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# The Guided Tour: A Research Technique for the Study of Situated, Embodied Information

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## ABSTRACT

This article introduces the guided tour as an appropriate research technique for studying situated and embodied information. The guided tour hybridizes aspects of observation and interviews, and involves a researcher's relatively shortened, nonspontaneous entry into a field site. During a guided tour, a participant leads the researcher through the location (often one that is personally meaningful for him or her) while describing and explaining its features, thinking-aloud the ideas, thoughts, and feelings to which it gives rise, and responding to the researcher's gentle inquiries. This article begins with a sustained background to the technique and descriptive breakdown of it in terms of other, related methods and techniques. It then reviews prior use of the guided tour in the information and library science field, where it is not prevalent *per se*, but has been used on an ongoing basis for at least three decades. It delineates practical steps and tips for carrying out a guided tour as well as strengths and limitations of the technique for studying situated, embodied information and information phenomena in general. The article concludes by briefly discussing researchers as embodied research instruments and the role of reflexivity in qualitative research.

## INTRODUCTION

In a study about the relationships that returning visitors develop with museums, Michele Everett and Margaret Barrett (2012) use extended excerpts from a guided tour through the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery that the first author conducted with eighty-year-old Virginia—a former university secretary, former children's nanny, and current "Friends" of the

museum committee member—in order to emphasize the wide range of reactions, thoughts, and emotions that one space and the artifacts it contains can evoke:

Virginia turns to me, motions with her arm and exclaims, “OK, come on!” . . . I ask Virginia to tell me what she thinks about when she looks at old objects such as these. . . . “Ah! I just think it’s remarkable, unbelievable that someone can do it. . . . Yes. It does tug at my heart. And I think of the humans that (pause) did it, manufactured it from clay. . . . Look there at the color. Now I ask you, isn’t that incredible!?” (37)

Throughout the remainder of the tour, the pair observes a prisoner confinement box, which Virginia laughingly recalls her former babysitting charges enjoying; a set of shell necklaces that her Friends group secured for the museum, “the objects Virginia was most intent on showing me” (38); and a series of artwork, which she explains “really gets me here (places hand on heart), and in my tummy also” (39).

As these quotations and contextual details from Michele’s time spent with Virginia imply, a guided tour proved an excellent means to “*observe* the ways in which participants engaged with objects and the experiences that hold personal significance, . . . *explore feelings and thoughts* as they engage, . . . [and *capture*] *conversations, comments, facial expressions, and embodied responses*” (Everett and Barrett 2012, 35, emphasis added). Overall, the researchers suggest that guided tours are a compelling technique for beginning to discern vicarious responses and locally situated perspectives. Moreover, they make a specific point of highlighting the strengths of guided tours for gathering embodied data; the ability to see participants’ actions and gestures, when combined with their commentary, seems to afford them deeper grasps on the phenomena in which they are interested. Because it uniquely combines “showing and sharing” (Everett and Barrett 2012, 42), the guided tour technique seemingly reveals and makes perceptible nuanced layers of meaning that are without a straightforward textual translation (e.g., Konecki 2011; Pink 2013). As Annemaree Lloyd writes, some knowledge will always remain “embodied and embedded as part of everyday performance” (2014, 99), present only in “physical actions and nuances” (2010a; see also Olsson and Lloyd, 2016).

Among information and library science (ILS) researchers, there is growing awareness of how individuals use their bodies to receive, absorb, express, and transmit information in professional and everyday settings (Cox 2012b; Lloyd 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; Talja and Nyce 2015), such as emergency response work (Lloyd 2009), electric vault inspection (Veinot 2007), archaeology (Olsson 2016), within the reference library (Cavanagh 2013), while engaging in a liberal arts pursuit (Cox, Griffin, and Hartel 2017), and during an ultramarathon (Gorichanaz 2015), as just some examples. Lloyd (2010a) refers to embodied information as the

corporeal modality, and argues that it is a long-silenced and long-sidelined aspect of information literacy, without which other forms of information (being epistemic and social information) are incomplete. Like many others within and beyond the ILS field, Lloyd's conceptualization of embodiment is rooted in practice theory. Among practice theorists broadly, participant observation and ethnography are championed research methods and methodologies, owing to their abilities to produce immersive, protracted accounts of the behaviors, thoughts, and feelings of *in situ* individuals (Cox, Griffin, and Hartel 2017; Gherardi 2012; Nicolini 2009). While there are no shortcuts for these approaches, compromises are often struck when researchers combine less-demanding qualitative research methods and techniques in complementary ways.

Guided tours such as those Everett and Barrett (2012) describe above have a spotty, four-decade history in information-related studies (Thomson 2015, 2016). The first use of the technique in this way seems to have been by Thomas Malone (properly, an organizational scientist): in 1983, he "systematically" (100) explored professionals' "personal information environments." Since then, ILS researchers have followed suit, employing the technique in order to tour through information-filled locales such as home offices (Thomson 2010), dorm rooms (Mizrachi 2011; Mizrachi and Bates 2013), domestic gourmet cooking collections (Hartel 2007, 2010), and digital file collections (e.g., Barreau 1995). The findings that result from these guided tours tend to draw out the spatial and material aspects of people's information dealings. However, this article introduces the guided tour as an appropriate technique for ILS researchers who have interest in connecting, in particular, the spatial, material, and embodied qualities of information behavior and practice. It also positions the guided tour technique as a significant addition to the methodological toolkits of those interested in embodiment.

