

THE MUSEUM VISIT



A Thesis on the Relationship Between
Museum Display and Audience Behaviour

MA Thesis | June 13, 2018
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Arts and Society | 2017-2018
Utrecht University | Dr. Marijke de Valck

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“six people in gallery, no one looks at the screen

. . . Tall man in black jacket holds hands with a woman in a bright

orange sweater. They are holding hands as they look at bulletin

boards in the back gallery

The look slowly

observe

The blonde girl, torquoise hoody, is back listening to the girl in

orange.

It must be an interesting piece.”¹

¹ Fragment of the video installation *Instant Narrative* by Dora García. First performed in 2006, it was aimed at observing people in an art setting. Instead of using a surveillance camera, a performer/writer and a white projection screen formed a hybrid that continuously displayed a narrative. Visitors became characters in this narrative – or not, as they were sometimes neglected in favour of other events happening at the same time (Rudolf Frieling, “Participatory Situations. Dialogical Art of Instant Narrative by Dora García,” in *The Participatory Condition Digital Age*, ed. Darin Barney et al. (University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 256-259).

Abstract

The museum is by origin a highly coded and regulated place. With regard to the specific set of behavioural and moral standards that the institute imposes on its visitors, Julia Noordegraaf argues that museum presentations are based on a 'script' that defines the framework of action between the presentation, its designers and its users. All the elements that mediate between the museum and its audience are part of a given set of power relations, which constitutes the ritual structure of the museum.

Today's exhibition sites are, however, subject to changing aspirations of the museum as a public institute. As visitors are increasingly used to play an active role in constituting an experience, museums experiment with different formats in which the visitor is no longer simply directed. Thereby, both the museum and the visitor are triggered to rethink their role within a reciprocal relationship. Consequently, it can be questioned whether the notion of script is still of relevance in today's museums of contemporary art. In order to find out, this thesis will zoom in on two case studies whose innovative formats explore the physical and conceptual boundaries of the exhibition space. Thereby, it contributes to the discourse that rethinks the potential use of the physical exhibition space, as well as it examines in what way novel strategies of display can inform audience behaviour.

Key words: script, strategies of display, audience behaviour, restricted freedom, sandbox, story-building.

Content

Abstract	4
1. Introduction	6
1.1 Aim	7
1.2 Scripted Behaviour Within Ritualistic Structures	8
1.3 From Theory to Practice: An Introduction of the Two Case Studies	10
1.4 Methodology and Outline of Argumentation	11
2. The Museum on the Move	15
2.1 The Museum as Experience	17
2.2 The Museum of the Future	19
3. “What Museums Can Learn from Video Games”²	22
3.1 Spatial Stories	23
3.2 Restricted Freedom	24
4. The Case Studies	27
4.1 Sensory Spaces 13 – Anne Hardy	27
4.1.1 Spatial Characteristics	28
4.1.2 Artistic Experience and Reception	31
4.1.3 Reviews of the Exhibition	33
4.1.4 The Sandbox of Sensory Spaces	33
4.2 Stedelijk Base	35
4.2.1 Spatial Characteristics	36
4.2.2 Artistic Experience and Reception	40
4.2.3 Reviews of the Exhibition	41
4.2.4 Building Blocks in the Basement	42
5. Comparison of Cases and Conclusion	44
6. Bibliography	47

² Seth Giddings, “SimKnowledge: What Museums Can Learn from Video Games,” in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Media*, First Edition, ed. Michelle Henning (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2015), 145.

1. Introduction

*Please remember when you get inside the gates you are part of the show.*³

Ever since the opening up of the museum to the general public, the museum has been responsible for instituting a specific set of behavioural and moral standards. In the nineteenth century, it functioned as a vehicle “for inscribing and broadcasting the messages of power [...] throughout society,”⁴ through which it submitted its visitors to a specific code of conduct. As the quote at the start of this chapter elucidates, visitors were part of a spectacle that Tony Bennett described as: “[t]o see and be seen, to survey yet always be under surveillance.”⁵ Interestingly, the unknown but controlling look of surveillance bears a resemblance to some of the ideals of the panopticon.⁶ Although the kind of surveillance is clearly of a different nature, both the inmate and the museum visitor are enforced to obey the “institutional articulations of power and knowledge.”⁷ With regard to navigating the nineteenth-century museum, this meant that the audience transformed into a self-watching and self-regulating crowd.⁸

The explicit and implicit rules that inform audience behaviour are still part of the current museum visit. There are, however, more and more examples of situations in which the rules are, to some extent, unclear. At present day, there are various ways in which innovative and challenging exhibition formats give substance to the museum visit. While the traditional museum experience generally entails walking around with your hands behind your back, reading captions and being quiet, today’s exhibition sites have been subjected to changing aspirations of the museum as a public institute. For example, digital technologies offer numerous possibilities concerning virtual museums and online exhibitions, thereby enabling visitors to experience the museum from a distance. As physical barriers disappear, the museum visit is becoming accessible to a broader audience. At the same time, the changing context conditions the physical exhibition space as it needs to adapt to changing viewing habits of the audience.

The necessity to adapt to changes in society is not a new phenomenon for the museum as a public institute. The continuing tension between novel strategies of display and attracting the visitor’s attention has fueled recent debates and is represented in “a rich literature on historical precedents.”⁹ A seminal contribution comes from art historian Alexander Dorner, who was the director of the Landesmuseum in Hanover in the 1920s. He coined the notion of a ‘museum on the move’ and suggested that “the new type of art institute cannot merely be an art museum as it has been until now, but no museum at all. The new type will be more

³ An instruction from a ‘*Short Sermon to Sightseers*’ at the 1901 Pan-American Exposition (Tony Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex,” *New Formations*, no. 4 (Spring 1988): 81).

⁴ Bennett, “Exhibitionary Complex,” 74.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶ The panopticon (“all-seeing”) is a prison model proposed by Jeremy Bentham in 1791. It withdraws “the spectacle of punishment away from the public eye and the prisoner from the dungeon, into the compartmentalized space of the prison cell where he would be subjected to the imagined, permanent gaze of his jailer. This architectural machine would induce subjective changes in the inmate, principally making him docile” (“Exhibitionary Complex,” *Miniature Worlds*, accessed June 3, 2018, <https://miniatureworlds.wordpress.com/gallery/exhibitionary-complex/>).

⁷ Bennett, “Exhibitionary Complex,” 73.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁹ Giddings, “SimKnowledge,” 147.

like a power station, a producer of new energy.”¹⁰ His words proved to be influential in the process of rethinking artistic presentation, and even until today, various museum professionals and academics offer suggestions in the same line of thought. Charles Esche for example, current director of Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, was quoted by curator Claire Doherty:

Now, the term 'art' might be starting to describe that space in society for experimentation, questioning and discovery that religion, science and philosophy have occupied sporadically in former times. It has become an active space rather than one of passive observation. Therefore the institutions to foster it have to be part-community centre, part-laboratory and part-academy, with less need for the established showroom function.¹¹

Novel strategies of display have a big impact on the current museum visit and influence the dynamics of power between the museum as an institute and the visitor. While traditionally it was the museum¹² that determined the content of an exhibition, nowadays, input from the visitor is frequently asked for, stimulated or even required.¹³ Subsequently, museums experiment with different formats in which the visitor is no longer simply directed. Evidently, this affects the way visitors move through and behave in an exhibition space. In the end, it triggers both the museum and the visitor to rethink their role in a reciprocal relationship.

1.1 Aim

The central focus of this thesis is the relationship between museum display and audience behaviour. By exploring the phenomenon of the museum visit and its complex relationship to spatial aspects, this thesis will contribute to the discourse that rethinks the potential use of the physical exhibition space in a digital age and digitized environment. Nevertheless, as Sebastian Chan has argued, it is important to keep in mind that:

[digital] is everything now. But it's not everything at the exclusion of all the other things. It's everything plus the other things. Digital changes our lives – it doesn't replace our lives.¹⁴

This research will contribute to an emerging critical account. Although renewal in the museum sector is nothing new,¹⁵ it has now reached a critical stage in which true innovation can be accomplished. Besides adding to the ongoing story that is being written, this study offers a new perspective by zooming in on two case studies whose innovative formats explore the physical and conceptual boundaries of the exhibition

¹⁰ Claire Doherty, "The Institution is Dead! Long Live the Institution! Contemporary Art and New Institutionalism," *Engage Review Art of Encounter*, issue 15 (Summer 2004): 3, https://engage.org/downloads/152E25D29_15.%20Claire%20Doherty.pdf.

¹¹ Doherty, "The Institution is Dead," 2.

¹² When talking about 'the museum' as an institute, most of the time this refers to the curator on site.

¹³ Examples of interactive installations include *Instant Narrative* (2006) by Dora García (cited on page 3), *Pulse Room* (2006) by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *A New Life Awaits You!* (2016) by Stichting Z25 and *Fair Warning* (2016) by Jonas Lund.

¹⁴ Dillon Baker, "Museums, the Next Media Companies: Why The Met Built a 70-person Media Team," *Contently*, May 12, 2015, <https://contently.com/strategist/2015/05/12/museums-the-next-media-companies/>.

¹⁵ There is a lot of research addressing the importance of renewal in order to attract a broader audience. Examples of authors include Paul F. Marty (2008), Christian Heath and Dirk Vom Lehn (2013), Mark W. Rectanus (2015), and Nancy Proctor (2015).

space. Because both use or manipulate the characteristics of their physical surroundings, this research will broaden the knowledge and understanding of how novel strategies of display can affect audience behaviour. Before I will introduce the two selected case studies, I will first elaborate on the notion of 'script' that has been central to this study. This is needed in order to formulate an accurate research question, which will be posed at the end of the following paragraph.

