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## **Guiding In a Post-Museum: Challenges And Opportunities**



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## **Abstract**

This thesis confronts guiding practices to the post-museum concept. Since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a current stream of theories has renewed the museum's mission in the Western world. Some label this new ideal, a 'post-museum'. This shift has been characterized by focusing on the visitor and his or her experience. Consequently, guiding practices are challenged: alternatives must be offered to their prior model of "school like" transmission. In guided-tours, many opportunities can occur, thanks to the interaction created by the personal guide who seeks after reaching out to all the guided-visitors, including their feedback and input.

Those challenges and opportunities for the guides will be analyzed theoretically and through the practical insight of three Dutch case-studies: two art museums, the Rijksmuseum, the Van Abbemuseum and the counterpoint of a commercial institution, the Heineken Experience. Based on interviews, these cases-studies will bring to light common points and inspirations to understand how guides can contribute to achieve the post-museum ideal.

Keywords: post-museum - guides - visitors – education – long life learning – visitor's experience – case-studies

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## Introduction

In a *New York Times* article titled ‘Let a Robot be your Museum Tour Guide’ author Doreen Carvajal points out one of the many possibilities that robotic technologies offer to 21<sup>st</sup> century museum visitors.

<sup>1</sup> Carvajal explains that the rationale for developing these still very expensive devices is the need for remote visiting capabilities, as well as the ‘wow effect’ that a robot creates in the gallery for the present visitors. An interesting aspect in all examples is that the robots are almost always accompanied by a human guide.<sup>2</sup> For instance, at the World War I Museum in Meaux France, the guide’s task is to “offer running commentary while visitors direct its (the robot’s) path”.

Despite the rise of robotics and self-guided tours in the museum, the role of the human guide is thriving.<sup>3</sup> This is a paradox because many visitors instead of favoring an individual customized visit from their homes or in the museum (thanks to virtual tours, or devices) still prefer to join a collective experience under the lead of a guide who will choose for them. And I will argue that those tours are not only shelters for potentially overwhelmed visitors by loads of information, they act as ‘labs’ for social and cultural exchanges, leading sometimes to very personal conversations. These exchanges would have been hardly possible without a guide.

So, why a paradox remains? The guided-tour is often perceived as belonging to the prior authoritarian tradition of museums, focused on a top-down transmission; while new technologies would allow museums to democratize their content, making it available for everyone in his or her own terms.<sup>4</sup> In practice though, guiding continues to evolve incorporating many new aspects, including technological tools, such as tablets or robots.

These aspects are stemming from the changes in the museum’s mission. Along the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the museums have kept drifting away from this authoritative transmission model. Progressively or drastically sometimes, they have opted for a model where the visitor has a say in how

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<sup>1</sup> Doreen Carvajal, ‘Let a Robot Be Your Museum Tour Guide’ in *The New York Times*, 14.03.2017

<sup>2</sup> Similar initiatives are to be found in the U.S.A., Canada and the U.K. without mentioning the Netherlands like chapter 3 will show it with the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven offering a robot for remote or disabled visitors.

<sup>3</sup> Virtual visits exist since the first museum websites. Multiple technological milestones from Google Art project to now robots offer dematerialized but relatively customizable visits. When physically in the museum, common supports of content like apps’ or audio-guides provide the visitors with specific tours according to their interests.

<sup>4</sup> Those new technologies allow even further the potential expression of everyone’s preferences in the way the content can be retrieved. The caricatural opposition is forced here because technology is much more ambivalent than just described: to me, it prescribes as much as it offers.

they experience the museum. This increasing incorporation of new technologies into a museum's experience is also symptomatic of the museum's urge to become a more democratic institution. As several museum theorists such as Hooper-Greenhill, discuss this phenomenon, museums have oriented themselves towards the ideal of a post-museum.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, I state that the guide is one of the key learning tools of the museum to reach the ideal of the post-museum: a museum centered on the visitors' needs and aspirations. The traditional function of the guide limited to teaching has already evolved and exceeded this historical function. New approaches to education encouraging life-long learning processes have enriched the field of museum studies.<sup>6</sup> Guides can do much more than just incorporate technology into their existing job functions. In my opinion and as a museum guide,<sup>7</sup> it is time for museums to use more fully the guides' potential to help museums reach true democratization of their discourse and practices. This implies that the museum accepts and processes the guides' perceptions and feedback about the visitors' groups they are in contact with. This seems as a platitude but there is an actual dearth of thinking about the guides' role which in many theories and approaches, is not really analyzed.<sup>8</sup> But the specificity of the guide is his or her subjectivity in contact with each of the visitors and as a group, for a brief but specific sequence of the visitors' experience: the tour.

Challenges and opportunities arise during a guided-tour, especially when aligned with the ideal of the post-museum. A difficult question comes to mind immediately: how to make a visitor-centered guided-tour when by definition the guided-tour is a collective experience? Especially when most of the time, the tour follows an already established script, validated by the museum's education department? If a guided-tour is partially written, where are the margins of maneuvering for the guide, the group and each of the visitors? As a guide myself, the experience on the other side of the visit – not as a visitor – but as an 'actor' contributing to the other's visit, made me realize how intensely personal and physical this job is. Many other factors are also to be considered like logistical issues in the galleries (space and time are usually scarce), but also economical aspects at stake for the guide and the museum. Those parameters can disturb the ideal tour, or even conflict with the idealistic mission

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<sup>5</sup> chapter 1.

<sup>6</sup> chapter 2.

<sup>7</sup> Since February 2016 mainly at the Rijksmuseum for French- and English-speaking audiences, adults, and teenagers.

<sup>8</sup> chapter 2.

of the guide to share and reach out to visitors, even if guides and museums do their best to achieve this mission.

Beyond a subjective summary of my practical experience, this research needs to be articulated in broader theoretical terms to grasp how different approaches and practices to guiding are possible. Therefore, I selected theoretical concepts to build a framework and to single out challenges and opportunities in the current and ideal guided-tour. I then chose to apply this framework to three case studies, which are mainly focused on art museums but put into perspective with a more commercial institution. Through this theoretical and practical journey, my leading question has remained the same: how can the guide achieve the ideal of the post museum?

Firstly, I shall examine what is the “post-museum” and which impact it has on the role of the ‘guide’ and how it modifies the tour and its perception by the visitors. Secondly, insights from the communication sciences, but also the concept of ‘museum’s experience’ will help me to identify what happens during the tour in the visitors’ heads and bodies. I will also articulate instances in which the guide has the opportunity to play an active role in the visitor’s experience and how, by doing this, a non-patronizing style of adult learning can emerge. Finally, I will apply this theoretical framework to three case-studies. These case studies embody the current challenges and concrete solutions chosen by two leading Dutch art museums; the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven. Pivoting around the visitor’s experience to be put in perspective with the marketing theories of the “economy of experience”, those two art museums might draw inspiration from a commercial institution, the Heineken Experience which is also seeking for a very different type of learning but meets comparable challenges to be solved of the benefit to the visitor. These case-studies will also help to identify areas of improvements and further opportunities.

The choice of the two art museums rests on their complementarity to each other: the Rijksmuseum is a national and international leading museum that deals with large historical periods while the Van Abbemuseum is mainly focused on contemporary art and aims to reach out to its local audiences. The Heineken Experience has a special role in this thesis because it is a commercial institution whose objective is to support a commercial brand through its narrative. It is not, strictly speaking, a museum, even if it shows a part of the historical collection of Heineken. Despite obvious differences, there are many concerns in common involving the public and content issues, namely; how to ensure the visitors have a good experience. How to respect and value the visitors’ diversity which might be sometimes challenging and ensure for all the same quality of visit. Comparing the two museums with a commercial ‘attraction’ helps to analyze the visitor’s experience, I will also discuss

the unique features of the Heineken Experience, as a distinct form of visitor experience in contrast to the museums.

To document these case-studies, I chose to contact and interview the three institutions through their education departments (for the two museums) and the collections manager (for the firm Heineken, through the structure of the Heineken Collection Foundation<sup>9</sup>). The complete transcripts of those interviews can be provided on request. I also added personal observations on the toured-groups when I could attend them, mainly at the Rijksmuseum. Concerning the audience groups, I will focus in this thesis on the adult visitors taking part in a guided-tour.<sup>10</sup> I will distinguish them from the school groups and families with young children even if the specific methods for those audiences might be a source of inspiration for the adult groups.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> More information on the Heineken Collection Foundation and its links with the rest of the group: <https://www.heinekencollection.com/about-the-foundation/>

<sup>10</sup> This scope of visitors was the one I asked about in the three interviews.

<sup>11</sup> Due to regulation regarding alcohol, children and families do not especially visit the Heineken experience. Moreover, for the school groups in museums, the tours are linked to the school curriculum. These aspects influence directly the visitors' museum experience with very external parameters I was not in measure to cover.

## Chapter one -What does guiding in a post-museum imply?

The specificity of guiding in a post-museum and its consequent challenges and opportunities can only be understood by taking two steps back in time. Firstly, I shall examine which aspirations and challenges are encapsulated in the concept of a “post-museum”. Secondly, I will focus on how the guiding function, as old as the museum itself, intersects with the post-museum.

### A. The post-museum: a metaphor leading to challenges

The streams and circumvolutions which lead to the post-museum are not the object of my thesis, however some milestones need to be considered. Museum studies and later the concept of post-museum emerge progressively on the breeding-ground of the competing ideologies of the Cold-War, the counter-cultural movements in the West (especially the women’s and civil rights movements) and the decolonization in the rest of the world. All of those prompted a revision, some pleaded for a renewal, of museums in theory and in practice.<sup>12</sup> Concurrently, universities and intellectual circles were challenging perceived notions about society and its institutions.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the definition of the post-museum is as diverse and nuanced as the influences which color the author’s views.

The post-museum also inherited the aspirations of the “New Museology”, the chosen title of Peter Vergo’s essay (1989), in which he opposed it to an old museology concerned only by methods and practices. Vergo pleaded for a discipline which would be “a matter of concern to almost everybody” due to the link between the museum and contemporary society.<sup>14</sup> The focus of the museum shifted away from explaining the world through objects and galleries to the recipients of the entire institution; the visitors which were increasingly considered as contributors to the shaping of knowledge. This is also precisely where the visitor’s experience will intervene in this thesis and why it is so essential to try to seize the visitor’s expressed feedback not only through evaluation

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<sup>12</sup> In France, *la nouvelle muséologie* claimed, in the 1980’s, to come back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century revolutionary goals of creating museums, see André Desvallées, dir. *Vagues, une anthologie de la nouvelle muséologie*, Mâcon, éditions W, Savigny-le-Temple, M.N.E.S, vol.1, 1992.

<sup>13</sup> With a multidisciplinary approach, new disciplines emerged such as cultural studies, communication studies, new and comparative literature, (new) history, sociology, education theories. They all benefited the nascent field of museum studies or *muséologie* in French and in various versions in Latin speaking countries.

<sup>14</sup> Vergo, Peter. 1989. *The new museology*. London: Reaktion books, as quoted by Smith, C. (2014). ‘Post-modernising the museum: The Ration Shed’. *Historical Encounters: A journal of historical consciousness, historical cultures, and history education*, 1(1), 32-49.



questionnaires taking place after the visit but also during the duration of the guided tour itself. However, a visitor-centered museum immediately invites new challenges. If museums are really at the service of the visitor, then they should ideally take it upon themselves to reorganize and revise their content according to the visitor's wishes. But how does a museum incorporate visitor feedback when it may threaten centuries of tradition? In practice, even organizations of the personnel have evolved. Titles of museum's departments have been modified and the choice of words is never neutral.<sup>15</sup> Hooper-Greenhill argues: "the museum world has begun to accept that visitors are not a passive, homogeneous mass of people, 'the general public', but can be seen as individuals with their own particular needs, preferred learning styles and social and cultural agendas. (...) The old passive 'general public' has become the new 'active audience'."<sup>16</sup> Logically the departments and vocabulary of education, have increasingly made space for "mediation" and "interpretation".<sup>17</sup> Being not only a matter of trend or only local, those terminologies all express attempts to put the audiences and the communities they originate from at the heart of the museum's mission and actions.<sup>18</sup>

The post-museum is not a ready-made solution: it brings practical challenges. As also underlined by and critical scholars,<sup>19</sup> and Hooper-Greenhill herself: "while there are substantial ongoing changes within museums, these proceed based on interrogating and renegotiating earlier practices and philosophies, many of which continue in one form or another to underpin the identity of

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<sup>15</sup> The mass of people designated for a long time as the public is now marked by a plural, being increasingly designated as "audiences" or "publics". Not only due to a marketing's segmentation, this usage of the plural reflects the diversity acknowledged by post-modern theories.

<sup>16</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean. 1999. *The educational role of the museum*. London: Routledge. P 67

<sup>17</sup> For instance, in France and in Canada, academics and professionals are thinking, teaching, and practicing the mediation for the audiences, resulting in corpus of theories, diplomas and professional associations. One leading figure is for instance Collette Dufresne-Tassé teaching at the Université de Montréal and at the Ecole du Louvre.

<sup>18</sup> In the Western museums' sphere, differences exist between an English speaking relatively contiguous academic sphere and other traditions of thinking the museum as they can be found in French speaking and other Latin languages but also in Germanic and Slav speaking countries. Despite divergences on their favorite concepts to describe new museums, a convergence in their aspirations can be observed in their focus about "community", like the ecomuseums. See Mairesse François. La belle histoire, aux origines de la nouvelle muséologie. In: *Publics et Musées*, n°17-18, 2000. L'écomusée : rêve ou réalité (sous la direction de André Desvallées) pp. 33-56. [http://www.persee.fr/doc/pumus\\_1164-5385\\_2000\\_num\\_17\\_1\\_1154](http://www.persee.fr/doc/pumus_1164-5385_2000_num_17_1_1154)

<sup>19</sup> Alivizatou, (2009) and Keene, (2009) quoted by Smith, C. (2014). 'Post-modernising the museum: The Ration Shed'. *Historical Encounters: A journal of historical consciousness, historical cultures, and history education*, 1(1), 32-49.

the museum today.”<sup>20</sup> Prior conceptions and derived habits coexist with more recent aspirations sometimes conflicting with each other.

A critical synthesis and roadmap were offered by Hooper-Greenhill.<sup>21</sup> To her, the post museum is a metaphor for the challenges faced by contemporary museums. This new ideal museum reflects on the elaboration of knowledge and the role that the subjective identity of the individual plays in the process of meaning making. This reshaping of knowledge decimated the theoretical foundations upon which museums had been built. Three myths were to be unveiled: "the project to produce single explanations of the world through knowledge that apparently has universal relevance"; "the idea that the self is a fixed and stable entity "; and the concept that learning consists of absorbing and reproducing a fixed body of approved knowledge.<sup>22</sup> Those three myths refer to the modern museum born from the Enlightenments' ideals and which spread throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and prevailed until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Considered a public service for the people's enjoyment and education,<sup>23</sup> the museum encompassed essential missions like defining collective and national identities but it remained consistent in its conception of knowledge.<sup>24</sup>

With the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a new paradigm challenged those convictions. A new episteme had been forged in which everything should be questioned in order to reveal and deconstruct any authoritative strategies.<sup>25</sup> As Hooper-Greenhill argues: “One of the most useful ways of using postmodernism is as an attitude or a critique, a way of thinking”.<sup>26</sup> Lyotard proposed postmodernism

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<sup>20</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean. Chapter. 28 Education, postmodernity and the museum. p 368 in Knell, Simon J., Suzanne Macleod, and Sheila E. R. Watson. 2007. *Museum revolutions: how museums change and are changed*. London: Routledge.