In the sections that follow, a definition of and background to the guided tour technique are given, and the guided tour is examined in light of similar methods and techniques. Then, a somewhat meta-analytic stance is taken as the guided tour's presence in existing ILS literature is reviewed. From there, practical steps and tips for studying situated, embodied information are given, and strengths and limitations of the guided tour technique for studying situated, embodied information specifically and information phenomena in general are considered. The article concludes with a short discussion of researchers as embodied research instruments and the role of reflexivity in interpretive, qualitative research studies. In order to ground the argument that guided tours can generate valuable findings about embodied information, this article utilizes practice theory and the metatheoretical lens of social constructivism; very brief overviews of and justifications for both are given below.

*Practice theory and social constructionism*

At the start of the twenty-first century, *information practice* emerged as a “critical alternative” (Savolainen 2007, 109) to *information behavior*, the prevalent expression describing people’s interactions with information. When made deliberately, an ILS researcher’s decision to use the term *information practice* will draw upon reinvigorated, second-generation practice theory in order to acknowledge people’s information-related dealings as irreducibly “social, embodied, embedded in routines and material objects and their arrangement, closely linked to purposes, feelings and taste, transitory and situated” (Cox 2012a, 183). Pulling all of these strands into a holistic picture of information interactions in empirical research requires the use of methods and techniques that achieve both breadth and depth, showing in detail how they interweave with information and accomplish bigger real-world actions.

Via the guided tour technique, it is possible to explore any or all of practice theory’s inextricable themes in detail; this article, however, highlights the particular affordances of the guided tour technique for studies of information spaces, objects, and the body. All three exist in a dialectical relationship: on the one hand, spaces and objects embed information and “embody” individuals—“personal settings such as a work area, office, and home contain material items or artifacts that its user/owner has collected,” each with “a history of how it got there and a reason or meaning” (Saldana 2013, 54), and on the other hand, individuals experience information through their bodies and senses as they interact with the “material objects, artefacts and other people” (Lloyd 2010a) in a space, being enabled or constrained by it. Neumann (1999) captures the pervasive nature of this triadic space-object-body relationship well when she writes, “Information in [an] environment lies not only on the written pages of books, photocopies, and computer screens, but in how they are . . . placed in relationship to each other and the occupants of this space” (440), and, “information is contained in tools, in spatial relationships of objects, and in hands that know where to reach for particular things” (442).

Arguably, distinguishing between the terms “information behavior” and “information practice” when discussing embodied information is unnecessary, “since both perspectives rely heavily on the corporeality of the human body” (Lueg 2015, 2707). Yet, practice theory does make this less-considered aspect of people’s information processes more evident (Cox 2012a); further, it has different metatheoretical sensitivities and is suggestive of different methodological approaches (Savolainen 2007). With this in mind, this article speaks from a social constructivist perspective in order to align with practice theory’s idea of the interconnectedness between individuals—inclusive of researchers—and their social milieus (Bates 2005). Social constructivism has implications both for how research studies are

carried out and how they are accounted for: each becomes a constructed process and constructed product from which the researcher, as an embodied research instrument, cannot be extricated. Precisely because the guided tour technique rests upon the embodied copresence of and the interaction between a researcher and participant, it must, in turn, involve the researcher's own reflexive awareness. This idea is further explored in the Discussion section.

### THE GUIDED TOUR

Elsewhere (Thomson 2015, 2016), the guided tour has been defined as a research technique that hybridizes aspects of observation and less-structured interviews, involving a researcher's relatively shortened, non-spontaneous foray into a field site. During a guided tour, a participant is asked to lead the researcher through the location (often, one that is personally significant to him or her) while describing and explaining its features, thinking-aloud the ideas and feelings to which it gives rise, and responding to a researcher's gentle prompts and conversational inquiries. Thus, the guided tour engages visual and aural sensibilities in a mutually reinforcing way in order to produce findings that are more than the sum of their parts. Researchers who employ the technique glean insights that can come "only through first-hand experience with the participants in the setting . . . witnessing" (Everett and Barrett 2012, 43–44) their comportments, movements, and reactions and hearing their explanations and descriptions.

The earliest known description of guided tours comes in James Spradley's 1979 book about ethnographic interviewing. Spradley makes reference to two types of questions researchers may ask participants: "Guided Grand Tour" and "Guided Mini-Tour" questions. He writes of Guided Grand Tour questions:

This form asks the informant to give an actual grand tour. A secretary might be asked: "Could you show me around the office?" The ethnographer might ask a Kwakiuti fisherman, "The next time you make a set, can I come along and could you explain to me what you are doing?" (Spradley 1979, 87)

A Guided Mini-Tour question essentially investigates more focused territory within a setting, or a smaller aspect of an embodied experience. Johnny Saldana (2013) encourages guided tours in qualitative work generally:

If I am walking into a new space, the primary analytic task that runs through my mind is, "Tell me something about the person or people who live/work here." Certainly we can learn much more about a space's occupants and its artifacts by having participants give us a guided tour

accompanied with questions and answers about significant items that attract our visual attention. (54–55)

Following Spradley (1979), Margarethe Kusenbach (2003) described a similar phenomenological-ethnographic technique for sociologists called the “go-along” or “walk-along” interview, during which researchers “accompany individual informants on their natural outings, and—through asking questions, listening, and observing—actively explore their subjects’ stream of experiences and practices as they move through, and interact with, their physical and social environment” (463). Cecilia Andersson (2017) conducted “walk-alongs” with secondary school pupils in order to see their information activities, and Lisa Given conducted “walk-throughs” with students in academic libraries (Polkinghorne, Given, and Carlson, 2017), though how these techniques converged with and diverged from prior instances of guided tours in the ILS field remains to be elaborated by the authors. Guided tours can be just as open-ended as walk-alongs, but, at least in ILS research, tend to occur in more focused territory and to consider set information spaces. However, Kusenbach (2003) too points out the hybrid nature of go-along interviews, painting them as a way for researchers to perceive of and hear about culture “from within,” ultimately leading them to better understand and even to share their participants’ perspectives.