1.2 Scripted Behaviour Within Ritualistic Structures

*The museum is more than a location. It is a script that makes certain acts possible and others unthinkable.*¹⁶

Julia Noordegraaf has argued that "museum presentations are based on a script which, like the script of a film, defines a framework of action within which the presentation, its designers and its users interact."¹⁷ The script includes all the elements that mediate between the museum and its audience: the location, architecture and layout of the building, the order and arrangement of the objects, the floor plan, the various display techniques and the different means of visitor guidance. Most of all, her research underscores that "changes in the script of museum presentation has [*sic*] constantly defined the relationship between museums and their audiences in new ways."¹⁸

Noordegraaf's research draws upon ideas developed in film studies, and proceeds from the assumption that the visual media that confronts both exhibition designers and visitors constitute certain viewing habits that influence the design of museum display. In particular her focus on the fact that "museum presentations are the product of both its designers *and* its users"¹⁹ makes her research of great value for this thesis. Although the shift towards a visitor-centred perspective is not unique within museum studies, her contribution is of importance to a field that continues to regard visitors as "passive victims who are subjected to the ritual of the museum."²⁰

The notion of script as used by Noordegraaf bears an initial resemblance to the "ritual"²¹ structures as described by Paul O'Neill.²² Here, he refers to the given set of power relations that is present between the artwork and its display and reception. Doherty similarly describes the museum space as a place that enforces some kind of ritual, or a space that structures human behaviour. She argues that it "is the frame of the gallery, and the prescription of behaviour within it, which seems to distinguish 'role play' from 'real play'."²³ From this perspective, it could be argued that the behaviour of visitors is already coded by the gallery's associated exhibition program, which is also referred to in the quote at the start of this paragraph. Furthermore, Noordegraaf cites Carol Duncan who explained that the design of the museum

¹⁶ Philip Fisher, *Making and Effacing Art: Modern American Art in a Culture of Museums*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 12, 18.

¹⁷ Julia Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display: Museum Presentation in the Nineteenth-and Twentieth-Century Visual Culture* (NAi Publishers: Rotterdam, 2004), back cover.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 247.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

²¹ A ritual is defined as "a religious or solemn ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed according to a prescribed order" (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/ritual>). However rituals are often thought of as belonging to so-called tribal cultures, the Western museum can in fact be seen as a place in which rituals are performed on a daily basis.

²² Paul O'Neill, "The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse," in *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, ed. Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick (Intellect Books, 2007), 13-28.

²³ Doherty, "The institution is dead," 6.

presentation structures the museum visit in various ways, namely “physically because of the layout of the floor plan and building, [and] mentally because of the information given or left out.”²⁴ It is important to say, however, that Noordegraaf does “not share the implicit view of visitors as passive victims who are subjected to the ritual of the museum,” because in her view, “visitors are active agents who by their physical presence, behaviour and viewing habits have an active role in shaping the museum space.”²⁵

Ursula Biermann offers an interesting perspective by suggesting to approach the exhibition space as a momentary location that derives its meaning from the people who visit it as well as from the temporary projects that it houses. In that way, both the people and the projects may inscribe themselves in the space, giving insight into a system of navigation and representation.²⁶ In the same line of thought, Elke van Campenhout argued it would be valuable to inscribe yourself, as a spectator, in the bigger story that is being written:²⁷ “[a]t that point, curatorial politics is no longer about provoking (un)wanted interactive dynamics between spectator and performer: it allows them to rethink their role in the whole.”²⁸ Interestingly, by this change in attitude, art would no longer be an abstract message sent out to an abstract receiver.

In the context of today’s society, abovementioned viewing habits are influenced by new habits obtained by the use of omnipresent digital technologies, both inside and outside the museum. It comes as no surprise that “[o]ver the past 20 years, changes in society and technology have reshaped how museums function, how they deliver experiences and how their spaces are designed.”²⁹ Similarly, digital technologies are popular, especially among younger people: for many of them a world without video games, computer special effects, the Internet, mobile phones, and so on, is almost unimaginable. It is important to note that although digital technologies and the normalization thereof play a big part in the recent changes made in the museum sector, it is not solely the implementation of digital art – or so called new media art³⁰ – that has the potential to generate new ways of looking or behaving in an art setting. Also the proliferating attention for active audience participation has had, and still has today, a tremendous impact on strategies of display.

Consequently, the lion’s share of contemporary museums is experimenting with novel ways of exhibiting art. The unprecedented changes with respect to the use of information resources have transformed the experience of visiting a museum, requiring adaptations in the museum script. Therefore, the question that this study seeks to answer is:

In what way is the notion of ‘script’ of relevance to the museum that applies novel strategies of display?

²⁴ Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display*, 16.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁶ Mark W. Rectanus, “Moving Out: Museums, Mobility, and Urban Spaces,” in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Media*, First Edition, ed. Michelle Henning (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2015), 542.

²⁷ From this perspective, the space is created by both its designers and its users, as Noordegraaf also argued.

²⁸ Elke van Campenhout, “Shuffling the Deck, Shifting Positions. Curating as environmentalism,” *Frakcija Performing Arts Journal*, no. 55 (2010): 43.

²⁹ Arup, “Museums in the Digital Age,” Arup Foresight + Research + Innovation, October 2013, 5.

³⁰ As there is already an impressive body of literature on new media art and its impact on collecting, preserving and exhibiting, I will not elaborate on this subject. Instead, see Christiane Paul, *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond: Curatorial Models for Digital Art* (University of California Press, 2008).

It is important to emphasize that the physical exhibition as a form of presentation still has much to offer. It provides a space in which a coherent set of narratives, dialogues and proposals might be played out. Philosopher and art critic Boris Groys stated that “[e]very exhibition tells a story, by directing the viewer through the exhibition in a particular order; [therefore,] the exhibition space is always a narrative space.”³¹ Being aware of the specificity of this space can produce artistic or curatorial added value, raising questions such as; how do we enter the space, and when does the performance actually begin?

1.3 From Theory to Practice: An Introduction of the Two Case Studies

A notable example of a museum that redesigned its permanent exhibition space is the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. The opening of Stedelijk Base (see figure 1+2 on page 13) in December 2017 is considered “the finale of the museum’s revised spatial design,”³² which was initiated to establish a clear layout and to devote a larger part of the museum’s space to the collection.³³

Stedelijk Base is the “permanent installation of iconic works from the collection,”³⁴ for which Rem Koolhaas designed the spatial layout. Interestingly, not all visitors understood the network of diagonally placed walls: some were disappointed, describing the exhibition as “an insult to the visitors’, “pure chaos”, and even that it is “made impossible” to enjoy the art.³⁵ In contrast, journalist Thomas van Huut argued that Stedelijk Base is nothing less than the museum of the future. It is striking that, by means of applying a novel and experimental strategy of display, the Stedelijk Museum seeks to rejuvenate its profile and attract new audiences. Thereby, it illustrates one of the challenges that museums are facing nowadays.³⁶

Another challenging exhibition format can be found at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam. Titled Sensory Spaces, the entrance area of the museum houses a series of solo exhibitions that is free of charge. The selection consists of internationally promising artists, who have not had a solo show in the Netherlands before.³⁷ For every edition, an artist is asked “to respond to the particular characteristics”³⁸ of the space. For the 13th edition, which was on show from the 10th of February until the 27th of May 2018, it was the British artist Anne Hardy who provided the installation (see figure 3-5 on page 14). Curator Nina

³¹ Boris Groys, *Art Power* (The MIT Press, 2008), 44.

³² “The Collection, Stedelijk Base,” Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, accessed May 16, 2018, <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/exhibitions/stedelijk-base-the-new-collection-presentation>.

³³ In 2012, the museum re-opened after a long period of renovation - the museum has consecutively initiated several wings as well as the entrance area in 2017, which has been metamorphosed into an open and welcoming meeting place. Currently, as much as seventy per cent of the surface is dedicated to the collection (“Feestelijke heropening entreegebied, opening “ik ben een geboren buitenlander” en openstelling Carlos Motta,” Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, accessed May 10, 2018, <https://www.stedelijk.nl/nl/evenementen/opening-ik-ben-een-geboren-buitenlander-openstelling-carlos-motta>); (Maxime Smit, “Nieuw entree Stedelijk: opener en plek voor espressootje,” *Het Parool*, September 22, 2017, <https://www.parool.nl/stadsgids/nieuw-entree-stedelijk-opener-en-plek-voor-espressootje~a4517982/>).

³⁴ Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, “The Collection, Stedelijk Base.”

³⁵ Thomas van Huut, “Hoe het Stedelijk en Rem Koolhaas hét museum voor de Instagram-generatie bouwden.” *Brainwash*, January 31, 2018, <https://www.brainwash.nl/bijdrage/hoe-het-stedelijk-en-rem-koolhaas-het-museum-voor-de-instagram-generatie-bouwden>.

³⁶ Erkki Huhtamo, “Museums, Interactivity, and the Tasks of “Exhibition Anthropology,”” in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Media*, First Edition, ed. Michelle Henning (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2015).

³⁷ Art Tube, “Sensory Spaces 13 - Anne Hardy,” produced by Studio Maslow, video, 07:28, <http://www.arttube.nl/en/videos/sensory-spaces-13-anne-hardy>.

³⁸ Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, “Sensory Spaces 13 - Anne Hardy,” 2018, hand-out, 5.

Folkersma chose Hardy because “[s]he creates environments, dream-like environments, that appeal to all your senses.”³⁹ In doing so, she creates the possibility for the visitor to completely merge into the work and to experience a changing and sensory environment.⁴⁰ Most importantly, Hardy aspires to eliminate the existing barrier between the work on display and the visitor.

Both case studies have been chosen because of their ambiguity concerning the inscription of a script. By pushing spatial as well as metaphorical boundaries, they draw attention to the possibilities and/or options that the space offers to its visitors.