<sup>21</sup> The main model is coined in *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (2000).

<sup>22</sup> Hooper-Greenhill (2007) p 367

<sup>23</sup> This ideal is still partially at stake in the current ICOM's definition of a museum. Source: <http://archives.icom.museum/definition.html> (18.11.16)

<sup>24</sup> This aspect is represented in my case studies, with the Rijksmuseum's Great Hall whose architect Pierre Cuypers envisioned as a sort of preview. This leads to the “Gallery of Honor” with the glorified 17<sup>th</sup> c. Dutch paintings.

<sup>25</sup> This critical attitude sees the mark of Michel Foucault who in *Les mots et les choses* (1966) and *L'archéologie du savoir* (1968) uses the ‘episteme’ to analyze intellectual shifts in how knowledge is shaped.

<sup>26</sup> Hooper-Greenhill (2007) p. 367-368, indicates the bibliographical reference in her quote:” (Usher *et al.* 1997:8)”

as an attitude of incredulity,<sup>27</sup> and skepticism towards modernist ideas which have attained the status of 'common sense' or 'myth'." Therefore, the museum had to be deconstructed and its focus shifted.

### **B. What is the guide's role in the post museum?**

One of those practical challenges the post-museum is confronted with, can be identified in the function of the guide. Indeed, putting the visitor(s) at the center of the post-museum, challenges directly a tradition of transmitting knowledge about collections, almost as old as the collections themselves: the guiding practices.

About the historicity of the guiding function in museums, a whole body of research still needs to be conducted. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the guiding function has become increasingly professionalized and its importance recognized.<sup>28</sup> Although guiding has attained an independent function, the polysemy of the word 'guide' itself remains. The act of guiding can encompass the written support of information, to multimedia support, to a person who is physically guiding visitors through the galleries. The appellations depend also on the country, the tradition of museum studies there and the connotations that the museums choose to underline in this function. (for more terminologies and their insights, report to appendices 1). In this thesis, the word "guide" will be used in general to cover this diverse reality.<sup>29</sup> However, the quotes from the literature might use vocabulary as reflecting their cultural, historical, and national or even institutional background.

In the context of the post-museum, the guides cannot escape the reconfiguration of their relationship with their audiences. In practice, some visitors are surprised by the new styles of guiding and express mixed reactions. Sometimes it is positive and other times they complain about unfulfilled expectations. This might originate from some of the underlying 'myths' or preconceptions associated with what the goals should be of a guided tour and ultimately of a visit at a museum.

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<sup>27</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, *Ibidem*, p. 368 indicates as precise bibliographical reference: "Lyotard (Lyon 1999: 16)"

<sup>28</sup> Compared to the history of collections, researching the history of transmitting knowledge about those objects is much scarcer. Perhaps the very human nature of this transmission: oral and performance culture could explain it while a written culture is easier to track. Another difficulty lies in the diverse appellations that this function got, sometimes called undefinedly "keepers", 'guards' or any person in charge of the collection who also in charge of making the tour of it. The need is there as pinpointed by Rika Burnham and Elliott Kai-Kee (2011), who have drawn a comprehensive history of guiding in the United States, and linked the evolution of museums' practices to the evolution of education and museum theories. For further information see appendices 1.

<sup>29</sup> Chapter 3 will underline how diverse appellations and tasks can be, even just in the Netherlands.

## Reconfiguration of guiding

Coming back to the three myths presiding to the permanence of museums according to Hooper-Greenhill, there are presumptions made by the tradition concerning the tour in the museum. Those also are to be consequently deconstructed.

The first myth was “the project to produce single explanations of the world through knowledge that apparently has universal relevance”. For the guided-tour, it meant that the guide was deploying the narrative, in more detail, and was implicitly supposed to be right. No contestation was even conceivable. The guide was comparable to the authoritative figure of a teacher or a professor since he or she was the voice of the institution. In the post-modern theory though, the world can no more be denoted by a universal set of explanations. The guided-tour includes cautious warnings that the information comes from the current state of knowledge, without leaning towards a complete relativism.<sup>30</sup> In this delicate balance to break with the *ex-cathedrae* posture: the guide is no longer a figure of absolute reference but a transmitter of a certain type of knowledge. In a more pedagogical and constructivist approach,<sup>31</sup> the guide acknowledges not only by questions but also by a whole attitude that a part of knowledge is already brought to the museum by visitors’ identities and life experiences. The tour does not actually deliver a narrative of the world but, ideally, becomes a personal revelation for the visitor who reconfigures what is already known by being in contact with the objects and the whole museum. Moreover, this reconfiguration happens in a social environment. The guided-tour is minimally a dialogue of two voices; the guide and at least one visitor, but in parallel, quite often, the visitors initiate conversations among themselves.

Deconstructing this first myth impacts not only the selection of objects and their display but also the way in which those objects and the knowledge around them are communicated from the guide to the visitors. The tour creates a potential multi-voiced dialogue, allowing room for exchanges and contestation.

The second myth pleaded for “the idea that the self is a fixed and stable entity” implying the permanence of historical, political, and cultural categories. Though narrating collective identities can be part of a tour content (eg: the Dutch culture during the golden age at the Rijksmuseum), this content needs then to be presented as multiple and evolving according to which historical prism is used to

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<sup>30</sup> Hooper-Greenhill. *The Educational Role of the Museum*. London: Routledge, 1999. p. 49

<sup>31</sup> chapter 2

analyze them. Those identities can no longer be reduced as incarnations of a nation or a time, in the lineage of a *Volkgeist* and a *Zeitgeist*<sup>32</sup>. Identities at stake in a tour are not only the narrated ones through objects. They are consubstantial of the tour participants. The visitors and the guide him- or herself come to the tour with multi-layered, sometimes even conflictual identities. This creates potential tensions since individuals can feel that their identity is threatened by perceived criticism or forgotten by not being represented at all in the tour. The guide, no longer in a hierarchical position, needs to be able to acknowledge conflict, potentially solve it and, if not possible, continue the tour for the rest of the group. Intellectual and communications skills are necessary for the guide to negotiate between her or his own identity and the ones she or he encounters in the group.<sup>33</sup>

The third myth concerned the nature of learning in museum and the expected outcome of a visit. Learning consisted of absorbing and reproducing a fixed body of approved knowledge. In that context, a visit to the museum was supposed to be educational and instructive in a quite restrictive, academic way. The result of this myth was that both the guide and also the written panels in the galleries tended to provide the group with a potential overload of content, dates, biographical information and demonstrated facts which were expected to be remembered, like a lesson. Today, in the lineage of a constructivist approach,<sup>34</sup> the stress is put less on pure content and more on the process of engaging with the artwork. This leads the guide to wonder which skills are the visitors mobilizing during the tour. Which of these skills could the guide help them acquire or realize what they already have? The goal is more the appropriation of knowledge that visitors find personally relevant than the ability to recite an approved corpus. It implies from the guide an ability to reach out to the visitors and assist them in their own learning process.

In the shift from the modern to the post-museum, the position of the guide has transformed from source to resource. From being the translator and amplifier of an authoritative narrative composed from stable categories to read the world represented in galleries, the guide is now more comparable to an interpretation center. He or she can unfold, on demand, documented pieces of information, in function of what the visitors are curious about and what the guide knows from the current state of knowledge. At the same time, the guide might also act as a point of reference in a world of shifting

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<sup>32</sup> As theorized during the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries by Germanic philosophers.

<sup>33</sup> These skills are not necessarily provided during the classical guides' background in pedagogy, history, or art history. An extra-training can be provided, like it was the case at the Rijksmuseum, on the 29/09/2016, by the activist and among other functions ex-director of Green Peace Netherlands, Sylvia Borren.

<sup>34</sup> chapter 2

identities and the evolving content around those collective identities.

From the practice point of view, the group of visitors provides the guide with opportunities to enrich his or her own knowledge and to arrange meaningful exchanges during the tour. As Hooper-Greenhill states: “In post-modernity, knowledge is perceived as fluid, changing and unstable”.<sup>35</sup> This new perception of knowledge might reinforce the need for a guiding presence, from being a point of reference to even a referee. In an environment where people encounter difficulties in reading history due to the multiplicity of viewpoints and voices, the dangers of relativism can be foreseen. Reason why, Hooper-Greenhill details ethics issues raised by post-modernism in museums. When confronted by groups who want to contradict the museum narrative (extreme historical revisionists for example), the guide cannot keep a neutral role, but has a moral duty to oppose extreme relativism. So, if less authoritative, the function of guiding keeps a potential authority to set limits but hopefully in a more democratic way.

In the post-museum, as I have already demonstrated, the content of the guided-tour is ideally no longer standardized.<sup>36</sup> Recognizing the profound subjectivity of the guide and the ‘guided’ implies logically that a guided-tour might fail to reach those multiple ambitious objectives. Since the content is less ‘fixed’ than before and the evaluation of the tour’s objectives less clear, it becomes a much more creative but also uncertain experience on both sides: for the guided individuals as well as for the guide her-or himself.

This final point could appear as a paradox as the guide’s function has become more professionalized. It would be tempting to see guided-tours as steady, efficient exercises which could be reproduced with a clearly articulated metric of success. In my opinion, the professional guides must develop an ability through training and theoretical background to understand, accept and negotiate with this more unpredictable, more subjective and more stimulating exercise.

To summarize this chapter’s insights: museums have been revolutionized in their focus, thanks to the ‘post-museum’. Guiding practices have been impacted by this shift in both approach and content. The challenges faced by guides today demonstrate the inspirational strength of the post-museum but

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<sup>35</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean. Chapter. 28 ‘Education, postmodernity and the museum’. in Knell, Simon J., Suzanne Macleod, and Sheila E. R. Watson. 2007. *Museum revolutions: how museums change and are changed*. London: Routledge. p 370

<sup>36</sup> Adapting to even people who do not like to go to museums seems to be the successful bet and selling argument of private guides, like the American start-up ‘Museum hacks’/ Video: ‘Gray, Nick, How I learned to stop hating and love museums’ | Nick Gray | *TEDxFoggyBottom* source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6VWPHKABRQA> (15/05/17)

also its inherent difficulties in translating concrete and consistent objectives.

The next chapter will bring us a step further by defining a theoretical framework that brings together museum, guides and visitors.

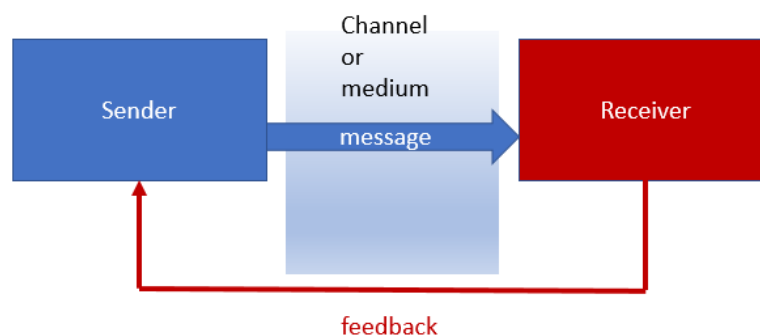
## Chapter two – The guided-tour as medium towards learning

In the post-museum, the visitor is at the core of the museum’s challenges. Firstly, I will explain how communication theories can help position the guided-tour as part of a specific sequence within a visit. Secondly, I will examine the nature of the museum visitor’s experience as defined by Falk and Dierking and how motivation can play a role in a tour. Finally, I will question what and from whom the visitor is actually learning and the consequences for the guide.

### A. Communications Theory’s insights

The communications theory emerged mainly after WWII, inspired by the technological progress of telecommunications. One of the first reference models was elaborated in the Bell Laboratories by Shannon and Weaver (1949).<sup>37</sup> In parallel, other scholars were contributing to this new field of study,<sup>38</sup> like Norbert Wiener who has coined the key concept of “feedback” (1948)<sup>39</sup>. Merging those insights, I shall use a model developed by Berlo, 1960: the Sender -Message-Channel-Receiver (SMCR).<sup>40</sup> This schematizes the rich and complex communications happening in a museum, but also during the tour.

Fig. 1 – A communications model based on the SMCR



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<sup>37</sup> Shannon, C. E., & Weaver, W. (1949). *The mathematical theory of communication*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press

<sup>38</sup> These models have been criticized for their simplicity. So lot of variants insist on certain parameters. For a review on the concurrent models, their limitations and their advantages see Picard Dominique (1992). ‘De la communication à l’interaction : l’évolution des modèles’. In *Communication et langages*, n°93, 3rd trimestre 1992. pp. 69-83. [http://www.persee.fr/doc/colan\\_0336-1500\\_1992\\_num\\_93\\_1\\_2380](http://www.persee.fr/doc/colan_0336-1500_1992_num_93_1_2380) (10/04/17)

<sup>39</sup> Wiener, Norbert. (1948). *Cybernetics: or, Control and communication in the animal and the machine*. [Cambridge, Mass.]: Technology Press.

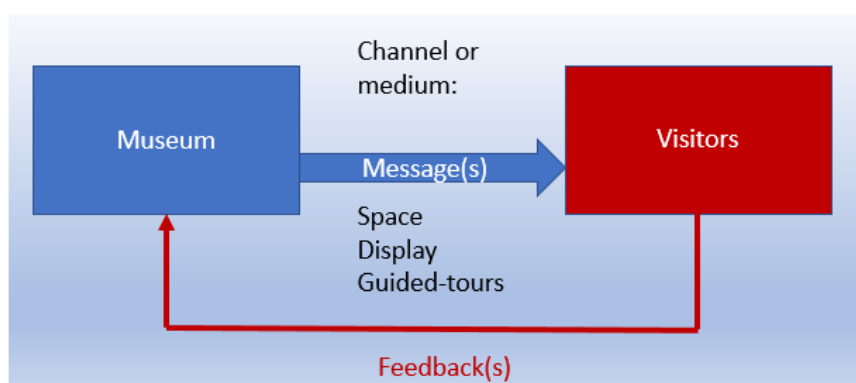
<sup>40</sup> Berlo, D. K. (1960). *The process of communication*. New York, New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston



When applied to the museum, this model acknowledges the systematic circularity of communication. The receiver - here the visitors - answers the sender in response to the sent message. So, the museum, like the visitors, has a double role of sender and receiver. Although it is a bit artificial to separate the museum as institution from the museum as a context, space and moment of communication itself. For clarity purposes, I will distinguish between the institution (symbolized by the blue rectangle) and the museum context (a blue gradient rectangle) whose role is to channel information towards the receivers.

In a McLuhanian approach, the museum could be considered as a medium itself,<sup>41</sup> since it is inside the museum that messages are exchanged. Analyzing further the communicative loops inside the museum, the guided-tour is, in a *mise en abîme*, another medium, in the museum medium; the tour is a moment of delivering messages and exchanging feedbacks.