#### *Related Methods and Techniques*

Precedents for the guided tour can be found in other, perhaps more familiar research methods. For example, guided tours resemble participant observation, in that researchers assume roles as active-but-restrained “observers-as-participants” (Baker 2006; Gold 1958), engaged in the situation but largely under the direction of their participants as they attempt to garner a “local vantage point” (Kusenbach 2003, 460). However, participant observation emphasizes periods of habituation and trust-building (Chatman 1984; Jorgenson 1989), whereas researchers design guided tours with roughly bounded, relatively contracted timespans in mind. Guided tours are also in many ways like “a form of photo elicitation, . . . the strategy of ‘object elicitation’” (Everett and Barrett 2012, 35–36). Whereas photo elicitation involves the use of images alongside and in place of words in order to prompt commentary during an interview, guided tours rely upon the tangible parts of a physical setting as entry points for exploring the different dimensions of a given phenomenon. During guided tours, encountered artifacts and built environments serve as the “object” and “walking” probes (DeLeon and Cohen 2005) that are meant to stimulate participants’ reflective discussion and facilitate researchers’ understanding; here, “objects beyond the photograph, like keepsakes, awards, trophies, and collectibles, can serve to prompt informants” (DeLeon and

Cohen 2005, 201), and even the “most mundane locations and the events that occur in them can elicit rich responses” (203).

Guided tours also function as a type of less-structured interview: the hearing of participants’ narratives is just as integral to the technique as is the watching of their actions. Less-structured interviews revolve around participants’ natural flows of dialogue, with researchers following along on their spoken trails, integrating verbal probes and follow-up questions as appropriate (Smith 1995). Likewise, guided tours point toward open terrain, literally in terms of physical environment and figuratively in terms of subject matter, and cede navigational control to participants. Although some verbal probes and follow-up questions may be used during guided tours (as, in the introductory excerpt, when Michele asked Virginia to tell her what she thinks about when she views old museum artifacts), the technique looks more to material object and spatial walking probes (DeLeon and Cohen 2005) to spur participants’ stories. Further, guided tours strongly parallel with think-aloud protocols (known also as verbal reports or protocols), for which participants carry out tasks (rather than proceed through a location) and simultaneously relay their cognitive, affective, and reactive sequences. Beyer and Holtzblatt’s (1998) contextual inquiry interviews, conducted as tasks are carried out, are a very similar technique in this regard.<sup>1</sup> Guided tours are comparable in their reliance upon action, since as people “walk around, [they may] talk about past and current associations with the physical surroundings” (DeLeon and Cohen, 2005, 203). Participants’ voices are maximized in all of think-aloud protocols, contextual inquiries, and guided tours, with concurrent and, some believe (e.g., Ericsson and Simon 1980; van Someran, Barnard, and Sandberg 1994), fuller and more specific data being proffered.

Another technique that follows the model of think-aloud protocols and contextual inquiry interviews is the “interview to/with the double” (ITTD) technique, a projective walk-through that asks participants to imagine they must instruct someone who will replace them in their practice the following day, without this ploy being uncovered (Gherardi 1995, 2012; Nicolini 2009). Practice theorists, while advocating the use of protracted, naturalistic research methods, commend ITTDs as suitable complementary stand-ins because they make participants “interviewee-instructors” (Nicolini 2009, 198), foreground “small things . . . that may be forgotten in grand narratives” (Lloyd 2014, 104), and allow “insight into what information and ways of knowing are important in relation to situated activity” (Lloyd 2014, 102). Guided tours, however, advance beyond projection because they entail participants’ real-time movements; thus, they counter one of the shortcomings of interviews, being their failing to capture what is not so easily lent to narrative accounting, such as “pre-reflective knowledge and practices of the body, or the most trivial details of day-to-day environmental experience” (Kusenbach 2003, 462).

## THE GUIDED TOUR IN ILS

In this section, use of the guided tour technique across existing ILS literature is reviewed. Works utilizing the technique were identified during multiple searches of general and ILS-centric databases (using variations of the terms “guided tour” and “tour”), and are focused primarily in the areas of information behavior and information practices, personal information management, and human-computer interaction. Overall, sixteen unique uses of the guided tour technique were identified. Below, for clarity, works are discussed based on their use of the guided tour in physical, digital, or hybrid information spaces. Their settings, purposes and foci, and tools for data collection are compared in table 1. After this, practical steps and tips and strengths and limitations of the guided tour technique for studying situated, embodied information and information phenomena in general are considered.

To preface this section, however, the difficulty of aggregating examples of the guided tour technique in use should be noted. Among ILS researchers, there is no formal acknowledgement of the guided tour’s origins with Spradley (1979); further, inconsistent terminology surrounds it, as authors variously refer to guided tours (or aspects thereof) as “exploratory observation” (Malone 1983), “guided interviews” (Barreau 1995), “think-out-loud protocols” (Kwasnik 1989, 1991), and otherwise, and sometimes only imply their use of the technique when they off-handedly mention seeing information artifacts or when they integrate photographs into their final reports.<sup>2</sup> These factors, coupled with the guided tour’s already sporadic presence in the discipline, mean that the set of literature compiled here should be considered necessarily incomplete.