1.4 Methodology and Outline of Argumentation

My research design is based on qualitative research and builds upon key principles coming from museum studies and game theories. First and foremost, the notion of “exhibition anthropology” as coined by Erkki Huhtamo, has been central to my approach. One of the aspects of exhibition anthropology is to note down patterns of use, as well as to reflect on their wider theoretical and cultural underpinnings.⁴¹ By treating the museum as a kind of experience apparatus – “a combination of material features, social roles, and institutional practices and policies that provide a framework for visitors’ experiences”⁴² – the museum can be seen as a system in which experiences can be analysed by paying attention to the tension between the givens of the situation and the visitors’ share in the constitution of the experience. Keeping this in mind, “one goal of exhibition anthropology would be to match the constitutive elements of the museum apparatus with the ways in which it is activated”⁴³ or utilized by actual museum visitors. Huhtamo acknowledges that these encounters are ideologically biased and involve certain codes that influence each museum-goer in varying degrees.⁴⁴

Prior to analysing the two case studies, an in-depth exploration of the discourse of museum display will form a solid foundation from where to proceed. Chapter two includes a literature review, which outlines the main developments that have contributed to the establishment of the current relationship between museums and their audiences. In order to give a complete overview, however, it is necessary to limit the scope of work. Therefore, I have chosen to focus on contemporary art museums in particular that, by means of tracing back predecessors of innovative exhibition design, enable me to place the analysed strategies of display in the right context. Especially *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Media* proved to be of great relevance because it “brings together original essays by a global team of experts, to provide a state-of-the-art survey of the field of museum studies.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, the main concept and starting point of this thesis is provided by Julia Noordegraaf’s *Strategies of Display*.⁴⁶ It serves as a key theory given the innovative combination of film- and museum studies, thereby introducing the script as a framework of action in the museum sector.

³⁹ Art Tube, “Sensory Spaces 13 - Anne Hardy.”

⁴⁰ “Sensory Spaces 13 - Anne Hardy,” Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, accessed May 14, 2018. <https://www.boijmans.nl/tentoonstellingen/sensory-spaces-13-anne-hardy>

⁴¹ Huhtamo, “Exhibition Anthropology,” 273.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 272.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 273.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 273.

⁴⁵ Michelle Henning, ed., *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Media*, First Edition (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2015).

⁴⁶ Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display*, 2004.

Chapter three will explore possible similarities between the script as formulated by Noordegraaf and the notion of ‘sandbox’, derived from game theories. Defined as “a style of game in which minimal character limitations are placed on the gamer, allowing the gamer to roam and change a virtual world at will,”⁴⁷ it offers an interesting perspective on the physical exhibition space as well as it helps to define the concept of restricted freedom. In particular theories by game scholars Henry Jenkins and Clara Fernández-Vara are used to investigate the notions of storytelling and story-building, which can both be linked to exhibition design.

In order to provide in-depth insight into the experience of visiting a museum and its relationship to novel strategies of display, the main aspect of my research contains field visits to two contemporary art museums. As mentioned in paragraph 1.3, two significant exhibitions were chosen; Stedelijk Base at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, and Sensory Spaces 13 at Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. Both case studies were selected because of their unconventional and/or experimental way of exhibiting, as they adjust the characteristics of the space in a surprising manner. Consequently, the visitor is stimulated to (re)discover alternative ways of experiencing art. Moreover, the redesign of the permanent exhibition space in the Stedelijk Museum serves as an illustration of the current and ubiquitous development that is the starting point of this research: it fits in the “recent debates and concerns about the tension between attracting visitors’ attention to museums and exhibits through novel techniques of display and the serious educational and research aims of public museums.”⁴⁸ Therefore, it is of great relevance to investigate in what way two different exhibition spaces mediate the museum visit: Sensory Spaces 13 as an all-encompassing space in which the visitor is immersed from the moment one enters, whereas Stedelijk Base stimulates the visitor to move freely and associatively through a maze-like space.

By means of participant observation I have acquired information about audience behaviour and (possible) restraint in engaging with the content on show. Pictures and (audio)tapes⁴⁹ enabled me to reconstruct the visit afterwards. Furthermore, I have used background information found on both museums’ websites, supplemented with reviews published online and in national newspapers. The comparison of these data has enabled me to compare the ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ experiences of the respective exhibitions.⁵⁰ Lastly, it is important to note that the script as described by Noordegraaf is embedded in the total physical layout of the museum. It is due to time limitations, however, that this thesis focuses on the exhibition design in particular, referring to the order and arrangement of the objects, the floor plan, the various display techniques and the different means of visitor guidance.⁵¹

⁴⁷ “Sandbox,” Techopedia, accessed April 30, 2018, <https://www.techopedia.com/definition/3952/sandbox-gaming>.

⁴⁸ Giddings, “SimKnowledge,” 147.

⁴⁹ Both taken / recorded with my iPhone.

⁵⁰ I have deliberately chosen not to investigate individual experiences, for time-related reasons and the danger of not being able to collect enough representational data.

⁵¹ This means that I will not take into account the location, architecture and layout of the building.



Figure 1: Stedelijk Base, 2018. © Ossip van Duivenbode



Figure 2: Scale model of Stedelijk Base, 2018. © Gert-Jan van Rooij

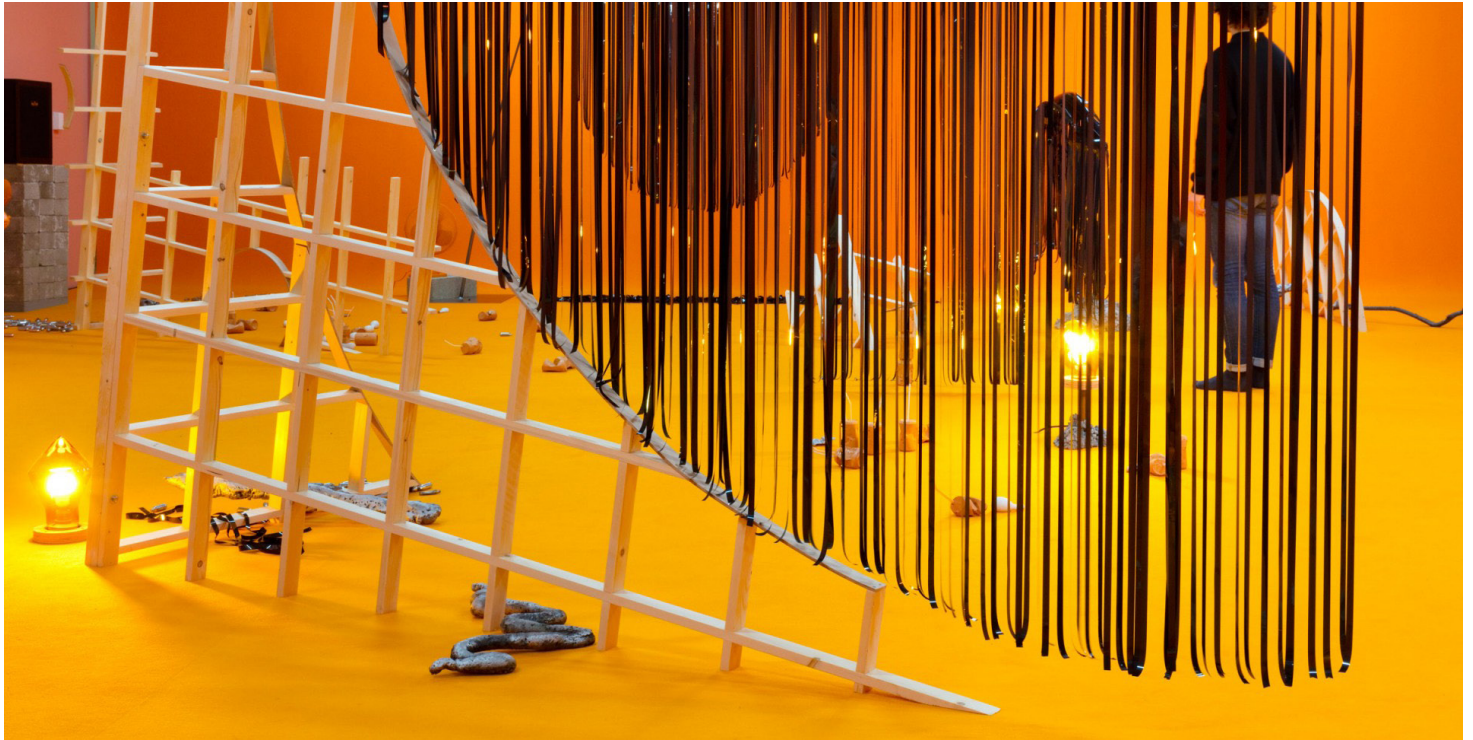


Figure 3: Anne Hardy Sensory Spaces 13 (detail), exhibition view: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 2018. © Anne Hardy, courtesy Maureen Paley, London, photo: Angus Mill



Figure 4 and 5: Anne Hardy Sensory Spaces 13 (detail), exhibition view: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 2018. © Anne Hardy, courtesy Maureen Paley, London, photo: Angus Mill

2. The Museum on the Move

The origin of the museum as a cultural institute can be traced back to the Enlightenment. Although the creation, selection and passing along of objects and collections goes far back in the history of man, the cabinet of curiosities from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is seen as a precursor of the current museum. At that time, however, it was mainly known as a Western phenomenon.⁵² Interestingly, at the early private collections it was often allowed and even encouraged to touch the artefacts, as touching was understood as “a complement to the act of looking.”⁵³

As was already shortly introduced in the previous chapter, the first public museums of the nineteenth-century submitted its visitors to a specific code of conduct. The museum was primarily thought of as educational institution, that was “aimed at improving the well-being and civilisation of the citizenry.”⁵⁴ This aim stood in great contrast with eighteenth-century collections, which were mostly kept in private homes – “restricted to privileged visitors who were assumed to know the proper codes of behaviour.”⁵⁵ Noordegraaf argues that “since the enlightened elite of the nineteenth century recognised education to be one of the most important instruments for civilising the people, the museum was seen as indispensable for any modern city.”⁵⁶ Huhtamo also recognises the democratic ideals in education, which were aimed at the masses. Paradoxically, however, is the fact that the museum applied an ‘exclusive’ script that kept an uneducated audience from visiting the museum. Because it was feared that “the new audiences could not be trusted to master the codes of behaviour,”⁵⁷ various precautions were taken: artworks were placed behind sheets of glass or in display cases, and museum guards were present to enforce so-called correct behaviour. Furthermore, it was assumed that the objects would speak for itself, but it turned out that this narrative was only recognisable “to specialists with some prior knowledge of art.”⁵⁸ Eventually, this meant that the museum was the territory of artists, craftsmen and scholars. The impressive floor plans⁵⁹ and lack of explanatory signs and/or guidebooks provided little guidance to the visitor of the nineteenth-century museum.⁶⁰ While the museum was ideally thought of as accessible to all, in reality, it was not as inviting to the general public.