Fig 2 – The communication model applied to the museum with a double role, sender and medium



The post-museum encourages visitors to give their feedback. The ideal of visitors' empowerment aims for a more democratic museum experience but creates practical issues. For example, the museum must discern which feedbacks are the most representative. Should the subjective feedbacks of the visitors be aggregated to find the average? And how should visitor feedback translate into a change in museum policy? Moreover, once a change has been agreed on, how does a museum implement it when it might dismantle the traditional authority inherent to most museum's policies and organization?

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<sup>41</sup> Considering the museum as a medium would imply for this thesis to link society and its museums. but this is not the core focus of this thesis. It is, however, a very interesting communications approach. The sociologist Herbert Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) coined a famous theory in 1964. *Understanding media: the extension of man*. New York: McGraw-Hill. Affirming that “the medium is the message” and therefore should be the focus of studying.

The recent literature reflects on guidelines such as those laid out by the *Participatory museum* which propels the visitor to the center of the museum's mission in a more radical way.<sup>42</sup> Its author, Nina Simon, Executive Director of the Santa Cruz Museum, states that not only the voice of the visitor matters, but that visitors should be considered as “participants” or “co-creators”.<sup>43</sup> Her terminology emphasizes a more active role than just ‘spectators’ and valorizes the visitors’ capacity to do, rather than just their capacity to see.<sup>44</sup> Exploring this co-participation is at the heart of Simons’ teams experiments and struggles.<sup>45</sup> The Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History approach is inherent to many community museums but with a renewed stress on visitor participation. To formulate this in communications terms, the visitors are more fully acknowledged as senders and not only as receivers emitting a feedback.

### **The communication model: Zooming in on the guide’s ambiguous role(s)**

As I began the preliminary research for this thesis, it dawned on me that the role of the guide has rarely been theorized using the communications model. Museum studies literature keeps referring to the “voice of the museum” implying a unified one, whose main characteristic is its authority. Though it rarely focuses on who is embodying literally the voice(s) of the museum. This includes guides but also hospitality and security staff. Concerning the guides, this lack of analysis could come from the common assumption that guides simply relay the museum’s message(s). However, this stance on the guide’s role is rather reductive.

Ambiguity starts with the space itself. For Stephanie Moser, Professor of Archaeology at the University of Southampton, the museum, through its display strategies “talks to” and teaches the visitor through a “complex network of factors”.<sup>46</sup> This accumulation of what she describes as meaningful details, from the architecture to the lightening effects, the role of colors and design in the exhibitions

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<sup>42</sup> Simon, Nina, and Jennifer Rae Atkins. 2011. *The participatory museum*. Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0. also available online: <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/read/>

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem

<sup>44</sup> Indeed “visitors” can be linked to spectators, through their Latin etymology, both words denote the sense of sight. Visitors meaning literally those who see often. <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/visiter> (30/06/17)

<sup>45</sup> Simons’ blog also documents how hard and complex this co-creation path is for the museum <http://museumtwo.blogspot.nl/> ‘Why we moved the Abbott square opening: a Mistake, a Tough Call and a Pivot’

<sup>46</sup> Moser, Stephanie. ‘The devil is in the detail: Museum Displays and the Creation of Knowledge’. *Museum Anthropology* 33/1 (2010): 22-32.

spaces until even the behavior of other visitors, creates - to continue the communications metaphor – either a harmonious or discordant concert of voices. Moser insists further on the fact that the exhibition displays are creating knowledge and therefore also embody the visitor’s preconceptions.<sup>47</sup> The visitor not only hears the voice of the museum expressed through physical, social and intellectual aspects but he or she is also expecting (if it is not their first visit) a novel type of experience.

In this context already loaded with meanings, the guide’s subjective voice can act as an amplifier - conveying the authority of the museum or supporting the “orthodox” way of reading the exhibition. Alternatively, the guide can act as a ‘thought-provocateur’ as postulated by the private company Museum Hacks.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, as may be expected by the visitors opting for a guided-tour, the guide can act as a decipherer. In this way, the guide is an extra intermediary figure in the already mediating settings of the museum itself. For instance, the guide can help deconstruct those settings by pinpointing the system of reverence organized by a pompous architecture. His or her explanations can reveal behind the scenes stories which are not present in the generic texts of an exhibition. This presupposed understanding of the institution shows up in visitors’ questions when they interrogate the guide about some choices of the museum. The visitors, like most of the museum theorists, seem to perceive the museum guide as a part of the museum’s voice.

A second explanation as to why the guide is not perceived as divergent from the museum, would be that few of the guides themselves write, at a theoretical level, about their practices. But with increasing recognition and a specific training, the guides begin to be more proactive in their conceptualization of their profession.<sup>49</sup>

Concurrently, a series of paradoxes is playing out in the background of the guiding profession which might influence the guide’s actions. Firstly, the guide does usually not belong, in the strict sense of the term, to the institution. There is a divergence between the visitors’ perception and the position

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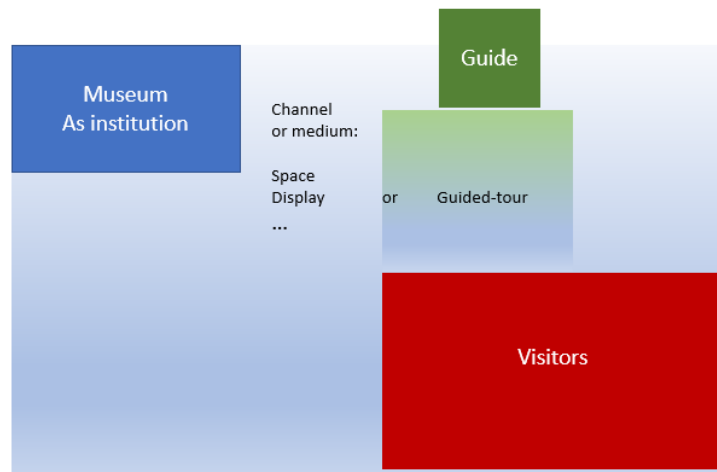
<sup>47</sup> Primarily an archeologist, Stephanie Moser researches the display of antiquities. In *Wondrous curiosities: ancient Egypt at the British Museum*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2012., she deciphers how the first choices of displaying the Egyptian antiquities at the British museum has influenced the preconceptions of visitors about Egyptian collections.

<sup>48</sup> According to the founder of the American start-up ‘Museum hacks’ which offers disruptive and provocative visits of museums. Video: Gray, Nick, ‘How I learned to stop hating and love museums’ | Nick Gray | *TEDxFoggyBottom* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6VWPHKABRQA> (15/05/17)

<sup>49</sup> Moreover, this profession is usually free-lance based. Unlike the researcher who benefits from an institution, the guide is paid only when guiding. This impacts the time and opportunity to reflect individually and collectively on the profession. Passionate guides, pedagogues and professional associations do reflect and have written on their activity, demonstrating it is possible but this is still not very common.

of the guide in and towards the rest of the museum. When guiding is outsourced, the guide is a service provider, on call, according to the demand. From an organizational theory point of view, this detail introduces asymmetries in the museum and guide relationship,<sup>50</sup> translating as potential interferences in the communication model.

Fig. 3 - The guide in the communications model – an insider-outsider



A second paradox occurs, when the visitors choose to follow a guided-tour. Many visitors seem to expect content, especially in an art museum, about the artworks, points of reference in a complex chronology and, naturally in their relationship to the museum’s space, a literal direction on where to start, what to see, where to finish. In their expectations, they project the guide in a power relationship and value, in terms of money and time, a top-down style of communication.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, I put the guide’s block on the top of visitors in this schema but actually in a post-museum configuration, the block should be at the same level as the visitors.

This patriarchal modern setting is inherited from the Western 19<sup>th</sup> century school system. Nevertheless, since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, theorists like Benjamin Ives Gilman, have encouraged the vision of a guide as a companion, sharing passion, knowledge, and the joy of

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<sup>50</sup> Indeed, in terms of retribution, the guide has less leverage on the institution, than the institution has on him or her: due to the possibility of giving/receiving work or not. This asymmetry introduces also a margin of freedom for the guide who, as a supplier or contractor, does not strictly depend on the hierarchy of the museum.

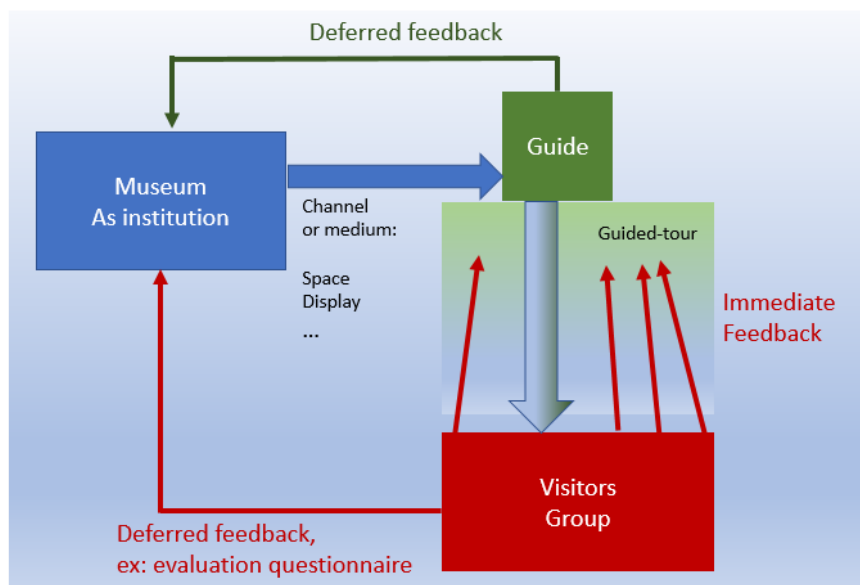
<sup>51</sup> For instance, this happens at a beginning of a tour, at the Rijksmuseum. When asking visitors, which centuries or types of artworks they might have a preference for, many answer: “we will do what you say, we will follow you!” and they add a sort of politeness and even a reminder of the tour promise: they want/wish/need to be “guided”.

contemplating art.<sup>52</sup> The shift to the post-museum and the ideal of empowerment invalidate a strict authoritarian approach to guiding. However, authority which might have been mutated into leadership remains due to logistical constraints. Even the friendliest of guides must use a minimum of leadership to make the tour work.<sup>53</sup> Those going back and forth between being an insider and an outsider towards the museum, an authoritative and a friendly figure towards the visitors bring interferences, or “noises”, in the communication model. I would like to demonstrate that those interferences are also opportunities.

### The guided-tour: a medium with specific feedback loops

In a guided-tour, feedback happens immediately and afterwards.

Fig 4 - Communications loops during and after the guided-tour <sup>54</sup>



<sup>52</sup> Ives Gilman, Benjamin, (1923) p 315: “Docent service has been organized at the Boston Museum to meet the common experience of travelers. Anyone who has ever looked at a picture or a statue in the company of an appreciative friend knows how much comprehension of it can be aided by the communication of another's interest and information.” Interestingly, Gilman adds: “The Italian word "cicerone" – as full of words as Cicero himself – expresses the tedium of generations of travelers. Granting that it is fatal to make an exclusive business of talking about art (...)”A docent is a companion among works of art, but he is also not a companion by profession.”

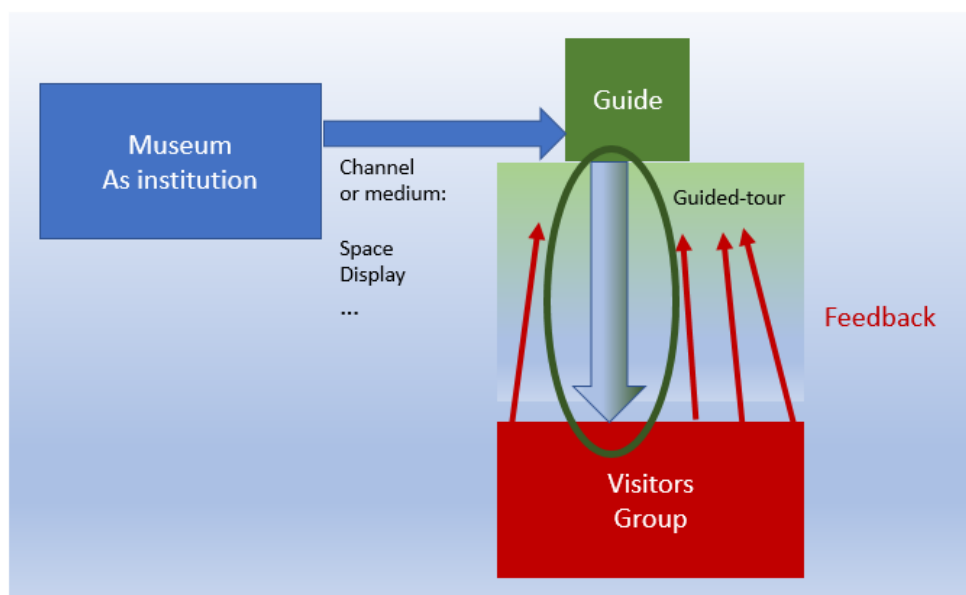
<sup>53</sup> This translates by holding the group in a crowd, keeping up with the tour’s rhythm, deciding of a new path if.

<sup>54</sup> For clarity purposes, I did not indicate other direct communication loops between museum institution and the visitors, already in fig. 2 but these communication loops might happen simultaneously (ex: a visitor taking part in a tour group interacts directly with a security guard or will write a letter or an e-mail to a curator).

The visitors might express themselves through an evaluation questionnaire. The guide might also form an opinion about the group, that can be used to formulate future recommendations. During the tour, the visitors' immediate feedback presents the guide with an opportunity. Because the guide must be approachable, open and friendly as part of their job, the visitors feel more comfortable voicing their opinions to them. Just as the museum is a sender and a receiver, the guide is also a key sender and receiver. Moreover, the feedback of the guide is not simply an accumulation of the visitors' spoken or unspoken reactions. He or she can for instance, identify and anticipate recurrent questions. Due to the guide's position of outsider-insider the guide brings in the perspective gained from working outside the museum and can maintain a critical distance from the institution. This second feedback loop emerging from the guides seems to be underutilized by museums and lacks the critical attention from museum education programs necessary to unlock its full potential.<sup>55</sup>

Beyond these organizational issues, this thesis focuses on opportunities from the guide's point of view to improve the guided-tour for visitors in a post-museum setting.

Fig. 5 – Circling in green the potentialities of the guide's action to encourage more feedback



<sup>55</sup> To me, the guide's accumulated experience can be compared to an unexploited mine of information, where strata of the different groups' feedbacks lay. To my knowledge, museums or institutions proclaim that they are opened to internal feedback and any suggestions. And it always seems sincere in its intention. Nevertheless, a systematical integration of the guides' feedback is rarely officially in place. This would oblige the museums to give a certain power to persons who are not decision-makers and most of the times external. This requires a very non-authoritarian working structure, like the Van Abbe, according to the interview of Loes Janssen, 20/01/17. This is also a challenge according to Nina Simon, apostle of the participatory way: <http://museumtwo.blogspot.nl/2016/12/growing-bigger-staying-collaborative-5.html> (14/07/17).