### *Guided Tours in Physical Information Spaces*

As mentioned, the first use of the guided tour technique in an information-related study was likely that of Malone (1983). Physical information artifacts dominated the offices he studied, and by being able to see employees’ spaces and at the same time hear their descriptions of how items were arranged and used during a workday, Malone perceived the criticality of “files” and “piles” as visible enablers of “finding” and “reminding.” These concepts remain influential today, and also transfer to digital environments (e.g., Barreau 1995; Nardi, Anderson, and Erickson 1994). Later researchers have used the guided tour technique to continue highlighting the patterned and the personal dimensions of people’s collections and practices. Kwasnik’s (1991) study of faculty members’ offices is one of the most frequently cited guided tour exemplars (e.g., Bergman 2013; Hartel 2010), and her findings about individuals “[making] classification decisions within a context and for a purpose, but also within the constraints of physical objects and a physical environment” (391) seem to imply the value of the guided tour technique for tying together elements

of information practice that relate to space, materiality, and bodily action in addition to cognitive decision-making.

Swan and Taylor, two ethnomethodologists, carried out a longitudinal study spanning several years aimed at understanding mothers' domestic work and the role of in-home technology. Alongside observation and informal interviews, they conducted "tours of [participating] homes in one fashion or another" (Taylor, Swan, and Durrant 2007, 262) for their work, finding "artfulness" in refrigerator doors (Swan and Taylor 2005), versatility in to-do lists (Taylor and Swan 2004), and endurance in miscellaneous clutter (Swan, Taylor, and Harper 2008), as some examples. Baillie (2002, 2003), sharing Swan and Taylor's interest in in-home technologies, debuted a "technology tour" in her dissertation work in order to understand how families engage with "domestic technology" of all sorts, from televisions and computers to ovens. Baillie's tours were one step in her multi-phase "home workshop method" that, on the whole, facilitated learning about householders' technologies, their attitudes toward them, and their practices around them, but these tours were the only situated component. By taking place in real time and real locations, they allowed her to perceive of physical and social organization and family routines.

#### *Guided Tours in Digital Information Spaces*

Scholars have made use of the guided tour technique to investigate individuals' digital desktops, information collections, and information practices. Barreau (1995) aptly prefaced her tours through managers' computer directories by making reference to Kwasnik's (1991) tours through physical office spaces, and suggests that "if context is a key factor in the organization of materials within a person's physical space, it follows that context is just as important, or even more important, in how those materials are used in an electronic environment" (331). Just as guided tours afford researchers situated observations and solicitations of individuals' thoughts, feelings, and actions in the physical realm, the sorts of data they afford might also provide researchers with useful signposts in the less tangible virtual realm (Barreau 1995).

Nardi, Anderson, and Erickson (1994); Boardman and Sasse (2004); Jones, Phuwanartnurak, Gill, and Bruce (2005); and Lindley et al. (2013) have all employed the guided tour technique as a way to understand congruencies between individuals' physical and digital information management activities and information needs. Unfortunately, methodological reflection and procedural detail is even less common in digital than it is in physical guided tour studies. Bergman (2013), an exception to this, states that his participants were asked to "explain and demonstrate" during guided tours, and that "other than the initial general question ('please show me how you organize and retrieve your personal information'), the interviewer . . . let the participants lead the interview, asking

Table 1. Information-related guided tour studies

Author (Year)	Sample & Setting	Purpose/Focus	Data Collection Tools			
			Audio Recorder	Sketchbook	Camera	Video Recorder
<b>Physical Information Space</b>						
Malone (1983)	10 professionals, in offices	understand in-office information organization for system design	x	x	x	
Kwasnik (1989, 1991)	8 faculty, in offices	understand how people organize documents in their offices	x			
Baillie (2002, 2003)	5 households, in homes	understand in-home technology use as it is at present		x		x
Swan and Taylor (2004–2008)	various families, in homes	understand in-home technology use for system design	x	x	x	x
<b>Digital Information Space</b>						
Nardi et al. (1994)	15 Macintosh users, in offices	understand how people organize and find documents on computers				x
Barreau (1995)	7 managers, in offices	understand how digital documents are organized, stored, and retrieved	x			
Boardman and Sasse (2004)	31 computer users, unstated	understand cross-tool file, email, and web bookmark usage over time			x*	
Jones et al. (2005)	14 individuals, in (home) offices	understand how people organize information in support of projects			x	
Bergman (2013)	20 individuals, at main computers	identify and map variables that characterize PIM behavior	x			
Lindley et al. (2013)	14 individuals, in homes	understand whether a single virtual archive would be useful	x		x*	

### Hybrid Information Space

Kaye et al. (2006)	48 academics, in offices	understand techniques and tools for digital and material archiving	x		x
Hartel(2007, 2010)	20 hobby cooks, in homes	describe information phenomena in the hobby of gourmet cooking	x	x	x
Thomson (2010)	4 professionals, in home offices	describe information management and use in home office settings	x	x	x
McKenzie and Davies (2012)	4 women, in homes	understand the documentary tools used to keep track in everyday life	x		x
Al-Omar and Cox (2013)	17 faculty, in offices	describe academics' personal research information collections	x		x
Mizrachi (2011), and Bates (2013)	41 undergrads, in dorm rooms	understand students' information management and constraints faced			x

x\* = screencaptures

them relevant questions along the way” (466). This is a reiteration of Everett and Barrett’s (2012) point that the value of guided tours comes from their foregrounding participants’ voices; Bergman (2013) notes that “*a unique PIM [personal information management] narrative*” (466, emphasis added) and deeper reflections were naturally encouraged by permitting each participant to steer the tour of his or her own digital information collection and practices. He contrasts the minute, detailed data he could gather via guided tours, co-located and surrounded by digital artifacts, with the global impressions that tend to be gathered through “standard interviews” (471).