Around the turn of the century, museums realized that “accessibility entailed more than just opening the front door.”⁶¹ Professionals in all types of museums recognised that the museum needed to reform in order to appeal to a wider audience.⁶² The increased awareness of the visitor’s perspective meant that the script of presentation had to be rearranged, resulting in a museum in which two distinct types of scripts were combined: “a study collection for the scholars and a

⁵² The core tasks of museums can be reduced to collecting, storing, researching and exhibiting material, aimed at two public groups: the contemporary public and the posterity (Durrans, 1988; Morphy, 2015).

⁵³ Huhtamo, “Exhibition Anthropology,” 269.

⁵⁴ Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display*, 28.

⁵⁵ Huhtamo, “Exhibition Anthropology,” 269.

⁵⁶ Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display*, 29.

⁵⁷ Huhtamo, “Exhibition Anthropology,” 269.

⁵⁸ Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display*, 51.

⁵⁹ The floor plan is often drafted with a type of visitor in mind, resulting in unidirectional, personal, or customised routings; Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display*, 132.

⁶⁰ Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display*, 56.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 79.

separate exhibition area for the general public.”⁶³ In contrast to the exclusive script of the nineteenth-century museum, the audience that was targeted by the new museum script was assumed to be in need of some extra guidance to understand and interpret the content of the exhibition.⁶⁴ Museum reformers innovatively used the layout, architecture and arrangement of the museum as tools to guide the imagined visitor during their visit. Moreover, in addition to instruction on how to look at the art, new means of communication distributed information on how to behave. For example, “[i]nstruction booklets advised working-class visitors how to present themselves,”⁶⁵ and in the context of the newly arranged Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in 1910, the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* published a series of articles that showed “visitors looking at the paintings, either standing or resting on the benches.”⁶⁶ In other words, the public museum tutored its visitors “on the modes of deportment required if they were to be admitted [to the exhibition].”⁶⁷

Boris Groys described that, in the course of the twentieth century, “museums were transformed from places of enlightenment-inspired iconoclasm into places of a romantic iconophilia.”⁶⁸ This meant that the exhibition’s role in the symbolic economy had changed: instead of ‘devaluing’ sacred objects to produce art, profane objects – such as Duchamp’s urinal – were valorised to become art. At the same time, the democratising tendencies of the early twentieth century had a significant impact on the museum as a publicly funded institution, as it had to justify itself to society as a whole instead of solely to the well-educated, male elite.⁶⁹

Another paradox presented itself. While museums on the one hand desired to attract a broad audience by providing explanations about the works on display, on the other hand they tried to present aesthetic displays without too much intervention in the sense of context or explanations. It was believed that the aesthetic display of art was “the most accessible type of display for people without much education or training in looking at art works”⁷⁰ and could turn uneducated visitors into connoisseurs. The type of visitor that was taken as starting point for the design of the new script was, however, an idealised visitor: “one that existed only in the minds of the museum reformers.”⁷¹ It became clear that the newly designed museum with extended educational programmes was not sufficient to attract all groups in society: the tension between *ideal* and *real* use of the museum was increasing.

Building upon the idealised script that led to a direct, unmediated experience of the artwork, the post-war exhibition space tried to make the script even less visible. Noordegraaf argues that in the transparent, post-war museum, all the elements of the script served to enable a direct encounter.⁷² A non-hierarchical, flexible and efficient use of space led to the disappearance of human intervention and interpretation, which had previously been part of the museum visit.⁷³ The ‘invisible’ script shows characteristic similarities with most museums of modern art, which for example substituted the monumental staircase for an entrance at street

⁶³ Ibid., 60.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 75.

⁶⁵ Bennett, “Exhibitionary Complex,” 85.

⁶⁶ Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display*, 77.

⁶⁷ Bennett, “Exhibitionary Complex,” 85.

⁶⁸ Groys, *Art Power*, 44.

⁶⁹ Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display*, 89.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 93.

⁷¹ Ibid., 103.

⁷² Ibid., 149.

⁷³ Ibid., 176.

level.⁷⁴ Due to its inward-orientation, emptiness, uniform lighting and white walls, the post-war exhibition space became known as the white cube.⁷⁵

Everything that used to remind visitors of them being in a museum – monumental architecture, decoration, furniture – had to go, leaving the museum practically transparent. In addition, all clues as to how to interpret the works of art were removed.⁷⁶

Because of the elimination of all the decorations and historical references, the artworks acquired a unique and timeless character. However, it was not just the decoration that had disappeared: the viewer had become invisible as well. Whereas benches had been present in the nineteenth century museum,⁷⁷ the post-war exhibition eliminated everything that indicated human presence. Even railings, that were previously used to protect the artworks, were removed. Interestingly, Noordegraaf argued that “[a]pparently, visitors no longer needed restraining from touching the paintings. It can be argued then, that they had ‘internalised’ the proper reading of the museum script: they knew how to behave in front of art works.”⁷⁸

Although the invisible script was initially meant to provide for an unmediated experience, artists and art critics showed that a visit to the white cube was in fact highly mediated and not as transparent as intended.⁷⁹ Precisely due to the eliminated elements of the script, the post-war museum obtained an exclusive character that “was designed for people who were able to appreciate the art works without the help of tour guides.”⁸⁰

However, contradictory to the invisible script, the late 1970s also saw an expansion of the educational department. Informed by museum reformers of the early twentieth century who had recognised that visitor guidance was one of the principal means of involving visitors in the museum’s activities, the educational department gradually evolved into a large independent body.⁸¹ In order to appeal to a broader audience, so-called educational curators were appointed to create self-explanatory displays. Clear and accessible texts presented factual information about the works on display, which transformed the museum into a classroom. Eventually, it was this combination of two distinct aims in one script that led to the implosion of the white cube: an unmediated experience did not coalesce with popular education.⁸²

2.1 The Museum as Experience

Already in the course of the twentieth century, the visitor-centred perspective became the central focus of the museum script. More recently, as the model of the white cube merged with the model of the museum as classroom, the museum-as-experience arose.⁸³ Characterised by spectacular exhibition design, it aimed to

⁷⁴ Ibid., 157.

⁷⁵ Groys described the new tradition, which dictated that “an image must speak for itself; it must immediately convince the spectator, standing in silent contemplation, of its own value. The conditions in which the work is exhibited should be reduced to white walls and good lighting. Theoretical and narrative discourse is a distraction, and must stop” (Groys, *Art Power*, 44-45).

⁷⁶ Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display*, 161.

⁷⁷ For example, to prevent museum fatigue.

⁷⁸ Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display*, 162.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 193.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 193.

⁸¹ Ibid., 184.

⁸² Ibid., 193.

⁸³ The “museum as experience” emerged as a response to the white cube, in which the visitor was only regarded as a registering eye (Berendse, 2004, 168). Although one could argue that experiences have

“involve visitors with the objects on display and inform them on their context or function.”⁸⁴ In short, this meant that the various elements of the museum script were again deployed to mediate the museum visit. Noordegraaf states that in the museum-as-experience, “[t]he displays are no longer aimed at the transfer of meaning but at the experience evoked by the objects and their setting.”⁸⁵ The spectacular, evocative displays stage objects and information in a visual way and because decor and props constitute an essential part in the act of theatrical storytelling, they bear a striking resemblance to staging a theatrical production.⁸⁶

Moreover, an emerging awareness of the importance of audience participation contributed to a reconsideration of the long-established power dynamic between the museum and its visitor.⁸⁷ Instead of solely aiming to satisfy all attending visitors – however diverse⁸⁸ in their preferences and backgrounds – the visitor was now assigned a more active role. Most of all, this had to do with the urge to prove the societal relevance of the museum, and thereby to secure access to funding. By innovating and adapting to “changing user needs and economic realities,”⁸⁹ museums responded to the needs of attracting broader audiences and serving alternative forms of culture: two issues that each “place pressure on museums.”⁹⁰

The work of the French contemporary artist Cyprien Gaillard illustrates that audiences are increasingly positioned “in multiple roles as viewers, spectators, performers, and consumers.”⁹¹ Gaillard works across multiple media platforms and used his experience in filmmaking to stage installations as a (cinematic) event.⁹² He constructed, for example, a 72,000-bottle pyramid of beer in cardboard boxes at KW Berlin. Participants were free to climb, open, and consume as many bottles of ‘Efes’ beer as they desired, and as they were doing so, they functioned in the dual role of audience and performers. Interestingly, “rather than following a script or storyboard which would determine each shot or scene in a performance, the narrative unfolded through the unscripted performance of the visitors as they consumed and deconstructed the stage (i.e., pyramid) while drinking, talking, smoking, and interacting in small groups, much like reality television.”⁹³

The installation carried “an uncertain outcome with regard to how visitors experience and reflect on their individual and collective participation.”⁹⁴ Furthermore, as the images and stories made by visitors spread via YouTube and blogs, “social media created a discursive and sensory space that reflected the mobility of the visitor-performers as they moved in and out of the exhibition and across virtual

always been an innate part of the ‘product’ of the museum, the difference is that museums of the 20th century for the first time consciously adopted commercial strategies of display, in order to use them to legitimise themselves (Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display*, 233).

⁸⁴ Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display*, 193.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Emilie Sitzia, et al., “Defining Participation: Practices in the Dutch Artworld,” in *Museum Participation: New Directions for Audience Collaboration*, eds. Kayte McSweeney and Jen Kavanagh (MuseumsEtc, 2016), 39-67.

⁸⁸ “Publieksparticipatie in de culturele sector: e-brief, 2011,” Stichting Nederland Kennisland, accessed March 16, 2018. https://www.kl.nl/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/ebrief_publieksparticipatie_cultuur-sector.pdf.

⁸⁹ Arup, “Museums in the Digital Age,” 5.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Rectanus, “Moving Out,” 534.

