related to the production of social and cultural diversity. Heritage is from the outset written into a national narrative. Heritage both creates and gives form to "Our National History". Thereby heritage becomes one side of a dichotomy, where at the other hand we find "The Multicultural society." In Sweden, as in so many other Western countries, diversity and multiculturalism is understood as a result of recent immigration and ethnic revival. This has led to a sharp borderline being established between the past and the present. Earlier there was a homogenous and Swedish Sweden, today a new diverse and multicultural. Borders polarise; therefore also the past is understood as more Swedish than it was, while the present is understood as more diverse, multicultural than it is.

Heritage transforms its objects.

Heritage is made of the dying, or already dead. "Living tradition, living heritage" is standing catchphrase in heritage discourse. The death of the old is a precondition for the intensive heritage production that follows. "Living tradition" is not only a magic **spell, course**, to prevent the coming death of things, but also compelling duty. Not only the preservation but also the **levandegörandet**, two of the central duties of museumpeople, have become everybody's duties. We have all become museum staff.

An effect of heritage production is the transformation of ordinary things to museal exhibits. A number of symbols and signs create the necessary heritage gaze, "MUSEEING", the kind of gaze that foregrounds cultural-historic values.¹⁰ The result is a kind of theatre performance, in which the dead or dying is infused with new life. In the play "living tradition" real life is shown on stage. But to be able to play that play over and over again – in important precondition in all heritage production – props and **decor** must be kept and preserved. The real life of the players must therefore be **dismissed to** 'backstage' or 'offstage'. Here is where the central paradox in heritage production arises: Heritage is produced through a process which utradarar just det som ska visas upp (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:159)

¹⁰ cf Ehn 198X

All preservation, all reuse of history, all forms of revival, presupposes disappearance and death (cf. Ronström 1996b). **To remember is foreplay to forgetting**, writes Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998:159). To the heritage industry what is central is not to remember, but to forget, because it is only from forgotten and dead objects heritage can be produced. "Heritage (...) is the transvaluation of the obsolete, the mistaken, the outmoded, the dead, and the defunct" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:149).

Heritage presupposes, changes and transfers values. Heritage production presupposes a value, which can through **förädling** production can be increased and realised. Heritage is a "value-added" or "value-adding" industry. Objects that are about to disappear, because of lost function or value, becomes heritage by adding the value of pastness, exhibition, difference, and, where possible, indigeneity" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998:150). Heritage is when an ordinary object becomes an unusual object. This is done by branding, a process where a certain logo or sign is stuck to the object which is then transformed into something new, and much more valuable (cf. Bourdieu 1986:117). "Hemslöjd" - home made handicraft –is a brand that stands for the authentic and genuine, a quality mark for the customer. Through the brand the symbolic power of the producer, or the owner of the brand, is transferred to the object. The new value of the object thus refers not so much to the age or aesthetics of the object, but to the power of the owner of the brand. (cf. Bourdieu 1986:119, Klein 1999).

The raised value is not so much money as immaterial symbolic values. Such values are hard to describe, count and change to other currencies, but are nevertheless what heritage production is all about. These values are not intended to be exchanged on local markets. The raw material in all heritage production is local, but the product is aimed for export. On the markets where the goods are traded currencies of different kinds are handled. Money is of course important, as a precondition, a result of heritage production, but as in so many other forms of cultural production, money is not readily or obviously the central goal or value.

Heritage industry belongs to the most globalized among markets. As capitalistic commodity production much heritage production is a mere disaster. Very little of the invested money comes back as profits. The profits instead comes back as visibility or attention, a quality that many seem to lack these day. The shortage is the base of a new market, a system of transactions and currencies, in short an attention economy (Goldhaber 1997). It is on this global attention market

the real profits of heritage production can be made. Raised visibility, regionally, nationally or globally, can easily generate secondary economical profits, for example in the form of growing tourist flows. But visibility profits can also be exchanged into other symbolic currencies, such as enforced local identity and pride over ones origins.

What we are dealing with here is a symbolic economy within the global capitalistic hegemony, ruled by the same principles, but in which the central values is not money. Which, then, are the central values? Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett holds that the heritage industry produces four kinds of values: "the value of pastness, exhibition, difference, and where possible, indigeneity" (1998:150). Pastness is a value as an attractive destination when history is transformed to a foreign country. Exhibition is a value when the heritage industry transforms places to destinations, by exhibiting themselves as museums over themselves. Difference is a value because places and objects becomes valuable only as different, distinctive, which is necessary to compete on the very competitive tourist market. Indigeneity becomes a value by raising the objects quality on the experience market. To this I would like to add visibility as a fifth central value, because visibility is so closely related to profits in terms of recognition and reinforced local identity.¹¹

Heritage production means estethisation.