#### *Guided Tours in Hybrid Information Spaces*

At least six guided tours through hybrid physical-digital information spaces have been conducted since 2006. Of these, Jenna Hartel’s (2007) ethnographic dissertation research into hobbyist gourmet cooks’ information “libraries” and activities (also discussed in a 2010 article) has served as an inspirational template for other ethnographically minded studies, one being a masters thesis by Thomson (2010) investigating professional home offices and another a doctoral dissertation by Mizrachi (2011) investigating undergraduates’ “personal academic information ecologies” (also described in Mizrachi and Bates 2013). Others have considered hybrid spaces such as work archives (Kaye et al. 2006; Al-Omar and Cox 2013) and homes (McKenzie and Davies 2012). Inevitably, most hybrid studies still do skew attention more toward one realm than the other. Hartel (2010) addresses this when explaining that while her guided tours did not purposefully exclude digital information, neither did they demand comparable coverage of it; each was launched with the simple, open-ended request that participants show her the “locations and resources used in the hobby [of gourmet cooking]” (853).

Hartel’s (2007, 2010) research is also one of the most methodologically reflexive uses of guided tours in ILS scholarship. Adopting Sandstrom and Sandstrom’s (1995) position of scientific ethnography to distinguish ideational (thought- and belief-centered) and materialistic (practice-centered) orientations, Hartel used guided tours to ground the anecdotes and the interview data supplied by her participants in the real “features of a setting” (2010, 866). The especial advantages that guided tours brought to her research are discussed more below as strengths of the technique.

### GATHERING SITUATED, EMBODIED DATA WITH THE GUIDED TOUR

This section proffers practical steps for carrying out a guided tour and tips for ILS researchers studying situated, embodied information. Strengths and limitations of the guided tour technique for studying situated, em-

bodied information specifically and information phenomena in general are also considered.

### *Steps for the Guided Tour*

A general series of seven steps for designing and conducting a guided tour in physical and/or digital space can be delineated based upon, mainly, the four most detailed accounts of the technique that exist in the ILS field: Kwasnik (1989), Baillie (2002), Hartel (2010), and Bergman (2013).

First, researchers should generate a clear statement of their aims. Baillie (2002) notes her own dissatisfaction with previous studies that simply observed, but did not probe the meanings of, in-home technology (69–70), and both she and Kwasnik (1989) note their purposes as being to see the phenomena of interest (technology and information, respectively) as they existed at present while still hearing about their histories (Baillie 2002, 180, 205; Kwasnik 1989, 168). Second, researchers should enact data collection plans and secure any needed equipment. ILS researchers have employed the guided tour at varying points in a data collection sequence, some beginning with an initial interview (e.g., Hartel 2010) and some leaving an interview until later in the research encounter (e.g., Thomson 2010). Kwasnik (1989) and Hartel (2010) each used an audio recorder during guided tours, and Baillie (2002) a video camera. Hartel (2010) also followed her guided tours with photography, and both Hartel (2010) and Baillie (2002) created full-home sketches during and after their tours. Choices of equipment should depend upon the study purpose, the realm(s) in which it concentrates, the analytic tools available, and the sensitivity of the locations being toured; equipment considerations for researchers especially interested in situated, embodied information are discussed below.

Third, researchers should reassure participants and allow them opportunity to “prepare” for the event; Kwasnik (1989) gave her participants detailed letters that explained, “People’s behavior with regard to organizing their own documents varies. . . . I am not at all interested in evaluating [your] methods against any standard measure, such as high or low organization or [on a] sloppy-neat continuum” (168). Similarly, Baillie (2002) was flexible when scheduling in-home tours, aware that family plans can always shift at the last minute. Providing an estimated length of time for the tour (and any accompanying techniques) could also be considered part of good research practice. Fourth, researchers should launch their guided tours with direct but open-ended requests. Hartel (2010) indicated to her participants, “I’d like to you take me through your home, showing me the locations and resources used in the hobby [of gourmet cooking]. In particular, please show me the culinary information resources here in the house. Let’s start in the kitchen” (853). Bergman (2013) requested guided tours of participants’ computers by saying, “Please show me how

you organize and retrieve your personal information” (466). For Everett and Barrett (2012), beginning their guided tours was as simple as asking participants to each lead a tour of the local museum space, showcasing favorite areas, collections, and objects; “the only instruction provided was to ‘Take me wherever you want’” (35). Kusenbach (2003) asked her participants to “comment on whatever came to mind while looking at and moving through places, and also to share . . . what they usually experienced during routine trips” (465), sometimes probing them about extraordinary objects.