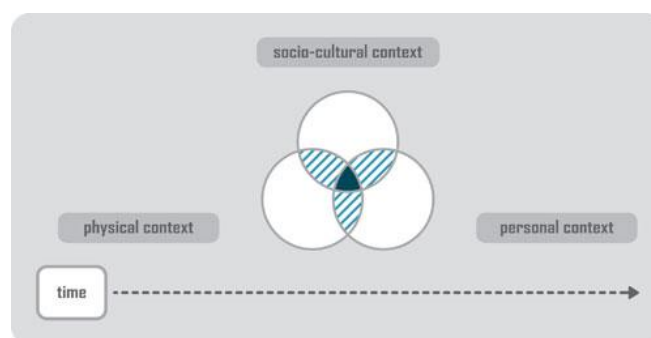
This green ellipse translates visually the action space the guide has at his/her disposal to unlock and stimulate the visitors' potential. From there feedback emerges that helps the guide to know if he or she is sufficiently reaching out to the visitor. So, it is crucial for the guide to understand what is at stake for each visitor taking part in the tour.

The inherent subjectivity of each visitor, the acquired experience from other museums, the diversity of expectations, all those dimensions of human complexity are, from a communications point of view, acting as a “filter” or “a noise” while the visitors decode the message(s) of the museum and of the guided-tour. This noise influences their understanding but is also a chance for the guide to co-create a richer experience of the guided-tour.

**B. The tour under individual and diachronic focus: the visitor’s museum experience**

To explore the visitor’s continent, I will use the “visitor’s museum experience” as defined by John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking. Unlike the communications model, its scale is not the institution and a mass of individuals represented by their function (visiting, guiding). Its scope is the individual one and it embraces conscious and unconscious elements such as the memories of prior visits which impact visitors’ expectations. It states that: “Each visitor’s experience is different, because each brings his own personal and social contexts, because each is differently affected by the physical context, and because each makes different choices as to which aspect of that context to focus on.”<sup>56</sup> These three contexts: personal, socio-cultural and physical whose intersection creates the uniqueness of the visitor's experience, can be schematized:

Fig. 6 -The Contextual Model leading to the museum visitor experience<sup>57</sup>



56 Falk, John, Lynn Dierking. 1992. *The museum experience*. Washington, D.C.: Whalesback Books. p 67-68.

57Source: <https://interlab100.com/literature-review-%E6%96%87%E7%8C%AE%E7%A0%94%E7%A9%B6/informal-learning-science-centre-education/contextual-model-of-learning-john-falk-and-lynn-dierking/> (19.06.16)

These contexts are not inert zones but are actively mobilized by the visitor, since his/her focus is “filtered through the personal context, mediated by the socio-cultural context, and embedded within the physical context.”<sup>58</sup> Those three verbs acknowledge the visitor as the source of his or her own museum visit like in the post-museum. Life experience and collective identity or identities are relevant when the visitors enter the museum’s doors: those personal and socio-cultural contexts will shape their visitor experience.

Another key dimension in this model is its relationship to time. Contrary to the idea that “over time, meaning is built up, layer upon layer.” the authors argue that “this description does not quite capture the true dynamism of the process, since even the layers themselves, once laid down, are not static or necessarily even permanent. (...) the individual both shapes and is shaped by her environment.”<sup>59</sup> The actual circularity of each museum experience connects to the prior ones and to other life learning experiences. This is where the “filtering” and the “mediation” previously described are happening. This is partially conscious for the visitor. Falk has researched consequently the visitor needs and formulated expectations. Again, despite some unconscious factors, the visitor is considered as an active, articulate, and willing individual: “without question, visitors’ entering motivations appear to have a particularly strong and important influence on both in-museum experiences and learning.”<sup>60</sup>

### **Visitor’s experience and learning**

When applied to museums, the learning processes needs a bit more recontextualization. Early in the museums’ history, the educational project is present.<sup>61</sup> The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw, even before post-modern critiques, diverse theories and studies on the learning process. Opposed to the prior pedagogical approach of the behaviorists, who insisted on stimuli and linking them to external observable

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58 Falk, John H., and Lynn D. Dierking. (2012). p 30

59 Ibidem, p. 29

60 ‘Motivations and Learning Styles’ in the colloquium "Understanding Museum visitors' motivation and learning" May 13-14, 2013. ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, Denmark. Publication of the intervention accessible in pdf: [http://slks.dk/fileadmin/user\\_upload/dokumenter/KS/institutioner/museer/Indsatsomraader/Brugerundersogelse/Artikler/John\\_Falk\\_Understanding\\_museum\\_visitors\\_motivations\\_and\\_learning.pdf](http://slks.dk/fileadmin/user_upload/dokumenter/KS/institutioner/museer/Indsatsomraader/Brugerundersogelse/Artikler/John_Falk_Understanding_museum_visitors_motivations_and_learning.pdf) (19.06.16)

61 In the long gestation of the Louvre museum, before the French revolution, a leading motivation was to provide artists and the public with a place to learn from the old European masters. The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a movement to ‘democratize’ education, and the museum was embraced as a tool for people’s instruction. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, B. Ives Gilman and other thinkers acknowledged the fact that museums were not and should not be comparable to the school, despite their educational function.



behaviors, the ‘constructivist theory of education’ has developed an approach based on the self-reflecting individual.<sup>62</sup> Many developments have enriched this constructivist theory. Museum education studies have been very inspired by it and assert that a non-formal way of learning occurs in the museum. As summarized by George E. Hein, theorist of a constructivist museum<sup>63</sup>: “each learner individually (and socially) constructs meaning - as he or she learns. Constructing meaning is learning; there is no other kind. The dramatic consequences of this view are twofold; 1) we (education museum professionals) have to focus on the learner in thinking about learning (not on the subject/lesson to be taught): 2) There is no knowledge independent of the meaning attributed to experience (constructed) by the learner, or community of learners.”<sup>64</sup> Experience and learning go entirely hand in hand. Consequently, experiencing a museum or another cultural activity is a learning process, from which the visitor is not necessarily conscious.<sup>65</sup>

At the crossing of education and psychology sciences, the researches lead by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and others bring another light on why people could wish to visit a museum and take a tour. They articulate the roles of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in learning. The extrinsic motivation comes from the environment including social pressure while the intrinsic motivation of learning will express itself differently since it is highly depending of the personal context. For Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanon, both motivations usually occur together but the intrinsic motivation is much more efficient in learning than the extrinsic one.<sup>66</sup> A museum visit is no exception.<sup>67</sup> So, how can the museum education professionals including the guide, enhance the intrinsic motivation?

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<sup>62</sup> In the 1920’s, under the impulse of leading thinkers like Jean Piaget (1896 -1980), more attention was drawn to the elaboration of the thoughts and meaning making inside the child and then the adult. Lev Vygotski (1896 - 1934) stressed the importance of external mediation in learning, through a ‘socio-constructivism’ insisting on the collective settings.

<sup>63</sup> George E. Hein tried to think a constructivist museum in the last chapter of *Learning in the museum*. London: Routledge. 1998. The same year he also co-wrote: Hein, George E., and Mary Alexander. 1998. *Museums: places of learning*. Washington: American Ass. of Museums.

<sup>64</sup> *Constructivist Learning Theory, The Museum and the Needs of People* This communication took place at CECA (International Committee of Museum Educators) Conference Jerusalem Israel, 15-22 October 1991 source: <https://www.exploratorium.edu/education/ifi/constructivist-learning> (19/06/17)

<sup>65</sup> Some visitors explain that they admire only artworks without “doing” anything. They are also actually busy learning.

<sup>66</sup> “Human action is motivated by a combination of two kinds of rewards: extrinsic an intrinsic. (...) This general principle holds for learning as well.”p. 67-68 Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, and Hermanson, Kim. ‘Intrinsic Motivation in Museums: Why Does One Want to Learn?’ in *Establishing a Research Agenda*. (1995): 67-77. Print.

<sup>67</sup> How many visitors have entered a museum because as tourists in a city, this what they should tick from their list? Another case is the one of spouses will have to follow their significant other thirst for culture. The latter is obeying an intrinsic motivation when the first one is more having an extrinsic motivation.

First, the principles nurturing the intrinsic motivation need to be understood. By setting goals and offering expectations about their feedbacks: “when goals are clear, feedback unambiguous, challenges and skills well matched, then all of one’s mind and body becomes completely involved in the activity.”<sup>68</sup> This prepares for what Csikszentmihalyi calls the “flow”: “In the flow state a person is unaware of fatigue and the passing of time (...) This depth of involvement is enjoyable and intrinsically rewarding”. Especially in giving the group and each individual a feedback, the guide can help to reach this wished state of learning. From the guide’s action, the critical part is the matching of the challenges and the skills especially in a constrained timing. Each group being different, the guide needs to assess quickly the level of prior knowledge, skills, and constraints (like physical or timing ones) this is a key moment following or preceding the introduction speech of the tour. The most difficult group is the most heterogeneous one (this aspect raises with bigger groups<sup>69</sup>) because it requires from the guide a great agility in offering diverse challenges and individualized feedback. From there, the ability of the guide to create a tour relatively on ‘measure’ makes the tour a personal learning and pleasurable moment for all.

### **C. Identifying opportunities: Stimulating the visitors to ease learning**

The guided-tour represents a specific sequence of learning during the museum visit. It is a process of searching, discovering and engaging dialog in a social context and with the guide: a mediating figure, who is, nevertheless, not a teacher. But the guide cannot control nor anticipate the many subjective parameters which are constitutive of his or her visitors but he or she can react to them and encourage them, when seen as opportunities.

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<sup>68</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, and Hermanson, Kim (1995) p. 67-68

<sup>69</sup> Smaller groups allowing a better interaction level. Quite intuitive, it is confirmed through observations and by Caroline Perkins’s survey (summer 2015) comparing the in-house tours at the MoMA, the Met and the ones led by the company Museum Hack: “The study also revealed the best operative conditions that construct a positive learning environment. Overall the best tours consisted of a small audience of 10 to 15 visitors, considered about six to nine art objects within a ninety-minute time frame, and provided a structured, efficient navigational pathway through the galleries.” Highlighted results for promotion purposes through a free e-book: <https://museumhack.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Museum-Tested-Audience-Approved-How-to-Attract-More-Visitors-and-Engage-Millennials-by-Museum-Hack.pdf> (21/07/17)

### **Three contexts of the visitor's museum experience, to be triggered by the guide**

The guide can trigger one or several of the three contexts, especially the ongoing exchanges between each one's personal sphere and the social interactions of the group. Those latter contexts are the easiest to observe through for instance the questions and answers between the guide and the group. But the physical context is also essential in a guided-tour. And if the guide is aware of the permanent intersection of the three contexts inside (and outside) the visitors, thanks to the concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, he or she can contribute to activating them and try to create the conditions of 'flow' during the tour.

The physical context seems to be less consciously used by the guides. Nevertheless, the guide is a body, talking and acting towards other bodies. The distinction of the three contexts as isolated blocks should be relativized: the relationship that the visitor has with his or her body is highly subjective and personal. This relationship to the body is also always culturally regulated, even constrained by the socially administered rules. One aspect is shared by all: the body mediates experience.<sup>70</sup> Many current pedagogical theories based on neurological research underlines the role of the body in the long-life learning process.<sup>71</sup> This physical aspect was acknowledged but maybe in a more restrictive way and sometimes even more authoritative controlling the social and individual bodies.<sup>72</sup> Exploring the potential physicality of museums remained in favor of one sense: sight. Walking through the galleries, gazing, and staring, were the main activities expected from the visitor. This perception impacted the idea of museum fatigue, being essentially conceived as visual. Today many efforts are done to make the museum a more accessible place to all types of bodies and conditions. Going conjointly with the recognition of the importance of the accessibility of the physical dimension,

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<sup>70</sup> Philosophers like Husserl and Merleau-Ponty attempted to define the relationship between the physical perception and the thinking process intertwined with the language. Merleau-Ponty wrote a founding book entitled: *Phénoménologie de la perception*. Paris: Gallimard. (1945), translated in English in 1962 whose famous quote is: "to be, is to be situated".

<sup>71</sup> Reflecting on the intersections of hard sciences and the constructivist pedagogy is in *Frontiers in Psychology* 2015-02. 'Educational neuroscience, constructivism, and the mediation of learning and creativity in the 21st century'. <http://journal.frontiersin.org/researchtopic/789/educational-neuroscience-constructivist-learning-and-the-mediation-of-learning-and-creativity-in-the> (14/08/17)

<sup>72</sup> Its architecture places the museum in a city, as a landmark and requires sometimes the "visiting bodies" to elevate not only their souls but themselves (with the museum as a temple with many stairs, a token in many national museums). Inside, the body of the visitor is confronted to the artworks' display and to many structural codes (wings, colors, designs). All those physical factors narrate what museums exhibit. This physical explanation of the world stems from the "theater of wisdom" to paraphrase the Samuel Quiccheberg's *Inscriptiones* (1565). Those philosophical aspects of the gaze and their shaping of the current museums are reflected upon by Hooper-Greenhill in *Museum and the shaping of knowledge* (1992).

the learning process includes progressively a more multi-sensory approach in museums.<sup>73</sup> Activities and tours offer focus more on other senses like the hear, the smell, the touch, and the taste<sup>74</sup>. These new approaches might be embedded in the guided-tour, but not always.

Stimulating the physical context of each visitor asks for a specific training for the guides and sometimes specific tools.<sup>75</sup> This is an opportunity to adapt the specific skills intended for impaired audiences to engage beyond the broader audience. Just as the accessibility of a building improves its use for all visitors, not just the disabled, I am convinced that making the tours more physically accessible and stimulating can only be of benefit to all visitors. But how do museums incorporate a physical dimension when the guide has not been provided with specific training or tools? How do they engage with the visitor's physical context without also being culturally or socially offensive?<sup>76</sup>

As described, the museum experience includes the memory of life experiences. The guide can reactivate, for instance, the memory of flavors in front of still-life painting, or memory of touch for the surfaces which are painted, engraved, or sculpted. So, the collections are discovered not only through the senses but also personally perceived. Beyond talking, the guide uses also his or her own body to reach out to the visitors' bodies.<sup>77</sup> This is not always conscious but ways of explaining can pass or be supported by miming a move, an attitude.<sup>78</sup> Also by inviting through gestures to regroup around a small

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<sup>73</sup> Popular topic since the mid 1990's-2000's, see Levent, Nina Sobol, Alvaro Pascual-Leone, and Simon Lacey. 2014. *The Multisensory museum: cross-disciplinary perspectives on touch, sound, smell, memory, and space*. i.e. collaboration between a museum expert Sobol Leven and a neurology professor Pascual-Leone.

<sup>74</sup> See chapter 3. at the Rijksmuseum, guided-tours based on a more sensorial approach including scents to interpret the highlights and at the Van Abbemuseum, the tour of the smells illustrating the permanent collections.

<sup>75</sup> For example, the Rijksmuseum lends i-Pads to its guides with the possibility of playing multimedia on it. The Van Abbemuseum provides the visitors with a small glass pot with coffee beans inside to prevent to be overwhelmed by the different smells during the visit.