Central in heritage discourse are words like quality, good design, genuine products, beauty, words that signals taste and aesthetics, art and education – culture! The infusion of symbolic and economical capital through heritage production leads a dramatic increase of trade value. This has to do with what it is that can be consumed in heritage. Heritage remakes all kinds of objects into aesthetical objects, which make them consumable also for other than the locals to which they originally belong. Estethisation is the key to the objectification. Heritage industry produces a kind of gallery that exhibits ordinary things as extraordinary things, as art. This is done by placing the objects into a new, global and aesthetically defined frame. The process is basically the same as when Duchamp produced his famous "ready-mades, transforming things like bottle openers to high art by exhibiting them on the stages of the art world. The trick is to bring objects out of their ordinary context and place them in another, where more abstract values are central.

¹¹ Recognition is one of the late 20th centuries most important values. Cf Taylor 1994.

What are exhibited in the art galleries of the heritage industry are displaced objects, ready for visual consumption. But the true and main object is not the exhibited objects, but the gallery itself, tradition, heritage. This is an abstract totality that can not be experienced only through close contact with the exhibited parts. As in all art galleries the totality is perceived only when you proceed through the halls in the gallery with a certain minimal speed, with a certain minimal distance. This of course immediately excludes most locals from the central parts of gallery-experiences.

This makes it clear that it is not the makers of the parts that is the true artists of heritage production, but antiquarians, archivists, curators, cultural historians, people whose main duty is reconstruction and preservation. The piece of art is not the exhibited object, but the reconstructed mental model of the object, as heritage or tradition. The growth of the heritage industry is a mark of how power, for example as interpretation priority, has been transferred from doers to makers, from producers to reproducers. This shift is a central part also in other kinds of businesses today, most notably in the form of branding, when what is made and sold are not products, but the mental models of products.

For whom are the reconstructed and visually consumable things exhibited by the heritage industry intended? Tourists, is the obvious answer. Tourists shall save the locals from economical decay, invisibility and oblivion. Another possible answer is that heritage production is produced for the makers themselves. Then tourists become the necessary but not especially desirable side figures that is needed to confirm and increase the symbolical and economical values of the heritage producers.

Heritage produces homogenised objects, with raised density, distinctiveness and visibility. The core of heritage production is profilation and homogenisation, resulting into a mental model of an object that real objects can only be more or less good representations of. A problem for much tradition, heritage is that it is to disparate, which makes it difficult to see and experience. A solution is then to pack it up tighter, raise its density, to have more heritage per inch so to speak. Raised homogeneity, density and distinctiveness are three aspects of the same commodification process that produces heritage as commodities to be packed and sold. Tourists are the main targets for the resale campaigns. Commodification, reification, is necessary to achieve visibility. Visibility is important on local, national, transnational and global levels. Heritage produces the local for export (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:153)) In the handicraft organisation every region

looks for products exclusive to their own region. When there is no obvious such product, locally distinctive objects from the past is dug up and reproduced. The products are then used as trademarks or brands for the local region.

What is different about the products of the tourist industry is that not much of it can be exported. What the industry therefore is forced to is to export the customers to the product instead of the product to the customer. This makes visibility on a distance a necessary prerequisite, otherwise the customers will not where they should go. Raised visibility is in fact one of the most important driving forces behind heritage production, by generating profits in terms of attention and recognition.

As already noted heritage is one of the most globalised industries. Local heritage must compete on a global market, where many other heritages already are competing. All of these have their own unique qualities. Because the entrance ticket to this market is distinctiveness, there is not room for two of the same sort. Everything is different, which is the whole point. But – by being marketed on the same global heritage market, with the same means, and equipped by the same rethorics and discourses, the result becomes that the different heritages becomes the more and more the same. The genuine, authentical, locally distinctive that the visitor is supposed to grasp, admire and pay for, is processed in a very homogenous and standardised global form.

Heritage and democracy

Heritages are problematic in many ways. I have but touch upon a few of the problems around production, distribution and consumption. To the most problematic and least discussed belong questions about heritage, democracy and power.

- Who has the power to decide what objects are to be preserved and evaluated as heritage? On behalf of whom are these people acting?
- On what grounds have makers and reproducers, taken control over the aesthetical forms from producers, doers, and consumers?
- Who controls the capital flows in the heritage industry? Who gets the profits? Even if the heritage industry always complains over lack of money, the capital flows in the business are considerable.¹²

¹² The total budget for culture in the Eu during the period 2000-2004 is estimated to 167 million euro. The EU parliament suggests that 11 percent is spent on litterature, 35 percent on the arts, and 34 percent on heritage (<http://www.kur.se>).

- Which esthetical values dominate and whose are those values. Esthetisation is often used as a tool to rule, by moving questions that should belong to democratic political processes and institutions to the closed rooms of aesthetical specialists.

These questions lead to the most problematic of them all: who controls the power over the future, by using the past as heritage.

Klein, Naomi 1999: No logo. Taking aim at the brand bullies. New York: Picador