Fifth, researchers do well to actively foreground participants’ voices during guided tours; Hartel’s (2010) participants held the audio recorder themselves as they led her through their homes. Kwasnik (1989) told her participants that “I will be purposefully vague in referring to the objects you are describing. This is because . . . I want to know how you think about them and what you call them” (168). Baillie (2002) found that her tours were often “quite unstructured, with members of the family coming and going, commenting and cutting in as appropriate. Although this led to some difficulty in the analysis, it was certainly grounded in the situation!” (205). Bergman (2013) makes equal mention of the fact that his participants always “led” (466). Sixth, researchers should make use of verbal probes, based on object probes, as appropriate during guided tours in order to encourage participants. “What’s this?” “Tell me more about this,” and “How does this work?” were all probes employed by Hartel (2010, 853), while Kwasnik (1989) used such probes as “How did this come to be here?” “Are all these things the same? How are they the same? How do they differ?” and “Under what circumstances did they get here?” (169) during her tours. Verbal tours should arise naturally based on the setting and artifacts therein, sensitized by the research purpose(s).

When object probes are exhausted or a participant indicates that a guided tour is complete, researchers can prepare to move to the next stage of data collection or to begin data analysis.

### *Tips for the Guided Tour*

Despite few ILS researchers self-consciously recounting or reflecting upon their methodological processes, and table 1 indicating that embodiment has not been the focus of any of the previous uses of the guided tour technique in the field, some tips that pertain to gathering such data still can be gleaned from written reports.

First, a significant proportion of ILS studies that employ guided tours—13 out of the 16 listed in table 1—also employ at least one means of collecting data visually, whether by way of handmade sketches, photographs, or videos. Cameras are the most commonly used tool to this end (11 studies), while video cameras (4 studies) and sketches (4 studies) may also be used. Sketching is a natural fit for guided tours in physical and

hybrid information spaces, whereas cameras and video cameras have been used for guided tours in all realms, including digital information spaces. When selecting the most appropriate tools for data collection, researchers might consider that sketching can be time-consuming, though instantly tailored and marked up depending upon research interests, while photographing is “visual documentation [that] later permits more reflection and meaning-making through analytic memoing” (Saldana 2013, 55). Video recording, though, is the only way for researchers to go about documenting dynamic, embodied interactions, and to record “*how* the local ecology of objects, artifacts, texts, tools, and technologies feature in and impact on . . . action and activity” (Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff 2010, 7, emphasis added; see also Harris 2016).

Second, nearly all of the ILS studies that employ guided tours mention having made use of either an audio recorder or a video camera that also recorded audio during data collection (with the exception of two, which make no such mention). By having an audio recorder of some kind present during a guided tour, researchers free themselves to pay attention to small contextual details and embodied cues, and to give in to the coconstructive experience of “musing together” about actions, identities, past memories, and future anticipations (Everett and Barrett 2012; Kusenbach 2003). With this said, however, as a third tip, researchers interested in preserving such rich data should still prepare to describe, elaborate, and memo the multisensory specifics of their research experiences as soon as possible after the close of a guided tour.

Fourth, ILS researchers interested in the guided tour technique as a way to study situated, embodied information may follow Kusenbach’s (2003) walk-along advice: ensure guided tours are as natural as possible for participants, even while recognizing that such tours are never be part of their completely normal courses of action.

#### *Strengths and Limitations of the Guided Tour*

Like any research method or technique, the guided tour has both advantages and disadvantages. Its strengths and limitations for studying situated, embodied data and for studying information phenomena in general are mentioned below. Future guided tour studies will undoubtedly be useful in uncovering even more opportunities and challenges associated with the technique.

*Strengths.* Everett and Barrett (2012) discuss six advantages of guided tours. First, they mention that guided tours are a way to level a traditionally skewed researcher-participant power dynamic and that, second, they position participants as experts (43–44). From an examination of all ILS guided tour studies listed in table 1, it is common for participants’ voices to be foregrounded through their leading of guided tour sessions. This

does not prevent researchers from loosely prestructuring their guided tours if desired; Hartel (2007, 2010), for example, focused on eliciting details related to information spaces, resources, and items. Researchers especially interested in situated, embodied information might focus on details relating to participants' "visible conduct, whether in terms of gaze, gesture, facial expression, or bodily comportment" (Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff 2010, 7), and probe their interactions with various information artifacts in the space.

Everett and Barrett (2012) count as a third strength that guided tours include nonverbal as well as verbal probes, and can thus draw out different responses from participants. This visual-aural interplay may reveal, for example, inconsistencies in participants' interviews (e.g., Kaye et al. 2006, 280), or garner more "specific" (e.g., Bergman 2013, 471) or sentimental (e.g., Lindley et al. 2013) narratives from participants. Everett and Barrett's (2012) guided tours produced deeper data that facilitated "new understandings" (39) in their overall project, while Kusenbach (2003) found that her walk-along interviews allowed participants to explore their idiosyncratic emotions, values, and practical knowledge because they conjured spatial rather than chronological biographies. Douglas Harper (2002) writes that visual cues of all kinds can surface the inchoate; they have an ability to "evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words, . . . a different kind of information" (13).