<sup>76</sup> This aspect of intercultural communications is quite crucial for an international audience. If everybody has a subjective physical experience, social rules apply differently from a culture to another. This should also be kept in mind while conceiving education programs or tours: there is no "one solution fits all". The guides and hosts might also be trained to avoid contra-productive misunderstandings.

<sup>77</sup> This explains for instance that the Rijksmuseum provides its guides with voice training given by theater actors, other trainings include exercises of breathing, motricity.

<sup>78</sup> This is something maybe more used in pedagogy with the children and then more easily visible in the school and family tours. But this works as well to underline, punctuate, temper, or embody very abstract or complex content which could interest adults.

detail or by inviting people to feel free to appreciate with their own body, a whole room, the guide helps the meaning making of visitors' bodies, and transform him/herself in a performer.<sup>79</sup>

### **Learning for whom and learning what?**

The next question is which outcomes can be improved by the guide?<sup>80</sup> If the improving quest of the museum experience takes place in the ideal of a post-museum, then it is essential to determine who should decide the outcome(s). Would it be the museum itself? The guide? Are the most proper decision-makers the people for whom the museum is made, including the individuals in the group? Inside this guided group should the majority rule apply or other types of decision making? Those endless questions are quite close to the core difficulties of any democratic enterprise. This is not because there are no simple answers, that those questions should be dismissed.

A recent Dutch essay, which title can be translated as 'The emancipated museum', attempts to confront museums to those debates.<sup>81</sup> It tries to think how to re-position the museum's mission(s) and not only the Van Abbe where the author Steven ten Thije is curator.<sup>82</sup> To me, the adjective "emancipated" does not only apply to the museum as a static phase but as the embodiment of an ideal. Inspired by this title, why not push the post-museum ideal further by envisioning an emancipating

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<sup>79</sup> In this, the guide is close to a theater or artistic performance tradition, in Latin, "pro forma" or "per forma" to indicate an event being accomplished through a form, here the guided-tour which makes time and space happen. See the definition of the performance: "She is a map, a writing which is to be deciphered in the immediate present, in the present situation, a confrontation with the viewer", personal translation from PONTBRIAND, Chantal, ' Introduction : notion(s) de performance', in A.A. Bronson, P. Gale, *Performance by Artists*, Art Metropole, Toronto, 1979, p. 22.

<sup>80</sup> To borrow words to the introduction of Simon, Nina. 2016. *The art of relevance*. Santa Cruz, Calif: Museum 2.0., museum should be able to answer the question « so what? » about their actions. The guides too.

<sup>81</sup> Thije, Steven ten, Steven van Teeseling, Mirjam Beerman. 2016. *Het geëmancipeerde museum*. Amsterdam: Mondriaan Fonds. This essay makes a valuable synthesis of current issues in Dutch society (economic, social and political tensions on national symbols relative to the Dutch identity, recent or more ancient immigration) and the evolution of museums types, their frequentation and their perception by the governments.

<sup>82</sup> This essay describes what the museum should stop: addressing mainly to a well-educated growing old middle class, being authoritative in its presentation of artworks. On a more political point of view Steven ten Thije also defends the Dutch museums against a purely economic appreciation of their added-value. He argues of a relatively good health in terms of visits figures and yearly use of this 'social tool' by the citizen. Another key aspect is the fact that the curator originates his thoughts from his own experience as a kid of a museum as a making-meaning and free opinion place when he was eight years old. Those personal anecdotes are part of the argumentation and of the ton of subjectivity which also allowed for an "emancipated" curator. If the initial shock of having to choose his favorite painting when he was eight years old, pays a discrete tribute to an emancipating museum docent, the essay lacks concrete leads especially in museum education. Though this is not the aim. But the last image presents the *Night Watch* with children taking part to a socially and personally reflective workshop, not very far from what might already happen in the "Tekenschool" at the Rijksmuseum.

museum for the visitors, the guides and the museum itself? Emancipating people literally means to set them free. In philosophy, one of conditions of freedom is the ability to think by yourself and for yourself. Could the museum, through its collections or, through its positioning in society, help people learn (including here thinking by themselves) - and not simply teach?<sup>83</sup> This emancipating approach must be linked to the key concept of interpretation.

As analyzed by Hooper-Greenhill: “In the museum interpretation is done for you, or to you. In hermeneutics, however, you are the interpreter for yourself. Interpretation is the process of constructing meaning.<sup>84</sup>” The guide can intervene in showing the philosophical approach to it<sup>85</sup>: “As errors in understanding are eliminated and as new sources of knowledge emerge, so meaning is a continuing process of modification, adaptation and extension. The hermeneutic circle is never fully closed, but remains open to the possibility of change.”<sup>86</sup>

### **Emancipating tool, the interpretation is never conducted alone**

Acknowledging the inherent subjectivity of the interpretation, Hooper-Greenhill re-contextualizes it though by introducing the interpretive communities: “Our individual strategies for making sense are enabled, limited and mediated through our place in the social world.”<sup>87</sup> Depending on which community of interpretation the visitor belongs to, the aim of the visit, even the legitimacy of spending time in the museum will be ‘tinted’ in a different way. The difference between the visitor’s needs, as described in Falk, is that they are consciously expressed by the visitor, whereas the interpretive communities are surrounding the visitor with a not always conscious social background.

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<sup>83</sup> About the political agenda of teaching and its relationship with ignorance, one of the major references in Thije’s essay is the philosopher Jacques Rancière. famous for *the Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1987), see its description in 2007: <http://ranciere.blogspot.nl/2008/05/emancipated-spectator.html?view=classic>

<sup>84</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean. 1999. *The educational role of the museum*. London: Routledge. p 12

<sup>85</sup> Hooper-Greenhill describes how opposite of the traditionally given sense of interpretation in art history it is; to try to decipher the artist's message or the iconographic symbols of his or her artwork for instance, in order to give the artwork a finished meaning.

<sup>86</sup> Ibidem, p.13.

<sup>87</sup> “(...) Given that the process of interpretation involves prior knowledge, and that the world is known through culture, our interpretation will be that which fits our particular time and place in the world. What we know is what we need to know to enable us to take our place in a particular society or group” Ibidem, p. 49.

The social and personal contexts play key roles in the interpretation led by the group and by each individual including the guide. Those interpretive communities imply that there is always some social aspect to what is thought to be purely personal. So, on a more philosophical level, is learning to interpret freely even possible when neither the guide, nor the visitors are fully aware of the interpretive communities they belong to? The professionalization at least the training of the guides is imperative to help them deal with those biases in themselves. Additionally imperative is to impart this awareness to the visitor, not through academic discourse but by mediating that interpretation is multiple and never closes.

To conclude this chapter, I have proven that the guided-tour is a privileged learning sequence in the visitor's museum experience. Second that the guide, beyond being a part of the museum's voice, can also be a powerful activator to get visitors to engage and dare to actively play with their three contexts, personal, social, and physical and hopefully reinforce their intrinsic motivation.

Through a communications approach, I underlined the key position of receiver that the guide has during the guided-tour to adapt and adjust to the group and the individuals' feedback. In those intricate communications and intersecting subjectivities (the ones of the guide and his or her visitors) lies the magic, the fragility, and the power of the guided-tour, put at the service of the interpretation, that, in an emancipating museum, all could dare to use.

## Chapter three – Case-studies and their further opportunities

The previously defined theoretical framework will help to analyze three different case-studies and to examine how those institutions lean towards the post-museum in terms of guiding practices and learning experiences for the visitors.<sup>88</sup>

### A. Presentation of the case studies and the method to collect information

The choice of the Rijksmuseum, the Van Abbemuseum and the Heineken Experience has been led by a certain complementarity. The first two are art museums which resonate with my own practice and observations: the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven. The first is a national and international reference about Dutch art and history and a touristic landmark in Amsterdam, whereas the second is focused on modern and even more contemporary art, reaching out to local, national and in a second time to international neighboring audiences.

As a counterpoint, the Heineken Experience is not a museum, despite displaying some historical collections. Its objective is commercial: to produce “brand ambassadors”. It uses other means to reach a different objective than purely learning but it can bring useful insights in terms of hospitality, subjectivity of the visitors and sharing experience. The word “experience” refers here more to the marketing approach of an added-value by offering to its customers not only a product but beyond it, an experience of the brand, in the hope of loyalty. This is the concept of the experience economy for instance developed by Pine and Gilmore (1998).<sup>89</sup> Common with the museum visitor experience is the fact that the experience should be good enough to be memorable.

The Heineken Reception Center which opened its doors at the beginning of the 1990’s in a decommissioned brewery on the *Stadhouderkade*, changed its name and approach in 2001 to become the “Heineken Experience” following the trend of creating immersive environments, also present in the blockbuster exhibitions in that period.<sup>90</sup> And if this institution takes part in a professional association of attraction parks, it follows carefully the innovations of different types of museums to

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<sup>88</sup> Those case-studies have been investigated through interviews of persons in charge of collections and visitors’ feedback (for the Heineken Experience) and persons in charge of audiences and guides (for the Rijksmuseum and the Van Abbemuseum). Direct observations in those three institutions have also been a source of reflection.

<sup>89</sup> Founding article is Pine, B. Joseph II and Gilmore, James, “Welcome to the Experience Economy,” Harvard Business Review, July 1, 1998 and the book one year later is Pine, J. and Gilmore, J. (1999) *The Experience Economy*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, 1999

<sup>90</sup> Demelza van der Maas, interview of the 30/08/2016



highlight its heritage collections.<sup>91</sup>

This relationship between museums and commercial institutions is nothing new, especially in terms of using new media to reach out to audiences. In the 1920's-30's in New York, the displays were realized by designers who worked for big department stores and for museums' life dioramas.<sup>92</sup> The Netherlands' case during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, has been studied by Julia Noordegraaf (2004).<sup>93</sup> In that perspective of porosity between institutions having a different goal, I wanted to include the Heineken Experience in the case-studies.

In my research, I also wanted to report not only the side of the guides but to investigate the panoramic view of the people in charge of their coordination, the writing of the tour and globally the visitor's experience. Due to the specificity of each institution, their titles and their perimeters of action differ but I have interviewed them with a relatively comparable grid of questions for instance on the use of a theoretical basis, on the feedback loops of their guides, what would be the intended result of a tour in the visitor's mind. I interviewed for the Rijksmuseum, Noortje Bijvoets, Coordinator of guided programs and of the guides, and Pauline Kintz, Senior Educator; at the Van Abbemuseum, Loes Janssen, Public Mediation and at the Heineken Experience, Demelza van der Maas, Collection Manager and Ana Camboim, Guest Experience Specialist. Based on the interviews, the tours I could follow (at the Rijksmuseum and the Heineken Experience<sup>94</sup>), plus my own observations and exchanges with my colleagues at the Rijksmuseum<sup>95</sup>, I will use the key concepts of chapter 2 to analyze the existing tours.

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<sup>91</sup> The Heineken collections consist of archive documents, objects linked to the industrial history and to the Heineken family itself. Juridically a foundation status protects the collections.

<sup>92</sup> Henning, M. (2006) 'New Media', in *A Companion to Museum Studies* (ed S. Macdonald), Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Malden, MA, USA.

<sup>93</sup> Julia Noordegraaf 'Strategies of Display' (2004) as quoted by Demelza van der Maas, interview of the 30/08/2016 Noordegraaf, Julia, and John Kirkpatrick. 2013. *Strategies of Display: Museum Presentation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Visual Culture*. Rotterdam Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2012 ©2012

<sup>94</sup> I visited twice the Heineken Experience, as a normal "tourist" on the 12/08/16 and as part of the VIP tour on the 08/05/17. As a normal tourist, I was accompanied by my father and both of us suffered from the crowd. Being with a family member was interesting because it allowed me to not be only a biased museum studies student but also have the social aspect of the visit: sharing thoughts, pictures, etc.

<sup>95</sup> Among others helpful colleagues, I would like to thank Isabel Sluitman and Monica de Ruiter for their insights.

## B. The guide as enhancer of the visitor's museum experience and of the intrinsic motivation

### The Rijksmuseum

At the Rijksmuseum, guides have many different backgrounds and skills to allow the diversity of programs offered by the national museum.<sup>96</sup> The adult groups following a 'classic' tour meaning 1 hour and maximum 15 visitors will be my focus because it is what I could observe the most and it is more comparable to the other case-studies. The tours are taking place daily in a sometimes very crowded museum which can impact the visitor's museum experience.

Some tools like the digital tablet are helping the guides to mediate between the visitors and the artworks. The tablets are used in that case as a sort of "zoom in" augmenting the physical context of the visitors. They can better see for instance the Delft tiles at the bottom of the *Milkmaid*, mostly unreachable due to the massing crowd in front of her. If useful, this tablet contributes to create a theatrical ceremonial and tangible link between the group and its guide favoring a socio-cultural exchange beyond the classical question-answer dynamics. The toured visitor can access one after the other, the meaningful detail, and engage not only socially but also personally and exclusively with the artwork.<sup>97</sup>

Some tours are more physically engaging thanks to their topics: sensations and memories might be triggered more easily than in galleries but they are not part of the mainstream offer. The gardens' tour is only available during the spring.<sup>98</sup> And the tour "Eat and Drink", despite offering no tasting, has a more sensorial dimension but is reserved for the Dutch friends of the museum.<sup>99</sup> A daring experiment has occurred during the Christmas holidays in 2016: the highlights with scents tour.<sup>100</sup> The

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<sup>96</sup> Those skills can be to master different languages, ability to act for the comedians who make the theater program for children, teaching art techniques for the museum docents for school and adult workshops

<sup>97</sup> On the i-Pad, the guide can show zooms-in, x-rays of artworks, sometimes plays even videos of an artefact in movement (like an 18<sup>th</sup> century desk with many internal mechanisms). Those extra pieces of information create a curiosity impulse from visitors outside of the toured-group who try to sneak in to be also presented personally to the 'secret' of the artwork.

<sup>98</sup> Not only echoing the touristic fever for the blossoming tulips, this tour showcases the outside architecture and meaning of the gardens by the architect P. J. H. Cuypers (Dutch architect, 1827-1921) but also the growing work of the Rijks' gardeners.

<sup>99</sup>This tour is in Dutch and called "Eten en Drinken in de Rijksmuseumcollectie" <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/steun-het-rijks/activiteiten-voor-vrienden/vriendenrondleidingen> (13/08/17)

<sup>100</sup>The highlights of the museum depart at fixed hours, in two languages (Dutch and English) on the principle of "stepping in". The experiment was though only in Dutch: *Hoogtepunten met geuren*. Without being informed two tour-groups would receive a different experience. One group was offered a normal tour and the other was offered the same tour with the addition of scents. Despite my demand, I am not aware of the final results of this experiment.

scents were not purely descriptive but evocative of their historical context. This “un-smelled” interpretation was due to the research led by scent-art-historian Caro Verbeek with Rijksmuseum curators.<sup>101</sup> For instance, a scent was created for *The battle of Waterloo*,<sup>102</sup> mixing Napoleons’ cologne, horses’ smell and men’s fear sweat, gunpowder and wet soil after the rain.<sup>103</sup> This scent was based on historical data to reconstitute an atmosphere but was translated in actual scent thanks to industrial knowledge of perfumers. For Verbeek and other scholars, if the smell is a direct shortcut to emotions and memories, what is then the role of the guide, beyond providing the scented smell sticks?