⁹² Christopher Jobson, “The Recovery of Discovery by Cyprien Gaillard: A 72,000 bottle pyramid of beer,” *Colossal*, May 14, 2011, <http://www.thisiscoolossal.com/2011/05/cyprien-gaillard-beer/>.

⁹³ Rectanus, “Moving Out,” 533.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

spaces.”⁹⁵ In short, the act of inviting visitors to transform the exhibition space into a site for touristic consumption and destruction, destabilized the participants’ modes of experiencing and seeing. Moreover, because the installation undermined the representational authority of the white cube and problematized how audience interaction is situated, it added a critical layer to the museum-as-experience.

2.2 The Museum of the Future

As the audience gradually obtained a more active role, habits informed by the use of digital technologies had to be taken into account. Subsequently, as connectivity and digital literacy continue to become an ever more pervasive part of everyday life,⁹⁶ the digital becomes a more progressive and naturalised part in a large number of museums. *Museum 2015*, the fourth in a series of international conferences, introduced a panel discussion on the “post digital museum,”⁹⁷ stating that “[i]n the sector today more and more museums are strategizing for a multiplatform future, with digital becoming embedded within their plans, brands, policies and missions.” Furthermore, the report by *ARUP Foresight + Research + Innovation*⁹⁸ has highlighted a number of key trends that will continue to have a significant impact on the user experience and design of future museums. With the help of students from Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London, they created a module regarding the museum of the future. It describes several scenarios of museums in the year 2040, based on predictions concerning the “future museum-visitor’s experience, the design of the museum space and the museum’s position as an institution spanning various commercial sectors.”⁹⁹ It starts off with an accurate observation and raises relevant questions:

As we live increasingly mobile, digital and virtual lives — with personalized user-experiences and services at our fingertips — museums will have to find new ways to tell stories and engage their audiences. As digital experiences and physical spaces merge, who will be the audience and who the curator? Will museums function exclusively in the cultural sector or continue to expand into other markets? How and where will content be exhibited and delivered?¹⁰⁰

Evidently, the future museum-visitor’s experience is subject to ongoing changes in society. Jim Richardson, founder of *MuseumNext*,¹⁰¹ states that instead of the “one-fits-all visitor experience,”¹⁰² technology will contribute to the process of personalizing the museum. Subsequently, people with different interests can each have a tailored

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ *Museum 2015: The Agile Museum*, “Working in the Post Digital Museum,” panel discussion at January 15, 2015, <https://agilemuseum.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/working-in-the-post-digital-museum1.pdf>.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ “Arup Foresight is part of the Arup University. The team covers the entire knowledge value-chain, from understanding future trends and identifying areas for development, to delivering collaborative research programmes and pursuing opportunities for innovation” (Arup Foresight, accessed April 21, 2018, <http://www.driversofchange.com/>).

⁹⁹ Arup, “Museums in the Digital Age,” 5.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ “MuseumNext is a major conference on the future of museums and has taken place annually in Europe since 2009 with an engaged, loyal and dynamic audience working at senior management level in museums, galleries and cultural venues across the globe” (MuseumNext, accessed April 21, 2018, <https://www.museumnext.com/>).

¹⁰² Arup, “Museums in the Digital Age,” 5.

experience.¹⁰³ Furthermore, *Museum 2015* underscored that “digital media is now an innate part of museum practice,”¹⁰⁴ meaning that so-called new technology is no longer something that has to be adopted or should be viewed of as a risk.

Because digital technologies have a profound impact on our society and our way of communicating and behaving, museums need to take into account that the incorporation of novel strategies of display might easily appeal to their desired audience. Museums could, for example, incorporate new media art into the collection of the museum, although that immediately provokes another problem. After all, work that is interactive and process-based¹⁰⁵ tends to question the very notions of history, heritage, and time, which are exactly the notions upon which museums and galleries are based.¹⁰⁶ This often results in anxieties and restraints concerning contemporary changes, which is mainly expressed in “the apocalyptic terms of the ‘loss of meaning’.”¹⁰⁷ A risk of highlighting spectacle at the expense of knowledge is described by Seth Giddings: “visitors might, it was feared, pay attention only to the technical devices and a presentation of simplified or preformed knowledge rather than to the artefacts themselves [...]”¹⁰⁸ This is not to say that work that involves digital technology does not provide knowledge transmission, although it could be misdirected in opinion of the curator: instead of learning from the primary object of study,¹⁰⁹ “visitors might be distracted by the techniques and apparatus of display, interaction, and illusion.”¹¹⁰ Even though the fear of being overshadowed by eye-catching ‘gadgetry’ is still felt,¹¹¹ collectives of networked artist stimulate museums to ‘think outside the box’ – or more aptly, “outside the white cube.”¹¹² Contemporary artists, for example, encourage visitors “to move in relation to art objects, interact with other viewers, and reflect on the interconnections between agency and multisensory perception.”¹¹³

It is important to stress that instead of approaching interactivity as a new phenomenon, Huhtamo underscores the importance of acknowledging that interactivity has seeped into the fabric of contemporary life:

One only needs to think of smartphones, their countless “apps,” and their omnipresence in social spaces from city streets to private bedrooms. As tokens of always-on lifestyles, they have become so ubiquitous that they are not necessarily designated as interactive any longer – if interactivity is everything, it may just as well go unmentioned (and perhaps unnoticed).¹¹⁴

It is likely that these newly acquired habits affect someone’s behaviour in highly coded and regulated places like museums, “at least when it comes to the attitudes of

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Museum 2015, “Working in the Post Digital Museum.”

¹⁰⁵ Examples include work that involves networks, systems, and/or feedback.

¹⁰⁶ Charlie Gere, “New Media Art and the Gallery in the Digital Age,” in *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond: Curatorial Models for Digital Art*, ed. Christiane Paul (University of California Press, 2008), 14.

¹⁰⁷ Giddings, “SimKnowledge,” 146.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 148.

¹⁰⁹ “[W]hether that be an animal, a people, a natural phenomenon, or an artefact” (Giddings, “SimKnowledge,” 148).

¹¹⁰ Giddings, “SimKnowledge,” 149.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 146.

¹¹² Rectanus, “Moving Out,” 542.

¹¹³ Cristina Albu, *Mirror Affect: Seeing Self, Observing Others in Contemporary Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 15.

¹¹⁴ Huhtamo, “Exhibition Anthropology,” 260-261.

the generations that have grown up under the spell of interactivity from their earliest childhood.”¹¹⁵ But because interactivity in a museum context often leads to an erosion of the “boundaries separating the roles of consumers and producers,”¹¹⁶ it can become unclear what one is, and is not, allowed to do. Although the earlier explained model of the panopticon offers an approach by which a desired code of conduct is constituted,¹¹⁷ Huhtamo stresses that “overly emphasizing [the museum’s] nature as a surveillance machine would distress and alienate the visitors.”¹¹⁸ Instead, the museum should think of a way in which visitors are granted with “a sense of freedom”¹¹⁹ that at the same time reminds them “of the limits of what is allowed.”¹²⁰

Strikingly, as several interactive and user-friendly displays give visitors a chance to view and engage with the content, the viewer’s experience is still heavily influenced by spatial and curatorial choices. The traditional, linear¹²¹ museum visit admittedly shifted towards non-linear, circular or even random experiences, but visitor guidance or supplementary information are often still focused on an idealised museum visit during which the narrative is communicated as intended. Therefore, interactivity in the museum could be seen as something I would like to call restricted freedom. How this notion relates to scripted behaviour is the topic of next chapter.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 263.

¹¹⁶ Albu, *Mirror Affect*, 15.

¹¹⁷ Bennett, *Exhibitionary Complex*, 73.

¹¹⁸ Huhtamo, “Exhibition Anthropology,” 262.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ With a clear start and finish.

3. “What Museums Can Learn from Video Games”¹²²

The notion of restricted freedom bears a resemblance to “restricted play” as described by Robert Alan Brookey and Paul Booth.¹²³ It refers to the strategically limited interactivity that video games offer, in the same way that the exhibition space limits the experience of the visitor. Strikingly, it appears that both games and museums apply a similar approach of interaction design, which will be further investigated in this chapter.

To begin with, the definition of “game” should be clear. Jane McGonigal described the various forms, platforms and genres in which games can be subdivided, such as single-player, multiplayer, and massively multiplayer games.¹²⁴ Furthermore, there are games that can be played on a personal computer, a console, a handheld device, or a mobile phone – thereby not forgetting the games that are played “on fields or on courts, with cards or on boards.”¹²⁵ Besides, there are story-based games and games with no story, and there are games with and without scores. Some games challenge mostly our brains and some challenge mostly our bodies, and obviously, there are countless combinations of the two. It is important to mention that, when stripped away of differences and variations, “all games share four defining traits: a goal, rules, a feedback system, and voluntary participation.”¹²⁶

Gamification, defined as “the integration of gaming elements, mechanics, and frameworks into non-game situations and scenarios for training and motivational purposes,”¹²⁷ puts forward potential ideas for the museum sector to connect with “the next generation of museum-goers.”¹²⁸ Informed by the immense popularity of games in the mobile app store, museums have globally tapped into the opportunities that gamification offers. In practice, this means the development of interactive and mobile apps by which museums aspire to improve user experience and user engagement¹²⁹ as well as “to transform cultural interactions into a rewarding, fun, and memorable experience.”¹³⁰

However, games can serve as more than just as gimmick or added layer to the existing museum visit. As mentioned in the introduction, Groys described the exhibition space as narrative space¹³¹ and it is exactly this characteristic that establishes an interesting parallel with (virtual) games. Furthermore, Henry Jenkins stated that game designers “design worlds and sculpt spaces”¹³² – a given that

¹²² Giddings, “SimKnowledge.”

¹²³ Robert Alan Brookey and Paul Booth, “Restricted Play: Synergy and the Limits of Interactivity in The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King Video Game,” *Games and Culture* 1, no. 3 (July 2006): 214–230. By analysing The Lord of the Rings (LOTR): The Return of the King video game, the authors discovered that interactivity as stimulated in the game is in fact devised to “incorporate the player into the LOTR franchise” (ibid., 226).