For Everett and Barrett (2012), that the guided tour permits active meaning-making to occur and fosters relaxed, interactive experiences between researchers and participants are further strengths. Baillie (2003) hints that the success of her guided tours is at least partly attributable to the participants' (and the researcher's) enjoyment of them: they were "effective as all [each member of each participating household] took part and made contributions" (8–9). In the same vein, Hartel (2010) describes how participants "came to life as they led [her] through their home and belongings," and goes on to add that "the tours produced very rich data, more valuable than the interviews alone in understanding. . . . Cooks are more articulate when showing and handling artifacts—it makes it less abstract" (866). Thomson (2010) echoes the point that guided tours "captivate" participants. For her, so much elaborative detail was "readily offered [during the tours . . .] that [participants] unknowingly answered several questions intended for interviews later" (36). Prolonged observation- or interview-based research can prompt discomfort, at least initially. That the guided tour, usually conducted in a participant's space, could alleviate anxiety or become altogether enjoyable is a definite strength.

Maximized participant involvement, in turn, facilitates greater researcher reflection and reflexivity, which Everett and Barrett (2012) count as another strength. They write that "witnessing the ways the participants engage with objects prompted Michele [Everett] to reflect on the way she

engages during visits to museums. . . . The guided tours also led Michele to reflect on her feelings about connection to place” (43). Through her analytic writing, Everett comes to a realization that while she herself has never felt a connection to place, “this research process has provided me with that feeling. . . . I have come to know and appreciate the TMAG [Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery] and Tasmania more fully through [the participants]” (43). The guided tour technique offers a situated and embodied experience to researchers: moving through a meaningful space while observing actions, reactions, and interactions and hearing personal stories can help them to increase their senses of familiarity and to generate the sorts of “thick descriptions” (Geertz 1973) commonly associated with immersive ethnography. This idea of increased reflexivity is further explored in the Discussion section.

Beyond the advantages Everett and Barrett (2012) state, it might also be noted that guided tours encourage ILS researchers, at least, toward visual presentations of empirical data; of the sixteen ILS guided tour studies included in table 1, nine incorporate sketches, photos, and video captures as components of their final reports. Visual presentations are memorable, holistic, and accessible, and they also go further in portraying inefable embodied information than does a strictly text-based account. ILS researchers may also count as a strength that guided tours are adaptable across realms—physical, digital, and hybrid information spaces—without compromising situatedness, and as another strength that they do not require large investments of time in order to gather significant data. Hartel (2007, 2010) distilled important findings regarding the role of information in leisure pursuits via 90- to 180-minute outings (including separate sit-down interview portions); Malone (1983) conducted his seminal in-office guided tours (and separate sit-down interviews) in just over one hour each; and Mizrachi (2011) found her guided tours through dorm rooms to last but 3 to 9 minutes, not inclusive of other methods.

*Weaknesses.* Among criticisms of the guided tour technique, their somewhat contrived nature may be pointed out, particularly when compared to the lengthy rapport-building and naturalism that participant observation and ethnography entail. Because guided tours request participants to give voice to their typically private “streams of perceptions, emotions, and interpretations” (Kusenbach 2003, 464), they will work best when some existing relationship of trust has been established, even if just in an initial preparatory letter. However, the challenge to researchers remains to gain enough familiarity that *in vivo* terms and intended meanings can be captured in short order (Nicolini 2009). Not only do guided tours take place during contracted and often semistructured sessions, they also, Hartel (2010, 853) mentions, hinge upon participants’ selective decisions of locations and artifacts to showcase. However, it can be argued that without

participants being in control of and comfortable with a guided tour, much of the essence and inherent value of the technique is lost anyway. And, as Nicolini (2009) has written of ITTDs, worries about such techniques generating morally idealistic data are allayed by realizing that the data they beget are clues about participants' ongoing and orienting concerns.

Further to this, despite guided tours being adaptable across physical, digital, and hybrid realms, Hartel (2010) speculates that guided tours in hybrid information spaces can skew participants toward physical resources—cookbooks, recipe cards, and keepsakes, in her case—rather than digital (or social) ones. When digitally housed information is not purposely excluded from the purview of a guided tour study, this is a potential limitation that researchers should address. Again, though, it might be argued that, during guided tours, participants show their “physical and digital . . . worlds as they see and interact with them,” with “maximum freedom to identify elements of importance to them in the environment, and to shape their descriptions as desired” (Mizrachi and Bates 2013, 1594) and minimal influence from researchers.

As Hartel (2010) notes, special software and data collection tools would be required in order to comprehensively account for participants' digital information during a guided tour. Any need for expert research equipment can alienate researchers who have modest resources and/or technical know-how. It is worth stating, however, that of the six digital information-space pieces reviewed above, none employ advanced data-capturing technologies, only cameras and audio recorders, nor do they aim for comprehensive coverage of participants' digital spaces. For ILS researchers interested in studying situated, embodied information, the same warning applies: video cameras are the best tools for collecting this sort of data, but likely the most complex to gain access to and to handle.

Moreover, since, by definition, guided tours are truncated, researchers' constant attention and awareness throughout each session is crucial, especially when minute embodied movements are of interest. In order to ease this burden, researchers with the means to do so may introduce (video) cameras to their outings, considering, however, that this recording equipment could alter the relational dynamics of guided tours or malfunction. And, abbreviated guided tour sessions, unless done longitudinally (something that has yet to occur, it seems), produce static pictures of what are actually dynamic phenomena. ILS researchers employing the guided tour technique thus miss out on seeing participants' information management or use activities and changes in these over time, for example.