This challenging task for which a specific training was provided, was to try to link the scent, its perception and the conversation starting immediately in the group.<sup>104</sup> Another difficulty that arises with scents, is the fact that people’s reactions are so personal, they are sometimes hard to reconcile and it can influence the group dynamic.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, in the context of a surprise experimentation, some visitors could have been surprised because they were expecting a regular visit. Some might have enjoyed so much the novelty that they were more focused on the scents than on the highlights. From a wonderful idea to engage with artworks in an innovative way, the reality of guiding might have shown the limits of one hour, four scents and no extra time or space to discuss about it. Hopefully the Rijksmuseum will continue to implement more participatory and subjective ways to engage with its collections but by also giving the guides more margins to make the logistics of the tour works, like for the successful drawing tours for families.<sup>106</sup>

To visualize how the guide can stimulate the three contexts during the tour, I made a scheme per museum.

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<sup>101</sup> Caro Verbeek worked priory on a tour at the Van Abbe, interpreting artworks in scents. This tour is still available without guiding. Her further research is described on: <http://www.caroverbeek.nl/> (01/07/17)

<sup>102</sup> *The Battle of Waterloo*, 1824, Jan Willem Pieneman (Dutch painter and printmaker, 1779-1853), oil on canvas, h 567cm × w 823cm × l 822.7cm.

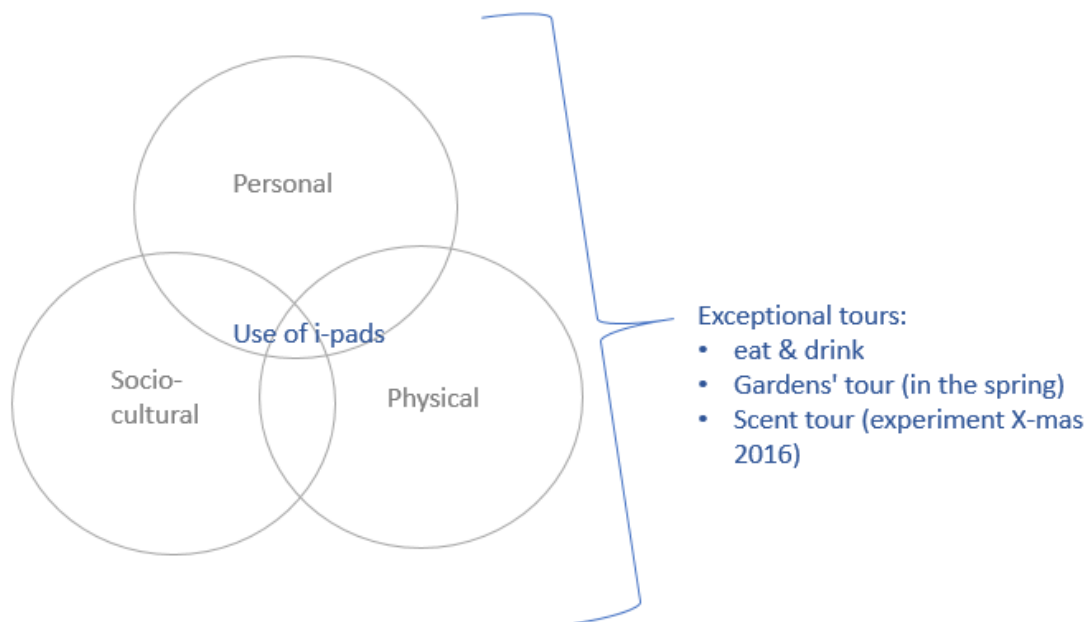
<sup>103</sup> An article of *Het Patrool* quotes in Dutch Verbeek’s reflexions <http://www.patrool.nl/stadsgids/op-de-vu-kun-je-ervaren-hoe-het-ruikt-op-de-maan~a4463318/> (10/07/17)

<sup>104</sup> This task seemed to have been difficult according to my colleagues: conversations about smells are so connected to personal and physical contexts that to bring back the focus on the highlights visit could be a challenge.

<sup>105</sup> The Latin saying states: "*de gustibus et coloribus non disputandum*" or in English: "There's no arguing about tastes and colors" it could be added scents.

<sup>106</sup> This free tour enjoins visitors, often families, to draw artworks. A museum docent gives techniques but uses them to engage with the artworks: <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/guided-tours/rijksmuseum-drawing-tour> (13/08/17)

Fig.7 - The Rijksmuseum - a mix of socio-cultural and personal stimulations with interesting experiments



Finally, in terms of intrinsic motivation, “three elements (are) critical: the task must be equal to one’s ability; there must be clear goals for what will be learned; there must be clear feedback.”<sup>107</sup> In all the cases-studies, the guides start their tour by giving their group a small introduction speech about: what will be seen, experienced, how long it will take and what is required from the visitors. The visitors are encouraged to ask questions and share their insights to enrich the tour. This short speech is quite standard, including the usual recommendations, for instance, to take pictures, but it reinforces the feeling of a safe learning environment.<sup>108</sup> The Rijksmuseum training requires from the guides a form of expectations management. The museum is so big and the tour so short - 1 hour - the tourists might feel a bit let down by how few objects they have seen from the collections. The guide can ask if the visitors want to see a specific artwork or a time period but it can be quite a challenge to accommodate this demand with the time and space constraints. So, the will exists from the museum

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<sup>107</sup> According to Dr Sally Montgomery OBE, ex-director of the W5 in Belfast and presenting “Contextual Model of Learning – John Falk and Lynn Dierking” transcribed online by Jennifer Jiayi Jin: <https://interlab100.com/literature-review-%E6%96%87%E7%8C%AE%E7%A0%94%E7%A9%B6/informal-learning-science-centre-education/contextual-model-of-learning-john-falk-and-lynn-dierking/> (01/07/17)

<sup>108</sup> “People are more open to learning when they feel supported, when they are in a place where they can express themselves and explore their interests without fear of embarrassment or criticism, and when there are no predefined expectations constraining their behavior. Support, security, and trust are critical for allowing openness to discovery and intrinsically motivated learning.” Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, and Hermanson, Kim, p. 74

and the guide to be more democratic and reward intrinsic motivation. However, this democratization of experience is somewhat constrained by the logistical feasibility of the tour, which does not always allow for guides to have a more personalized exchange with the visitors.

### **The Van Abbemuseum**

Opened in 1936, this museum is the result of the personal initiative of tobacco industrial H.J. van Abbe. Wanting to give Eindhoven his art collection, he provided the city with a place to come into contact with what was then called “modern art”. Sense of community and education have been characterizing this institution since its opening.<sup>109</sup> Displaying and acquiring contemporary art might explain its experimentation in terms of personal and social approaches.<sup>110</sup> Today the museum claims that it wants to become a more inclusive museum.<sup>111</sup>

In terms of guiding and welcoming, the Van Abbemuseum experiments with the complementary presence of professional guides and gallery hosts who are volunteers (appendices 1). The guides lead groups for a thematic or regular tour. But, uniquely, they are compelled to offer a free introduction to the collection: the “cicerone tours” several times a day. These are invitations to visitors who did not plan a guided-tour to step in and experience the story of the building, or conjoint interpretation of contemporary artworks.

The gallery hosts are also circulating from room to room, and provide visitors with a welcoming atmosphere, support and engagement with more information if needed. They are the relays of the cicerone and can orient the visitors towards the next cicerone shift. Like the guide, they also can report visitors’ feedbacks. Beyond the engaging and provocative nature of contemporary artworks, the personal and social contexts of the visitors are triggered by guides and hosts in the galleries.

In terms of physical context, another characteristic of the Van Abbe is its extensive program of tours for visitors which might not be seen physically as “the norm”. Those visitors are named “special guests” to refuse stigmatization and make them feel welcomed.<sup>112</sup> The same attention given to impaired

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<sup>109</sup> In his 1936’s inaugural speech, the director Dr. W.J.A. Visser explains: “Above all, the Museum would like to have the place it deserves in the future and to be a permanent point of contact between the whole population of the city and surrounding area of Eindhoven and the Museum: it must become part of the living community.”

<https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/about-the-museum/building-and-history/1936-the-opening/> (10/07/17)

<sup>110</sup> Their experiments range from “Inhaling art” a conceived by Caro Verbeek, to a very different type of audio-guide thanks to records of children’s comments, and even a sort of disruptive costumed tour entitled “Queering the collections”. Those features are available for individuals not taking a guided-tour.

<sup>111</sup> Interview Loes Janssen, 20/01/17

<sup>112</sup> This offer ranges from an aphasia program for people whose brain damages have eroded part of their expression faculties through spoken language but not the rest of their faculties to actually express themselves about art, to visitors

people, but also their social interactions with friends and family, are provided in diverse programs. This personal and social diversity benefits not only those special guests and their entourage but also the museum which experiments further. The *prikkelarm tour*, translated as “take a sensory break”, was initially designed for people with autism or other physical conditions which specifically need a non-overwhelming environment to enjoy a visit.<sup>113</sup> This type of visit aims to develop a “reduced sensory stimulated museum experience.”<sup>114</sup> It seems at the opposite of stimulating the physical context but this is actually quite compatible since it tries to identify and prevent what is actually disturbing visitors’ attention. It could help all visitors, and even be adapted to various degrees.

In exploring all these leads, thanks to specialized but also more generic professional guides, the Van Abbemuseum does not distinguish between its different target groups since they can be mixed in these special guests free tours. This ensemble of programs subtitled “Unlimited Van Abbe” has also given the advantage to the museum staff and especially the mediation team to reevaluate the limits of their own expertise. The museum positions itself as a receptor to listen and evolve with, instead of offering first and then correcting. This co-learning process shows the desire to reach the post-museum ideal. Like the website underlines: “the Special Guests program keeps developing and improving itself, always in close cooperation with the target groups and interest groups.”

In terms of technology, the Van Abbemuseum still aims for being inclusive in ensuring remote visits thanks to a robot. Remotely directed by the visitor(s) with the assistance of a guide when possible, the robot walks around the galleries with an accompanying host (or guide). The technology is at the service of the personal and social interaction of visitors who cannot come to the museum. The stress is put on the social context more than the novelty. The robot is just another means to reach a successful mediation but is paradoxically not as often booked as the museum would have wished for.<sup>115</sup>

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with dementia and Alzheimer conditions who are welcomed with their family members and caregivers.  
<https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programme/special-guests/> (14/08/17)

<sup>113</sup> <https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/mediation/special-guests/take-a-sensory-break/> (14/08/17)

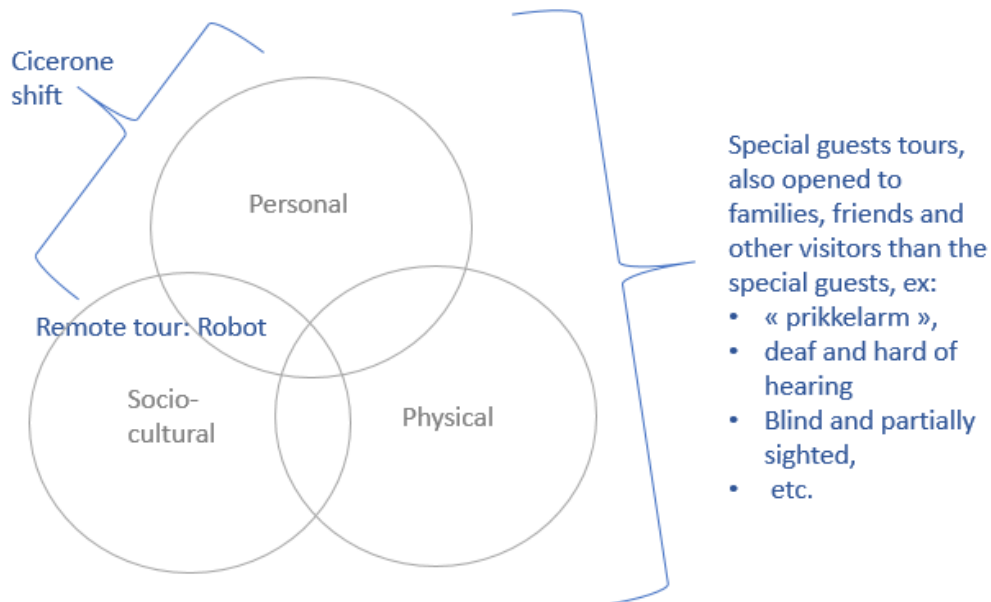
<sup>114</sup> Ibidem (14/08/17)

<sup>115</sup> Interview Loes Janssen, 20/01/17: People hesitate before requiring the robot for their own use, thinking it is only reserved to exceptional cases. There are no real restrictions for using the robot and the price is the same as a normal tour.

Fig 8 -The robot personal picture on the 20.01.2017 – It is discreetly standing in a corner but with an explanation panel to indicate its use.



Fig 9 - The Van Abbemuseum, a balance in including different audiences



In terms of intrinsic motivation, it can be assumed the visitors who enter contemporary museums are usually quite self-motivated because there are enough prejudices towards contemporary art to avoid it, if it is not an interest. Located in Eindhoven, the Van Abbemuseum is not on the classic touristic map. The guides work with a potentially motivated group but it can also be an unplanned tour during a cicerone shift. The intrinsic motivation is rewarded when objectives and feedbacks are clear. So, the guide should explain clearly about interpretive communities which can create very polarized reactions to contemporary art and about the fact that interpretation does not have a definite end or truth. In this co-agreed mindset, everything is done to help the visitors emancipate themselves by creating their own meaning making.

## The Heineken Experience

With its commercial perspective, the Heineken Experience aims to provide a variety of fun activities and a good feeling around their product and the brand itself. Through means adapted from theme parks, visitors can enjoy the different sequences and attractions without a guide.<sup>116</sup> In parallel and since only one year, a “VIP tour” under the guiding of experienced hosts,<sup>117</sup> has been established to satisfy the demand of a more niche audience, a bit older than the normal demographic, eager for more information and to spend not only more money but also more time than in the standardized experience.<sup>118</sup> This tour is comparable to the museums in terms of size of the group (up to 15 persons) but takes much more time: it lasts up to two and a half hours.

What is striking, is the fact that this tour does not need to do much more than let visitors experience the core product: the beer, to invoke all three contexts. The beer being consumed by the visitors, it stimulates by itself the physical and personal contexts of provoking sensations, memories, and past experiences. It is literal food for thought. The end of the tour is especially memorable because the process of tasting beers in a privatized bar creates, quite systematically, a favorable social environment to discuss.<sup>119</sup> In the tour, I followed, the visitors exchange on a personal level with the guide, asking her own preferences in terms of beer and other recommendations in terms of Amsterdam’s cafés.<sup>120</sup> The reciprocity of questions on taste preferences exceeds any authority level of knowledge in terms of beer processes or marketing intentions. In that sense, the Heineken experience has the advantage of attracting visitors who are potentially already connoisseurs, or curious to try the product(s) and, for those at least 18 years old, it is quite an accessible product: just drink and say what you think about it.

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<sup>116</sup> Many attractions through senses (smell, touching, playing with) are available without any help of a guide. The visitors can be asked to grind some barley “to help the brewer”, mixing the malt, and later can entertain themselves thanks to many games producing videos, images, to be recorded and socially shared.