¹²⁴ Jane McGonigal, *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World* (The Penguin Press, 2011), 20.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 21. For further elaboration on what exactly is a game, see chapter one of McGonigal's *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World* (The Penguin Press, 2011), 19–27.

¹²⁷ Larry Johnson, et al, “Games and Gamification” in *NMC Horizon Report: 2015 Museum Edition* (Austin, Texas: The New Media Consortium, 2015), 38.

¹²⁸ Johnson, “Games and Gamification,” 38.

¹²⁹ Sebastian Deterding, et al., “Gamification: Using Game-Design Elements in Non-Gaming Contexts,” *CHI 2011: Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (ACM, 2011).

¹³⁰ Johnson, “Games and Gamification,” 38.

¹³¹ Groys, *Art Power*, 44.

¹³² Henry Jenkins, “Game Design as Narrative Architecture,” in *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance and Game*, ed. Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin (MIT Press, 2004), 121.

corresponds to the process of designing a physical exhibition space. Clara Fernández-Vara underscores the similarity between narratives and virtual games by stating that “[s]tories take place in a spatial dimension”, and “[s]patiality is also one of the defining qualities of digital environments.”¹³³ Although it goes without saying that paintings or novels can also represent space, digital environments offer the extended possibility of truly navigating those spaces.¹³⁴

3.1 Spatial Stories

A story can be described as “a controlled experience; the author consciously crafts it, choosing certain events precisely, in a certain order, to create a story with maximum impact.”¹³⁵ Spatial stories, however, are constructed in another way. By combining various episodes or fragments, a compelling whole can be created “without contributing significantly to the plot development.”¹³⁶ This can result in evocative spaces, which “reference stories or genre narratives that the player may already be familiar with.”¹³⁷ Thus, as the story is not explicitly told, it is instead based on the player’s former narrative experiences. A similar process is defined by Rectanus, who describes that museum visitors interact “with cultural sites by drawing on their past experience with other sites of memory-making.”¹³⁸ Thereby, an interesting parallel between behaviour in physical and virtual spaces is illustrated.

It goes without saying that spatial stories cause struggles for game designers, as they try to “determine how much plot will create a compelling framework and how much freedom players can enjoy at a local level without totally derailing the larger narrative trajectory.”¹³⁹ When translated to an exhibition environment (by filling in ‘knowledge’ instead of ‘plot’ and ‘visitors’ instead of ‘players’), this would mean that there is no ‘ideal’ completion or outcome of the museum visit: instead of privileging plot development, spatial exploration comes first. In game theories, this type of game is referred to as a sandbox: a genre or “style of game in which minimal character limitations are placed on the gamer, allowing the gamer to roam and change a virtual world at will.”¹⁴⁰ In other words, the ability to manipulate the surrounding as well as to interact with objects in the space transforms the player into a performer.¹⁴¹ It is not surprising, however, that “players [still] restore a specific behaviour,”¹⁴² that is, they follow a script that may be encouraged by the game.¹⁴³

¹³³ Clara Fernandez-Vara, "Game Spaces Speak Volumes: Indexical Storytelling," *Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) International Conference: Think Design Play* (January 2011).

¹³⁴ Or as in theatre, the “[s]et design is the frame where the story or experience exists.” More importantly, it “gives a frame to the audience on how to watch the performance” (Van de Zandschulp, Klasien, “‘Slowing Down’: Storytelling in Set Design for Theatre – 5 Questions For Theun Mosk,” *Medium*, October 21, 2016, <https://medium.com/interactive-innovative-storytelling/slowng-down-stories-in-theatre-5-questions-for-theun-mosk-bf5edab938dd>).

¹³⁵ Greg Costikyan, “Where Stories End and Games Begin,” *Game Developer* (September 2000): 44.

¹³⁶ Jenkins, “Narrative Architecture,” 124.

¹³⁷ Fernández-Vara, “Indexical Storytelling.”

¹³⁸ Rectanus, “Moving Out,” 530.

¹³⁹ Jenkins, “Narrative Architecture,” 126.

¹⁴⁰ Techopedia, “Sandbox.”

¹⁴¹ Fernández-Vara, “Indexical Storytelling.”

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Brookey and Booth (2006, 218) explain that “the video game player is subject to the limitations of a game’s structure – limitations that are predetermined and proscribed by the people who design and produce the game. In addition, rarely do the choices in video games significantly change the structure of the game; rather, they might shift the specific details of a character’s attributes or the scenic features. Granted, some forms of video games allow the player a great deal of latitude in the designed game play. Yet, in the case of produced and manufactured games, [...] the player is not given the agency to change the game’s structure and design. In fact, such agency would undermine the purpose of mass producing

3.2 Restricted Freedom

While games and stories may bear an evident resemblance to each other concerning the spatial dimension, it is important to note that it could also be argued that the specific demands of both cause an inevitable conflict:

Divergence from a story's path is likely to make for a less satisfying story: restricting a player's freedom of action is likely to make for a less satisfying game.¹⁴⁴

From this point of view, it seems that interactivity as stimulated in a sandbox opposes narrative in its most central sense, as "narrative flows under the direction of the author, while interactivity depends on the player for motive power."¹⁴⁵ Although this so-called motive power (physical and/or mental input of the player) is crucial in an interactive game, in the end it is still the designer who determines the *degree* of interactivity, namely, by providing the content and the (virtual) boundaries of the game. Moreover, Brookey and Booth underscore that "[i]nteractive video games are still games,"¹⁴⁶ referring to the prescribed set of rules that regulate how the game is played: any player who either resists, ignores or reinterprets these rules, "is most likely to lose the game."¹⁴⁷ Therefore, "successful interaction in the context of game play" is not so much an effort of bringing "meaning to the text, but rather one in which the player follows the text very closely."

Therefore, the sandbox can be seen as a less strict interpretation of scripted behaviour as performed within the museum, as both games and museums grant a restricted freedom. There are, however, several models of narrative possibilities that each have their effect on the extent of player empowerment. Jenkins distinguished four types¹⁴⁸ that each can be recognized by certain design choices and the organization of spatiality. One that grants most freedom is referred to as "emergent narrative,"¹⁴⁹ which is therefore most relevant with regard to interactivity in the museum. Moreover, Jenkins cited Don Carson, Senior Show Designer for Walt Disney Imagineering, who suggested that game designers could learn a great deal by studying techniques of "environmental storytelling."¹⁵⁰ This concept can be described as the process of implementing the story element into the physical surrounding a visitor walks or rides through, for "[i]t is the physical space that does much of the work of conveying the story the designers are trying to tell."¹⁵¹ Or, in the words of Fernández-Vara, "a general term to refer to how spaces can evoke and construct a narrative experience while navigating a space."¹⁵²

Moreover, Huhtamo describes 3D-cinemas or amusement parks that encourage behavioural gestures "as part of the thrill and also of the total experience," which illustrate the evocative spaces already described above:

and marketing a uniform product; game manufacturers have a vested interest in creating a specific game experience and marketing that experience."

¹⁴⁴ Costikyan, "Where Stories End and Games Begin," 44.

¹⁴⁵ Ernest Adams, "Three Problems for Interactive Storytellers," *Gamasutra*, no. 144 (December 1999).

¹⁴⁶ Brookey and Booth, "Restricted Play," 218.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Evoked, enacted, embedded and emergent narratives (Jenkins, "Narrative Architecture," 129).

¹⁴⁹ Jenkins, "Narrative Architecture," 129. An example of an emergent narrative was already given by the installation of Gaillard, wherein the narrative of the exhibition space unfolded itself through the unscripted performance of the visitor.

¹⁵⁰ Jenkins, "Narrative Architecture," 122; Fernández-Vara, "Indexical Storytelling."

¹⁵¹ Jenkins, "Narrative Architecture," 123.

¹⁵² Fernández-Vara, "Indexical Storytelling."

[t]he visitors know the codes from previous experiences, stories, or pictures they have seen, and want to activate them because others have done so before them. How many of them do so as a form of ritualistic enactment, as an involuntary reflex, or because they believe it possible to actually touch something is difficult to judge.¹⁵³

Although it makes sense for game designers to draw inspiration from parties who design physical experiences, it is important to emphasize that the degree of control in shaping one's experience is incomparable. There is a crucial difference between designing an amusement park on the one hand and designing a game on the other: the former is designed for a visitor, whose experience is more or less structured by physical boundaries of the attractions, whereas the latter is designed for an active agent who can "touch, grab, and fling things about at will."¹⁵⁴ In this respect, visitors of the amusement park share the same restricted freedom as museum-goers: both have "some freedom to negotiate the experience – to decide their routes, rhythms, and what to watch"¹⁵⁵ – albeit framed within a premeditated and controlled environment.

Interestingly, Fernández-Vara cites Michael Nitsche who "builds on Jenkins' concepts of narrative by qualifying these devices as *evocative narrative elements*," or "building blocks which structure the player's experience [...]."¹⁵⁶ In his view, every player is empowered to make sense of the story in a personal way:

The aim of narrative elements like these is not to tell a linear story, but to provide evocative means for the interactor to comprehend the virtual space and events within it, and generate context and significance in order to make the space and the experience of it more meaningful.¹⁵⁷

Subsequently, Fernández-Vara concludes that the notion of storytelling might not be apt to describe the strategy wherein a narrative is "based on leaving traces and affecting the space, either on the part of the designer or the player,"¹⁵⁸ because technically, the story of the game is not told. Instead, the notion of story-building could be used to describe the collaborative activity wherein both designer and player contribute to the narrative. Story-building seems to defy narrative traditions, as "it is not structured, it rather lets the player pick up on the different signs at her leisure depending on her willingness to interpret them [...]." When one transports this line of thought to the museum visit, the notion of story-building provides for an interesting correspondence with Noordegraaf's earlier cited argument on museum presentations and the fact that it is a product of both its designers *and* its users.¹⁵⁹

While the notion of story-building could be valuable to the museum discourse, it seems that professionals in the field rather prefer storytelling – at least for now. There is, however, a growing awareness regarding empowerment of the visitor. An interesting example is provided by the event *Interactive Storytelling in the*

¹⁵³ Huhtamo, "Exhibition Anthropology," 268.