## DISCUSSION

The qualitative research paradigm emphasizes rich depictions of the behaviors, perspectives, and feelings of individuals *in situ*, in natural settings (Denzin and Lincoln 2008; Lincoln and Guba 1985). Through immersive

copresence and time spent with participants, qualitative researchers report having increased understandings of participants' life experiences, and being able to see and feel similarly to them. As an embodied research technique, the guided tour is powerful in this regard; researchers who have conducted guided tour studies report, for example, "being able to see . . . through the participant's eyes" (Everett and Barrett 2012, 42–43), and talk about the effect of "witnessing firsthand [people's] esthetic and emotional responses to objects and experiences" (41). The accounts of ILS researchers who have conducted guided tours and deliberately reported on either methodological (Baillie 2002; Hartel 2010) or procedural (e.g., Barreau 1995; Bergman 2013; Kwasnik 1989; Mizrachi and Bates 2013) aspects of the technique resonate with this, suggesting that the guided tour engenders mutual sense-making.

Cox, Griffin, and Hartel (2017) note that, in particular, ethnographic and observational methods access and subsequently foreground embodied forms of knowledge, "because it is precisely their embodied copresence that researchers themselves rely on" (389) throughout their experiences in the field. As a qualitative, embodied research technique that facilitates similar access to situated, embodied data, however, the guided tour should serve to increase researchers' awareness of themselves as embodied research instruments as well, and encourage serious reflection. Everett and Barrett (2012) count among its strengths that the guided tour technique encourages reflexivity, but do not stress a "critical impetus" (Pillow 2003, 180) for this. Wanda Pillow (2003, 186) argues that reflexivity is often approached as a comfortable methodological strategy by way of which researchers unquestioningly position themselves as closer to participants; believe in themselves and their participants as able and willing to honestly coconstruct narratives and self-represent; and suggest that they have transcended their own subjectivities and cultural contexts. Instead of declaring, as Kusenbach (2003) does, that guided tours allow researchers to "witness *in situ* the filtering and shaping of their subjects' perceptions, [which in turn] de-emphasizes [their] own presuppositions and biases, which are in the end irrelevant" (469), researchers employing qualitative, interpretive research techniques such as the guided tour might instead "seek to know, while at the same time situate this knowing as tenuous" (Pillow 2003, 188). No matter the sense of shared understanding a given research method or technique engenders, data "can never be apprehended in an unmediated way" (Nicolini 2009, 196); human senses and perceptions are inevitably limited, physiologically (by characteristics of the body) and psychologically (by personal experiences and expectations and social learning) (Cox, Griffin, and Hartel 2017; Lueg 2015). Researchers must attempt to scrutinize their own epistemic practices in addition to the phenomena with which they are concerned (Nicolini 2009).

Qualitative researchers proceed with the dual purpose to partake and

hold back: they are charged to keep “explicit awareness” of and presence in all occurrences during their research experiences, but also to remain aware of their introspective responsibilities, engaged in continuous thought about what is occurring (Spradley 1980). This is the turning back upon itself of reflexivity, an “active process [that] involves reflection, examination, scrutiny, and interrogation of the whole research process” (Renganathan 2009, 4), including what personal values, interests, attributes, and assumptions about knowledge researchers and participants bring to it. Precisely because embodied research techniques like guided tours encourage researchers toward shared perspectives—and even invite readers “to see through [researchers’] eyes” (Renganathan 2009, 15)—reflexive analysis of researcher embodiment is all the more important.

### CONCLUSION

This article introduced the guided tour as an appropriate research technique for the study of situated, embodied information in the ILS field. A sustained background to the guided tour, including mention of its congruencies with other, more familiar methods and techniques, was provided, along with an overview of past usage of the guided tour technique in empirical ILS studies. From this, a general sense emerged that methodological reflexivity on the part of ILS researchers who have employed the guided tour technique is rare; the rich findings that these reports portray are what typically must stand as proxies for assessing the broader value of the guided tour technique. Malone’s (1983) guided tours, likely the first information-related use of the technique, led to findings with strong and enduring communicative power. Observing and hearing participants in the information-rich settings of their offices, more “carefully controlled studies and more extensive naturalistic observations were suggested by the insights [he] obtained, . . . certainly worth performing” (Malone 1983, 101). Importantly, Malone pointed out, even if a researcher’s findings did not justify further research, guided tour studies are still amenable to tight “time and budget constraints” (101).

As a complementary technique to be used alongside other research methods, the guided tour addresses and connects spatial, material, and embodied concerns well. It must be pointed out, however, that the technique is not so specialized as to only be useful to ILS researchers interested in embodiment. Any qualitative study of information phenomena may benefit from the deep, holistic insights that guided tours offer.

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## NOTES

1. Think-aloud protocols and contextual inquiry interviews are more akin to Spradley's (1979) "Task-Related Grand Tours"; these only focus on embodied experiences, as opposed to situated and embodied experiences. Malone (1983), Kwasnik (1989, 1991), and Kaye and colleagues (2006) are among the ILS researchers who have incorporated smaller-facet sorting or finding tasks—embedded task-related tours—during their guided tours.
2. The descriptions provided in several reports make it difficult to determine whether they are "properly" guided tour usages. For example, Case (1986) followed Malone's (1983) precedent, conducting *in situ* interviews "in the same way one might conduct an archaeological dig" (Case 1986, 101). Observations like the number of piles and "stacks," books, journals, and notebooks, and items on shelves and within drawers and "other storage devices" were therefore facilitated (101), but no indication is given that participants engaged in or provided input into this portion of the research, as one would expect of deliberate guided tours. In another example, Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2006) mention collecting data from "digital camera tours," with adolescent participants photographing neighborhood places that they typically go to for information. However, the description that follows from this is reminiscent of the photovoice technique, not the guided tour technique.

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