<sup>117</sup> Interviews of Demelza van der Maas, the 30/08/16 and the 05/05/17. The hosts are usually students who have worked for the Experience and have demonstrated good skills in hospitality and communications. Being recent, this guided-tour is still under scrutiny of the Marketing department and also of the collections foundation to highlight more scientifically the historical collection supporting the brand’s narrative.

<sup>118</sup> Interviews of Demelza van der Maas and Ana Camboim on the 30/08/16.

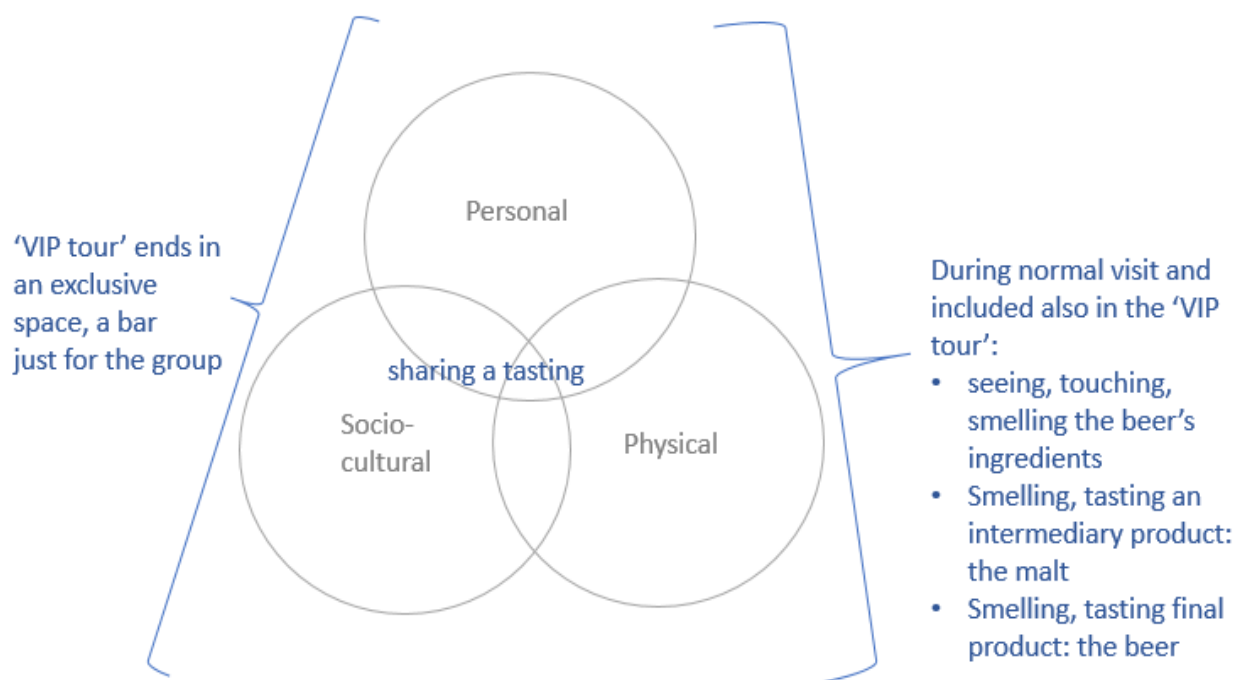
<sup>119</sup> The visitors open-up quite spontaneously to each other. The guide, in the role of the host, is responsible for creating and maintaining this good almost friendly atmosphere while providing further content if required by the visitors.

<sup>120</sup> VIP Tour of the 09/05/17.



For a learning experience, it is a very sensorial and social experience much more than an intellectual one which is not necessarily a bad thing, depending on the visitors' expectations. The history and science lovers might be still disappointed because the whole introduction to the Heineken's industries and production processes were, while I followed the tour, quite crunched in time and disturbed by the difficulty to cohabit between the regular flow of visitors and the toured group. This complex coexistence of, at a minimum, two types of visitors (individuals and groups) is also problematic in museums, for both guides and visitors, decreasing focus by reinforcing fatigue. The necessity of sometimes independent flows which corresponds to specific paths and constraints, should be taken into account in the renovation projects of the Heineken Experience in the coming years. Hopefully, more space for the historic collections will bring a more balanced experience in terms not only of fun and tasting but also content for those who would like to know more or engage more with some parts of the Dutch and international history intertwined with Heineken.

Fig. 10 - The Heineken Experience, VIP tour – a quite activated visitor experience thanks to the product: beer



Finally, in terms of intrinsic motivation, as already mentioned, the visit fills in a very clear promise: more information over a product and its fabrication, plus a degustation. The target, goals and feedback could not be more limpid and it reinforces a preexisting intrinsic motivation.

### C. Towards an empowered visitor?

In the post-museum perspective how can a guided-tour contribute to empowerment? The three case-studies offer three different answers and shed light on remaining opportunities.

The Rijksmuseum still seems to be the depositary of its 19<sup>th</sup> century national tradition which stages through architecture (which is cathedral like, especially in the “gallery of honor” for the 17<sup>th</sup> century paintings) a quite sacred, top-down type of setting. Guides do their best to make it a friendly, understandable place, but it seems that feeling impressed is part of the intended experience for the visitors. Thanks to the tour, the visitors might feel, hopefully, a bit more empowered to have some say about the milestones in Dutch history and art but it remains a very intellectual, almost cerebral, type of empowerment. For a more emotional and sensorial empowerment, the visitors can turn towards the specialized programs (i.e. drawing, painting workshops, garden tours) but most of them are either for local schools, or only available in Dutch. A lot of persistence is required from the visitors to know about and then enroll in those programs. Their empowerment would probably be raised if visitors could access more disruptive tours, next to the more standard offer (highlights of the museum and Rembrandt) and not only because it is in tune with the season.<sup>121</sup>

Due to a museum DNA that is locally rooted and anchored in contemporary time, the van Abbe has less difficulties in adapting towards post-modern ideals and being able to express it. The museum asserts its will to be inclusive and according to its director, Charles Esche, to help the visitors to: “Imagine the world otherwise”.<sup>122</sup> As seen, the special guests have many specific tours. Being able to participate in a tour with their entourage is socially inclusive and, probably, a personal empowerment too. The same goes for the use of technology: the robot is co-directed by the remote visitor(s), the guide is a technical help and commenting companion but not the only one leading the tour. Finally, during the cicerone shift or more classic booked tours, the guide can use the artworks as a starting point for very current social discussions but can also invite the visitors to prolongate the tour, in a more subjective way. Visitors can make their selection of artwork(s) in the “DIY archives” room, which

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<sup>121</sup> For instance, the Pink tour, unconventional re-reading art history is available only during the Gay Pride week-end. To me, it is a bit a waste of guides’ preparation work, since they could give the tour all year round, and a missed opportunity for interested visitors <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/guided-tours/guided-tour-pink-at-the-rijks> (13/08/17). NB: the self-tour without guiding “Queering the collection” at the Van Abbe was a year project 2016-17 and will continue under new forms: <https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/collection/queering/archive/> (14/08/17)

<sup>122</sup> Interview Loes Janssen, the 20/01/17 and completed by the article on <https://www.museumtv.nl/innovatie-van-abbe-museum/> (14/08/17)

allows the visitors to become their own curator, storage and exhibition manager and manipulate, under supervision, their chosen artworks.<sup>123</sup>

At the Heineken Experience, the empowerment is linked to the social ability for the visitors, after their degustation, to be able to teach themselves and others what they just have learned: how to tap, smell, drink and even pair the beers with different types of cheeses. It is up to them to become, like the Heineken Experience hopes, its “brand ambassadors” but they are definitely going to talk and elaborate even more about beer. The acquired knowledge of beer production and culture can reinforce the intrinsic motivation of those motivated enough for following a dedicated tour.

A last resource of empowerment might be the guides themselves when they advocate their groups’ feedbacks. The three institutions treat those feedbacks differently. At the Rijksmuseum, the feedback is always encouraged but in an informal way. Actually, there is no organized system in place that collects the guides’ feedbacks, like a data-base or a dedicated person who would be in charge of sorting suggestions, following up on their implementation. This informal way also predominates at the Van Abbemuseum. However, the guides there are integrated into the exhibition preparation, when curators and designers confront their ideas about texts and displays.<sup>124</sup> This possibility to use the guides’ accumulated experience of audiences is made possible through the smaller size of museum staff but also from the claimed inclusive democratic approach of the museum. This approach to the visitors is also applied to its ways of functioning. The Van Abbemuseum tries also to integrate the feedback of its volunteers who are present in galleries. It was thanks to their observations on visitors who were frustrated to not see an artwork they liked (permanent collections rotate), that the first version of the DIY archives emerged.<sup>125</sup> The Heineken Experience has also an informal way of giving feedback to the organization on the group, in the person of Ana Camboim, whom I could interview twice and whose function title is currently Guest Experience Specialist showing the organization’s

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<sup>123</sup> After Loes Janssens’ interview, my partner and I have experienced the DIY archives and it was quite interesting to see in the public space, some normally more confined techniques and habits of manipulation. It felt quite a playful privilege to say: “I want to see this one in real and I’m going to exhibit it here, next to this one!” The volunteers also shared their pleasure to see objects which were not often asked. Beyond being a gratifying personal and social experience, the idea that the visitor can come back and ask for another part of the collection is also a smart way of making the visitors “use” the museum more. We also noticed that some visitors were sometimes, despite the friendly explanation of the volunteers, a bit reluctant to participate, either being intimidated or maybe not so much interested.  
<https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programme/programme/diy-archive/> (02/02/17)

<sup>124</sup> Interview Loes Janssen 20/01/17

<sup>125</sup> Ibidem.

interest in direct visitors' feedbacks too.<sup>126</sup> The content of the VIP tour is also being reviewed with the guides and is updated to integrate recurrent visitors questions.

#### **D. Lessons learned and further opportunities**

There are several lessons that could be of mutual benefit to each of the three institutions to learn from each other. Here I will elaborate my suggestions.

The Heineken shows that a full, quite sensorial and fun experience can be appreciated as an introduction to not only a product, but also to a part of the Dutch culture. It offers a shared meaningful experience through a more laid-back setting of the reconstituted bar. The crowd management has to be improved to make sure that the individual visitors and the toured groups are not disturbing each other's paths. The idea of a specific place for the group, easing learning about each other and around doing something together is quite interesting. This is, of course, to be linked with existing museum workshops but in a much more informal way.

The Rijksmuseum shows that even as a big national institution, it dares to explore the newest visions of art history, like engaging with its highlights through scents. However, it needs to create more room logistically to create a more personalized experience which implies also less overcrowding and even smaller groups (the maximum is 15). In terms of relevance, it might also be needed to explain further what is intended for the tour. Therefore, the visitors might be able to choose more consciously for one type of tour among a more diverse offering. Currently, diversity among guides and tours exists but is not clearly advertised or systematically accessible.

The Van Abbemuseum shows that their special guests, with some of their disabilities but also all their curiosity and needs, can help design programs which are not only relevant to them but can be expanded with success to different types of visiting experiences. The complementarity of their guides and hosts is also interesting since the hosts can also bring a quite accessible contact and assume various functions which are not specific to the guide but useful to all visitors. The same mechanism is also at stake at the Heineken Experience between hosts and guides, reinforced by the fact they work together already which gives a quite unified feeling to the staff. This last aspect though might be easier to apply to a relatively small or middle-sized institution.

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<sup>126</sup> Ana Camboim was an intern at the Marketing department when I met her, the 30/08/16. After a MBA at Hotelschool, The Hague for which she investigated the satisfaction and expectations of the Heineken Experience visitors, she was "Guest experience specialist", when I interviewed her again on the 05/05/17, collecting visitors' feedback on different social media, administrates surveys regularly after the tours, and is in contact with the guides and their managers.

## **Training**

Concerning the guides themselves, their training should not only concern the content they deliver but also essentially the methods of communicating towards the group. Additionally, they should be trained to be a receiver, welcoming and encouraging the social and personal interactions happening in the group, with or without his or her support. Another key aspect would be training the guides on how to activate the physical context or, on the contrary, to temper those disturbing factors like noise and crowds. Even if the multi-sensorial style of learning is trendy for the visitors in terms of exhibitions design, not all professional guides are realizing that they induce certain physical reactions of their group with their own body. On socio-cultural aspects and understanding of interpretive communities, guides still need to continue to be trained, especially when confronted with international audiences.<sup>127</sup> Some rudimentary principles of intercultural communications could help fully connect also with visitors coming from very different cultures to offer them too, a richer socio-cultural experience.

## **Feedbacks: a resource for quality sourcing**

On a more generic and organizational level, the question remaining about the visitors' and guides' feedbacks is how to optimize this flow of information and set it in action. It is interesting to apply to the museum a certain quality approach like in the commercial firms, not to consider necessarily the visitor as a customer but as an individual with emotional reasoning, which might be resourceful for the institution to know about. This quality approach should not be primarily the privilege of the marketing or communication departments but also intersect with the education and audiences' department. Recording visitor feedback in a database could help apply this approach by tracking down, storing and connecting data about satisfaction or dissatisfaction and the expression of recurrent needs of the visitors. Many indicators can be relatively easily generated but more crucial is sitting around a table between different departments and including guides to define which indicators would be relevant in evaluating how a museum or an institution is doing on the path towards the post-museum.

## **Technologies at the visitors' service**

During the tour, the use of technologies should be improved. There is still a very top-down attitude of

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<sup>127</sup> A training, on a voluntary basis was organized at the Rijksmuseum the 16<sup>th</sup> March 2016 and lead by Jorinde ten Berge, guide and specialized in this matter. But in one hour and only less than 10 guides who were available and motivated that morning, it would deserve more investment.

the institutions compared to a more participatory attitude. In the case of Heineken, the attractions, even if engaging with the personal context, follow a script and the degree of customization by the visitor is not extremely broad. The sharing is also preconceived for social media. However, new technologies allow more prescription from the visitors towards the institution.

As shown by the creation of a VIP tour, some visitors, though not all, want more and can be quite articulate if only they were asked. The same goes for the Rijksmuseum's offer, which is quite broad, to correspond to its target groups but does not reflect all the potentialities of its guides. Indeed, to coordinate hundreds of guides, museum docents and actors, a database is necessary. But why in this database which incorporates information such as the language, acting or program skills are not also recorded strong points in art history, or history listed for each guide? This would allow an automatized linking between some visitors interested by specific part of the collections or time-periods and make available very qualified human resources, based on those interests. This would be, firstly, a nightmare in terms of organization because these "out-of-the-box" tours would be unseen. Though technically possible, it would renew the interest for a national museum, reaching out more directly to personal or social contexts of some visitors.

In the guided-tour itself, technological devices could be a help, if they stay a means to enrich it. New technologies enable a more subjective and customized measure of individual experience but they also enrich the social context thanks to the web 2.0 type of communication.<sup>128</sup> In fact, those new types of exchange and social sharing habits of the visitors are conducive to constructivist pedagogy and the post-museum. Therefore, it is very natural that they become helping tools in the hands of the guides and of the visitors themselves. Competencies and tools exist already but their full potential is not explored enough in theory and in practice. For instance, at the Rijksmuseum, guides receive their i-Pad but no specific training as to how to explore the interactions it could create with the group. Also in terms of content, the tablet is reduced to an illustration media and not really displaying pure multimedia content - videos being rare exceptions. In terms of manipulation (clicking on the right image, then showing, then closing it again) it remains a top-down type of delivering content.