¹⁵⁴ Jenkins, "Narrative Architecture," 123.

¹⁵⁵ Huhtamo, "Exhibition Anthropology," 269.

¹⁵⁶ Fernández-Vara, "Indexical Storytelling."

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display*, 17.

Museum.¹⁶⁰ Strikingly, by using the adjective 'interactive' in the title, it questions the often-unidirectional manner of storytelling. The event examined unconventional interactions and exhibits that each construct stories in unique ways. One of the speakers was Theo Meereboer, lecturer on the Reinwardt Academie, who doubted the technological-driven interactivity that is so often found in museums. Presumably due to educational motives and curators who do not want to hand over their authority to the public, interactivity in a museum is almost never ubiquitous but rather comes down to the incorporation of touch screens, buttons or new media art installations.¹⁶¹ In this way, it is most likely to guarantee (a certain amount of) knowledge transfer towards the visitors, which also means that visitors are not given the agency to influence the experience. Meereboer argued that instead, we need to make stories together. In order to do so, museums should design social interaction rather than (multi)media, which makes the museum visit conducive to emergent narratives. In the end, media in museums should shift from main activity – or so-called crowd puller – to a rather supportive role during the museum visit. Consequently, it could even obviate the common fear of distraction as explained in chapter two.

This chapter has discussed striking parallels between behaviour as performed in a physical exhibition space and in a virtual game. It has shown that the notion of restricted freedom can be linked to the sandbox, which offers a less scripted (player) experience. Subsequently, this approach could be of value to the museum visit. Now, turning to the empirical chapter of this thesis, I will zoom in on two case studies to examine in what way the notions of script and sandbox are relevant in today's museums of contemporary art.

¹⁶⁰ The event took place on April 19th, 2018. The Rotterdam-based initiative *Night Shift* organises monthly debate nights focusing on the relationship between cultural organisations and their audiences. For this edition, they joined forces with another meet-up group called *Interactive Storytelling* that discusses innovative storytelling projects. The events by Night Shift take place in Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam.

¹⁶¹ Peter Higgins, "Total Media," 305-326; Beryl Graham, "Open and Closed Systems. New Media Art in Museums and Galleries," 449-471; Nancy Proctor, "Mobile in Museums. From Interpretation to Conversation," 499-525; all in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Media*, First Edition (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2015).

4. The Case Studies

*The only way to understand art is to go to a museum and look at it.*¹⁶²

In line with the quote by French painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir, as mentioned above, novel strategies of display can only be studied by going to a museum and experience them. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the (physical) experience of the museum visit. It pays attention to the exhibition design in particular, referring to the order and arrangement of the objects, the floor plan, the lighting, the various display techniques, the protection of the art works, and the different means of visitor guidance. Both exhibitions under discussion, however, vary considerably in size as well as use different strategies of display. Therefore, it is necessary to provide a detailed description of both, highlighting their distinctive elements. The next and final chapter will subsequently relate the two case studies to each other, and review the issues brought up in my discussion of the museum visit.

Before I start, it is important to underscore that the case studies are incomparable in terms of scope, referring to space as well as content: as Stedelijk Base is presented as the art-historical canon of the twentieth-century, it serves as the core element of the Stedelijk Museum that therefore is likely to attract the majority of visitors of the museum. In contrast, Sensory Spaces is tucked away between the wardrobe and the museum shop in the entrance area of Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, offering a nice and free addition to the planned museum visit. It speaks for itself that the significant difference has a far-reaching impact on audience behaviour, even if only in matters of time spent inside the exhibition. Despite the clear difference, however, the case studies share an experimental spatial design that allowed me to study novel strategies of display.

4.1 Sensory Spaces 13 – Anne Hardy¹⁶³

The installation that Anne Hardy (UK, 1970) created for Sensory Spaces was on show from the 10th of February until the 27th of May 2018 (see figure 6 on page 29). Hardy aimed to install an immersive work that would give visitors the feeling of entering a dream-like, animated world “in which objects appear to lead lives of their own.”¹⁶⁴ Hardy is mainly known for her staged spaces that she used to construct in her own studio. The photos that are taken in the process of dismantling these spaces show complex, imaginary environments, suggesting that something had happened in them, although what exactly was never clear.

In 2013, Hardy decided that the presentational form of her work had to change, in order to remove the barrier between the artwork and the viewer. Therefore, she now presents the physical installations as the work itself, calling them “FIELD works.” The created worlds draw on Hardy’s signature multimedia palette, combining objects, light, colour, and sound. Another essential element in her oeuvre is spatiality. She usually sets to work with “a mapping process, going in search of spaces and pieces of land that in some way are situated somewhere ‘in between’.”¹⁶⁵ Hardy sees potential in these often forgotten, overlooked places as it triggers “our

¹⁶² Johan Idema, *How to Visit an Art Museum. Tips for a Truly Rewarding Visit* (BIS Publishers, 2014).

¹⁶³ Temporary exhibition at Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. Date of visit: April 19th, 2018.

¹⁶⁴ Boijmans, hand-out, 5.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

imagination to think of something new.”¹⁶⁶ For the installation in Rotterdam, Hardy and her sound engineer sourced the port city on a bike, approaching “the landscape of the city like a gigantic instrument.”¹⁶⁷ Hardy experiences the city as:

“an entity that is continually in motion and transforming, leaving behind all kinds of materials, sounds and experiences in different places, like a sea which ebbs and flows and washes all sorts of things on to a beach and sweeps them away again.”¹⁶⁸

As part of her sourcing trips through the city, Hardy often takes discarded objects from the street to repurpose them in her scenes. It is the city “where she collects materials, sounds and stories; building blocks for her new urban narratives.”¹⁶⁹ In particular places that have no clear function (anymore) gain her attention, which she calls “pockets of wild space.” She defines this notion as: “[p]atches of space that are not aware of or obedient to rules that might govern the surrounding spaces; voids in the city that are a bit feral since ‘anything’ might be possible here; [...]”¹⁷⁰

Hardy’s installations build upon this idea of possibility by presenting a space in such a way that it still leaves something to the viewer’s interpretation and imagination. She described her new FIELD work as a “sentient space,” which aims to give visitors the feeling that the work is performing for them: “it is a sentient, poetic being with which you can spend time, but can never fully understand.”¹⁷¹ In other words, it strives to completely immerse the visitor and to stimulate a sensitive experience. By means of a set of specific conditions that Hardy devises, a rather intimate relationship between visitor and artwork comes to life. Most importantly, the environment speaks to all the senses from the moment one enters, starting by the request to take off ones shoes and to continue in stockinged feet.

4.1.1 Spatial Characteristics

A billboard largely screens off the entrance of the installation, but it has an opening one can walk through to go inside (see figure 7+8 on page 30). When entering the installation, the space appears as a reckless fantasy with all kinds of objects scattered around. The installation takes up more or less fifteen by ten metres and although there is no (specific) route to follow, the free space in between the objects easily indicates the possible paths to walk on. Strikingly, the space has a gently sloping floor that is covered with an orange carpet. Kirsten Geekie described the installation as “a post-apocalyptic world where the only thing left is colour,”¹⁷² referring to the floor that blends in with the walls and ceiling, which are both painted in warm colours such as shades of orange and dusty pink, thereby resembling “the shades of a smog-filtered sunset.”¹⁷³

One does not need to enter the installation to hear the soundscape that plays

¹⁶⁶ Art Tube, “Sensory Spaces 13 - Anne Hardy.”

¹⁶⁷ Boijmans, hand-out, 7.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 9.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 11.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁷² Kirsten Geekie, “Anne Hardy creates a post-apocalyptic world where the only thing left is colour,” *Frame*, March 8, 2018, <https://www.frameweb.com/news/anne-hardy-creates-post-apocalyptic-world-where-only-thing-left-is-colour>.

¹⁷³ Geekie, “post-apocalyptic world.”

ANNE HARDY

**MUSEUM BOIJMANS
VAN BEUNINGEN**



SENSORY SPACES

**10.02.18
27.05.18**

Figure 6: Cover hand-out "Sensory Spaces 13 - Anne Hardy." © Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, 2018.



Figure 7: Entrance of the installation, side view. Picture taken by Tanja van Zoest on April 19, 2018.



Figure 8: Entrance of the installation, front view. Picture taken by Tanja van Zoest on April 19, 2018.

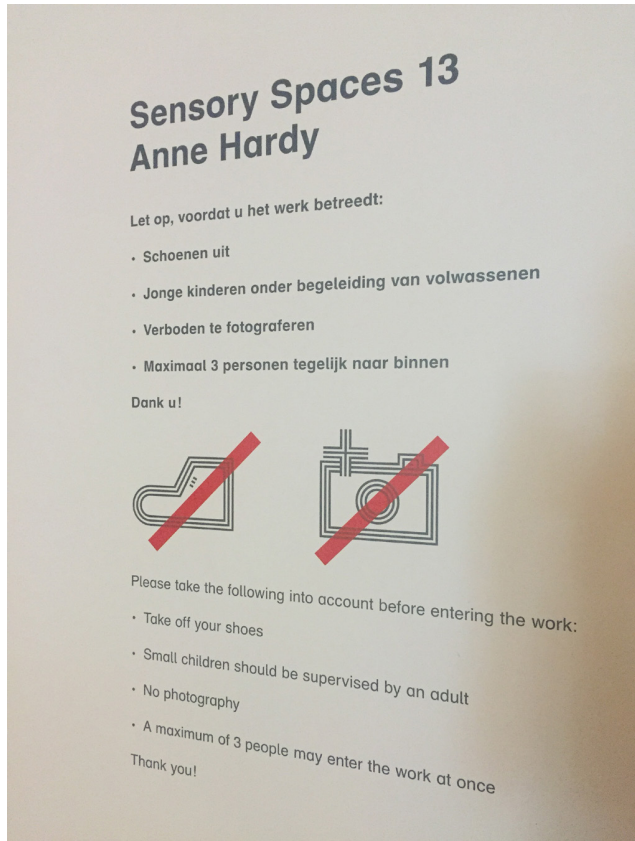


Figure 9: 'Rules' upon entering the installation. Picture taken by Tanja van Zoest on April 19, 2018.