Interestingly, only the children in a family group will dare to take the tablet from the guide's hands to use the tablet as media at their own service, to show better what they mean, after having spotted a detail in the picture of the *Night watch* for instance. This hands-on attitude might not be just the familiarity of the new generations with the new technologies but maybe also the effects of a more

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<sup>128</sup> Simon, Nina. 'Discourse in the Blogosphere: What Museums Can Learn from Web 2.0' in *Museums & Social Issues*, Volume 2, Number 2, Fall 2007, pp. 257-274 [http://www.museumtwo.com/publications/MSI\\_257-274\\_simon.pdf](http://www.museumtwo.com/publications/MSI_257-274_simon.pdf) (13/08/17)

constructivist type of education at school or at home.<sup>129</sup> Children do not doubt that their input can be valued. They might lead the way to a more democratic approach to come.

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<sup>129</sup> This raises the question of equipping each visitor with an i-Pad but then how to make sure they do not feel in their individual bubble and disconnect from the tour? This question is explored by an experiment on what visitors really see, lead in France by the Louvre-Lens and the research national institution the CNRS. See appendices 2.

## Conclusion

Thanks to the analysis of the three case studies and the theoretical framework I selected, I hope to have demonstrated that the guide can contribute to achieve the ideal of a post-museum.

Shifting from a modern to a post-museum creates unavoidable challenges in terms of content control, organization, and potential contestation about who and what is relevant for whom. But the post-museum provides the institution, and especially the guide, with an array of opportunities to enhance the visitors' learning processes.

During the tour, the guide can reach a post-museum perspective by explaining how the relationship to knowledge has changed. The museum guarantees the facts according to the state of the art, but does not specifically dismiss all other interpretations, and certainly does not decree that it detains the only and definitive interpretation. On the contrary, it is in art museums' interest to help the guide nourish the visitors' intrinsic motivations by acknowledging their insights. The guide can of course ask thought-provoking questions to stimulate personal and socio-cultural contexts. But as already mentioned, the guide can also use his or her own physical context to exemplify the multiples learning attitudes in a museum, including fun, playfulness, and reciprocity, like at the Heineken Experience. By triggering all those three contexts consciously, the guide might enable the visitors to reach a state of flow. A manifestation of this state is visible when the visitor is so immersed in his/her museum experience that he/she does not want the tour to end. To me, this flow could be more generally pursued if guides were more trained and could also rely more fully on the potential of new technologies.

Another capital contribution of the guide to the post-museum can occur after the tour is over. On the long term, the guide can be the echo chamber of visitors' remarks inside and towards the institution. The visitors' needs are sometimes difficult to identify from surveys only, which have many flaws: like the guide's feedback, they are biased. A human mediation is sometimes more efficient, like in the case of the Van Abbe museums' hosts who pushed for the creation of the DIY archives. That is why considering and actioning the guide's feedback is not only a matter of internal management, it is also a way to achieve the post-museum.



## Appendices 1 - Reflections on different types of guides: origins, terminology, and implications

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in defining the role of the docent, Benjamin Ives Gilman reveals still pertinent themes.<sup>130</sup> He has linked very early the mission of the (art)museum and the objectives attributed to the guide.<sup>131</sup>

To Gilman, the museum and the school could not be more different in their goals. Therefore, he marks a difference in the nature and aims of the teacher and the docent. The latter should be comparable to a friend for the visitors and, in the content he delivers, an inspirational source of interpretations: “the admiration of the docent is like the latent fire of a match, imprisoned in his head, and not effective without an interlocutor as igniting surface, and even an auditor beside as a tinder.”<sup>132</sup> He insists on the delight the guided-tour should bring, the docent being at the origin of this social atmosphere which allows very personal emotions to arise. “The purpose of the docent is to lead his disciples on to enjoyment”. Following the examples of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the word and function of docent were successfully adopted in several major museums.

In parallel, depending on the museum’s democratic vision (to involve local community) or financial means (lack of funds to pay guides and rely on good wills to animate their galleries) another category emerged and is referred to as “volunteers”. They do not necessarily assume the same functions as the guides so are not in direct competition but, marginally, they can also “guide”. In practice, an ambiguous relationship often develops between them and the education professionals of the museum. The latter are glad to be helped but might also fear what is said and taught in the galleries since the volunteers come in various degrees of commitment and professionalism<sup>133</sup>. This reluctance is mirrored in the increasing demand for the educational and guiding functions in museums to be fully recognized as a profession (and not just as part of a good will), with prior adequate qualifications and

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<sup>130</sup> Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Benjamin Ives Gilman. 1923. *Museum Ideals of Purpose and Method..* Second edition. With additions and an index. [With illustrations.].

<sup>131</sup> p 282: "Every museum of art, by its nature as a keeper of things for show, creates a certain educational need, and assumes a certain educational obligation auxiliary to its ultimate purpose." It also very early show that this function of the museum is at the core of its mission, the ‘auxiliaries’ being no luxury but almost a democratic imperative for the city, at the Greek sense of the word. Another thing interesting to note: The docent seems to be quite systematically masculine for Gilman, when the professionalization of the profession seems to have gone parallel with its massive feminization.

<sup>132</sup> Ibidem, p. 306

<sup>133</sup> Elliott Kai Kee, p 30.

compensation. Working as a guide continues to evolve and, recently, appears to be circling back to merging several functions and flirting with volunteers' versatility too.

For instance, an updated version of the volunteer is the "gallery host" position whose task described at the Norfolk Chrysler museum is to welcome the visitors, guarantee safety, and potentially engage with audiences to discuss and encourage interpretations about artworks.<sup>134</sup> This versatility of the host makes possible more functions for a reduced budget but aims essentially to break the possible intimidating atmosphere of the museum.<sup>135</sup> So, the difference with the former custodians consists off the fact that these personnel is mainly at the service of the audience, assuming some of the guiding practices like initiate a discussion with the visitors.

This same multi-function and service driven mission exists at the Van Abbemuseum, one of my case studies, through its museum hosts. They are distinguished from the guides who are qualified similarly to the Italian *cicerone*<sup>136</sup>, referring to the Grand Tour's guides which were eloquently compared to the antique statesman and rhetorician Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC). In Great Britain, it seems that "museum educator" and "volunteers" are of common use as well as "guide" and can have the same or comparable layers of functions and meanings than in the USA.

Avoiding a long enumeration, my point is to examine if through those appellations, nuances of guiding practices appear. In France for instance, the term of *guide* comports a connecting dash to the word *conférencier*. This certifies the quality of content which can be delivered as if in a walking-conference and seems to inherit its character of authority from the modern museum.<sup>137</sup> Next to existing

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<sup>134</sup> The Chrysler museum website present those gallery hosts in "what to expect": <http://www.chrysler.org/planning-your-visit/what-to-expect/> and a review of the diversity of their tasks including safety and security of artworks and persons can be found of the website of the (American) Association of Art Museum Directors <https://aamd.org/our-members/from-the-field/gallery-hosts-at-the-chrysler-museum-of-art>. (20/06/16).

<sup>135</sup> The reflections behind the creation of the gallery host job at the Chrysler museum originates from an observation and feedback campaign led inside the museum. Hennessey, William and Corso, Anne, article *Listening to our audiences*, in *Engagement and Access: Innovative Approaches for Museums*, dir. Decker, Juilee,ed. Lanham, Maryland : Rowman & Littlefield, [2015], p. 17-25.

<sup>136</sup> This appellation does also exist in English, in German and in French, even if for the latter it is old-fashioned, see definition of the online wordbook Larousse: <http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/cic%C3%A9rone/15972> (20/06/16).

<sup>137</sup> The title of *guide-conférencier* can be granted only after the recognition of a national diploma. The same regulation is required from independent tour operators in order to be allowed to perform their services inside national museums or national monuments. According to the French Tourism code, art. L 221-1. A decree in 2011 fused the prior status which were differentiating between the regional and national guides guide which could be specialized as interpreter-guide, or as specialist in art and history of cities. All those professions are now recognized only as one. Source: <http://www.entreprises.gouv.fr/tourisme/foire-aux-questions-metiers-guidage> (17/06/2016)

freelance guides, there has also emerged a different category of institutionalized guides: the *médiateurs* or mediators translating into action an approach linked to interpretation theories. *Médiateurs* typically work in contemporary art museums but also in a broader range of institutions such as music and cultural centers. In the Netherlands, which is the focus of this thesis, the words of *gids* (guide) and *rondleider* (leader of the tour) coexist. The word and function of *museum docent* are also in use but those docents seem to be more specialized in educational matters.<sup>138</sup>

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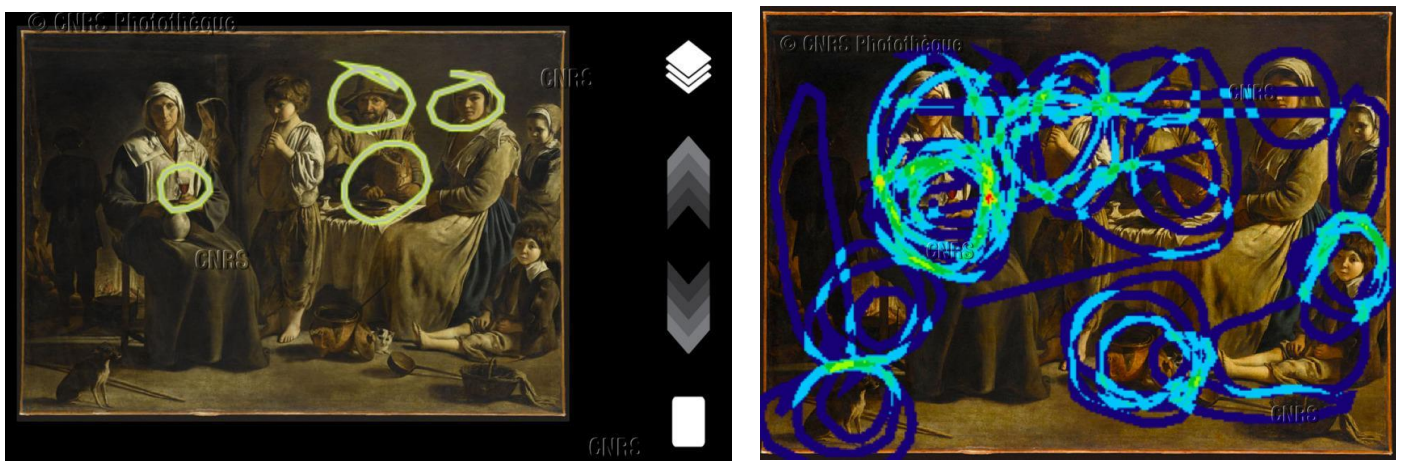
<sup>138</sup> For instance, at the Rijksmuseum, museum docents are not only guiding in galleries but also animating workshops for school and adult groups who have signed up for a specific cursus.

## Appendices 2 – technologies recording and reinforcing the museum experience

Recently an initiative has been developed by the Louvre-Lens and the French National Center for Scientific Research or CNRS,<sup>139</sup> for the exhibition ‘The Le Nain Mystery’.<sup>140</sup> It uses technology in link with its recording and aggregating potential.

Visitors (c. 600 of all ages, classes and contexts of visits: in a couple, group or with the school) are provided with an i-Pad and the instruction to show what attracts their eyes first on a painting. If it seems very traditional to interrogate the visitors’ gaze, what matters is the aggregation of tracking down points of vision. This makes the personal and physical contexts (what a visitor sees thanks to his/her body and mind) linked on a more collective almost social level: the results are statically aggregated by the researchers of the CNRS.

Fig. 11 – Examples of a visitor interface on the tablet (left)<sup>141</sup> and the aggregated results of visitors’ gazes (right)<sup>142</sup>



<sup>139</sup> The *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* usually abbreviated in “CNRS” regroups many expert researchers which can collaborate with other public establishments, like museums.

<sup>140</sup> *The Le Nain Mystery* from March 22, 2017 to June 26, 2017 at Louvre-Lens (France):  
<http://www.louvre.fr/en/expositions/le-nain-mystery> (14/08/17)

<sup>141</sup> This indication is made through the interface of the *Ikonikat* application. More in French:  
[http://phototheque.cnrs.fr/index.php?idPageWeb=95&afficher=publication&afficherParNew=vignette&asPageNew=1&nouvelleRecherchePhoto=1&afficherVignetteDuSujet=387&pageSujet=1&id\\_theme=0](http://phototheque.cnrs.fr/index.php?idPageWeb=95&afficher=publication&afficherParNew=vignette&asPageNew=1&nouvelleRecherchePhoto=1&afficherVignetteDuSujet=387&pageSujet=1&id_theme=0) (14/08/17)

<sup>142</sup> Heat map indicating the frequency of the circling by the visitors (blue : not often, red: very often). Here the only red point is the wine gals hold by the woman on the left. Artwork: *Peasant family in an interior*, Le Nain, Louis (French painter, ca.1593-1648), musée du Louvre. <http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/peasant-family-interior> (14/08/17)

This technological and scientific experiment unlocks the deeper social context for the guide, who can use it for mediation purposes. The guide can ask “what do you see first?” and then ask people to indicate on their tablets to draw it and from the group’s various answers can build an informative, though provoking commentary. This is at least what is acknowledged on the Louvre Lens website<sup>143</sup>.

This type of information is precious to the guide because collecting data in live and being able to react on materialized visual interest of the visitors, could be a very interesting mediation departure point. It would help to interpret together stimulating even more personal and social contexts, making the interpretive communities also more tangible thanks to observing the different immediate reactions of groups.

This aggregated data brings the proof of long thought theories that children and adults do not perceive in the same way. For instance, in the project led by the CNRS with *Ikonikat*,<sup>144</sup> in schools and projecting images of artworks in the classroom, children seem to look for action in an artwork, while teachers might analyze already the whole composition. Asking what do they see first on the Milkmaid of Vermeer, the children all showed the gesture of pouring the milk, while their teacher had a much more generic and then analytic gaze at the woman, the room, the light. But other adults might have a total different approach because they are not used to decompose an image in an analytic, pedagogical way, like the teachers.

From better understanding the interpretive community(ies) the group belongs to, a dialogue is initiated between the guide and the group, which can lead to a more “on measure” learning. This would help also link the learning in museums with what is socially and personally relevant for each group, circling back to what Nina Simon calls: ‘the art of relevance’.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Source : Ibidem

<sup>144</sup> Press release of the CNRS on the joined project around the Le Nain’s exhibition and Ikonikat : <http://www2.cnrs.fr/presse/communique/4927.htm?theme1=9> (17/05/17)

<sup>145</sup> Simon, Nina. 2016. *The art of relevance*. <http://www.artofrelevance.org/> (14/08/17)

## List of illustrations

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- 20/01/17 Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, interview of Loes Janssen
- 05/05/17 Heineken Experience, Amsterdam, interview of Demelza van der Maas, then Ana Camboim

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Due to the extensive use of many and diverse websites, please refer to each individual footnote which indicates the exact reference and the date of access.