inside – some sounds get through the walls and/or entrance of the installation, as a prelude to what happens inside – but a truly immersive experience is only generated by physically being surrounded by the soundscape. The sounds are quite intense and sometimes even ominous, with a certain cadence that slowly increases and decreases again. Some sounds were hard to identify, whereas others made me think of rain, a noisy scooter, squawking seagulls, tingling shells and gusts of wind. The peak of intensity is reached by the sound of a thunderstorm, which almost awakens a sense of fear due to its loud volume.¹⁷⁴ Long ribbons of videotape dance in the wind of a nearby table fan, and enforce the re-enactment of tempestuous nature. Furthermore, the soundscape and the lightning have been programmed in such a way that it feels like the space is slowly changing – “like an animated but unstable world that moves in time with [you].”¹⁷⁵

While the separate objects such as silver-sprayed cans, straws, concrete blocks, table fans, and whipped cream chargers might offer the viewer a moment of recognition, the abstract sculptures of twisted iron tubes and curled shapes of PUR foam create confusion. Interestingly, the assemblage of found objects comes to represent multiple histories that give these household objects both mystery and meaning. According to Geekie, “Hardy is able to use these imagined histories to further complicate the relationships between the various elements of the intriguing installation.”¹⁷⁶ For example, the convergence between the objects and the colourscape misleads the viewer in such a way that one is abandoned by the known and instead, is welcomed as “a fellow misplaced actor.”¹⁷⁷ All together, the space floats between real and imaginary, as it feels strange and familiar at the same time.

4.1.2 Artistic Experience and Reception

Hardy experiments with a non-linear, open-ended visit. There are, however, some prescriptions in order to regulate the visit to a certain extent. Hardy has come up with very specific conditions for visitors to experience the artwork: as mentioned above, you must take off your shoes before going in, and only three people are allowed to be inside at the same time (see figure 7 and 9 on page 30). Both conditions are initiated to create a more intimate relationship between visitor and artwork. Entering the room without shoes makes you feel slightly more vulnerable and it presumably makes you more open to what you are seeing. However the second rule is not strictly maintained, the presence of only a small number of fellow visitors substantially benefits one's individual experience as “the objects are given meaning through the relationships with their surroundings and with the presence of visitors.”¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, Kirsten Geekie described that “[i]n response to the presence of the viewer's body as well as that of other visitors, the installation is always shifting both in meaning and in form.”¹⁷⁹ Consequently, enough personal space will contribute to one's ability to merge into the work, as other visitors might distract one's focus.

According to Nina Folkersma, the curator involved in Sensory Spaces 13, those who visit the work of Hardy “get the feeling that they are walking around in a

¹⁷⁴ As I read later on in the accompanying booklet, the audio score is played through a quadraphonic (4-channel) audio system, which gives the sound a very precise spatial structure (Boijmans, hand-out, 7-9).

¹⁷⁵ Boijmans, hand-out, 9.

¹⁷⁶ Geekie, “post-apocalyptic world.”

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

dream or hallucination.”¹⁸⁰ The artist herself explained that “when you walk into this orange and pink space, it is unlikely that it is something familiar to you. So it’s also about destabilizing you in a way, but destabilizing in a specific kind of way: into a specific kind of mood.”¹⁸¹ The rustling curtains of videotape, the curled shapes on the ground, and the noises that sound repetitively and at the same time reassuringly add up to an experience that cannot be captured in words – “just as we are unable to recount dreams.” Folkersma states that there is something magical about it – something that goes against the usual vocabulary and can be better expressed in sounds that could help to capture the essence of this experience, like *phhhhhhhhhhh phossshhhhh crrhhhhzzz mn huaooogh*.¹⁸²

I spent more or less 30 minutes inside the installation, trying to detect possible patterns or loops in the soundscape as well as to extensively absorb the physical surroundings. While I was inside, several other visitors joined and left me again. Most people only spent about two or three minutes inside the installation, walking around with their hands behind their back. I noticed that each visitor chose their own way of navigating, ranging from attentively going from corner to corner, studying the objects that were lying on the floor, to rather enjoying the overview of the space. When three young men entered, something interesting happened. Firstly, the loop of the soundscape had just reached its peak and slowly went towards fade-out. Although there is a short silence between fade-out and fade-in, it now seemed to take a long time because the new visitors were expectantly looking around as they tried to make sense of the space. I noticed that one of the guys had been in here before, as he tried to explain to his friends that the work is about emptiness, space and time. Secondly, despite my attempt to observe as discretely as possible, I was openly surprised when one of them walked through a ribboned curtain that hung in the centre of the space. Certainly, the instructions upon entering the installation did not mention whether or not one could touch the objects, but I had unconsciously assumed that all objects were meant to remain untouched. His action made me doubtful: could I move the cans that were lying on the floor? Unfortunately, the fact that I was still in a museum with an attendant just outside the installation restrained me from trying. It made me wonder, however, why such an experimental setting mainly evoked a type of behaviour that is known from the traditional museum visit as described earlier.

After I had put on my shoes again, I approached the attendant to query whether he had witnessed striking behaviour while watching over the installation. Clearly having noticed me spending a rather long time inside, he estimated that only one out of 30 people really took the time to absorb the environment, for example by sitting down or by walking several rounds. He seemed surprised that, in the two and a half months that the installation is thus far on show, nothing unusual had happened. Surprisingly, he was not sure whether visitors could touch the sculptures or objects - although he thought that it was not really possible to break anything anyway - or why visitors were not allowed to take pictures. Moreover, he shared that most of the time, he is not really able to oversee what is happening inside: he can only look through the opening of the billboard once in a while.

¹⁸⁰ Boijmans, hand-out, 9.

¹⁸¹ Art Tube, “Sensory Spaces 13 - Anne Hardy.”

¹⁸² This is the subtitle of Hardy’s work *Falling and Walking (phhhhhhhhhhh phossshhhhh crrhhhhzzz mn huaooogh)*. See <https://vimeo.com/229179525> for an excerpt of documentation.

4.1.3 Reviews of the Exhibition

The installation has been recommended by several agendas of both online and offline channels,¹⁸³ but the number of (critical) reviews is very limited. The Belgian magazine *H ART*,¹⁸⁴ however, published a profound review by Machteld Leij in which she describes the work as an “oversized diorama.”¹⁸⁵ In general, she refers to Hardy’s installations as cinematic decors that are rich in suggestively placed objects: although their placement suggests recent use, it is obvious that it is in fact a fictional space. The act of viewing is expanded by a physical experience, in which one is exposed to visual and auditory stimuli. Interestingly, Leij mentions the link between this “feast for the senses” and the experience of going to an amusement park, wherein similar incentives are paramount. Yet, she also sees an important difference: “Hardy uses what she finds on the street. For this installation she collected sounds and abandoned objects in the area of Rotterdam.” It seems that all those packaging materials, which she painted silver and subsequently scattered all over the floor of the exhibition space, say something about our way of life and in particular, about how we consume and use our environment. Leij thinks that Hardy wants to convey a message, instead of solely aiming to reach a certain effect as is the case in most amusement parks.

Above all, it seems that Hardy encourages her visitors to perceive actively. Leij shows her critical attitude by questioning how this turns out in practice, and whether people really understand what the artist is aiming for. She describes a group of students that “flutters through the installation like a bunch of frightened sparrows and screams loudly as the sound from the boxes swells until it becomes almost unbearable. Hurriedly they hurry back to the exit.”¹⁸⁶ If nothing else, the installation serves as a refreshing wake-up call for anyone who thinks that the museum is a place for quiet contemplation. Nevertheless, Leij wonders whether it is sufficient for Hardy to express her love for the abandoned objects found in the fringes of the city, which she presents so beautifully and theatrically. Although she understands that most artists like to keep their work subtle and suggestive – instead of being portrayed as moralists – she believes that it would benefit Hardy’s work if she would combine her love for tactility with areas of friction, so that visitors can truly cling themselves to relevant issues. Only then, a sense of necessity arises. She concludes her review by saying that Hardy already sharpens the senses convincingly, but the next step would be to involve the brain.¹⁸⁷

4.1.4 The Sandbox of Sensory Spaces

By being part of the freely accessible entrance area of the museum, Sensory Spaces functions both literally and symbolically as a portal to another world, in which artists get the chance to experiment with(in) the boundaries of the given space. It is worth mentioning that such an experimental format of presentation is allocated in a place that is easily overlooked – it is almost as if its allocation communicates a hidden

¹⁸³ See *All This* (<https://seeallthis.com/exhibition/sensory-spaces-13-anne-hardy/>); *Uitagenda Rotterdam* (<https://www.uitagendarotterdam.nl/agenda/s/sensory-spaces-13-anne-hardy/>); *Museumkaart* (<https://www.museumkaart.nl/museum/Museum+Boijmans+Van+Beuningen/Sensory+Spaces+13+-+Anne+Hardy.aspx>); *Ammodo* (<https://www.ammodo.org/agenda/sensory-spaces-13-anne-hardy/>).

¹⁸⁴ *H ART*, since 2006 a magazine for contemporary art in Belgium and surroundings, publishes every three weeks an edition with news from the field of contemporary visual arts.

¹⁸⁵ Machteld Leij, “Anne Hardy in Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam: De zintuigen gefêteerd,” *H ART* #179, March 22, 2018.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

message, by which the curators of the museum clarify that they do not see Sensory Spaces as belonging to the core of the museum. Instead, it obtains the function of a rather amusing side-program, in which bold and daring formats can be tested.

The spectacular exhibition design of Hardy's installation confuses visitors in such a way that it is unclear how one should or should not behave. It is precisely this dubiety that is needed in order to stimulate one to associate freely, as was already put into words by Kevin Lynch in 1960: "a landscape whose every rock tells a story may make difficult the creation of fresh stories."¹⁸⁸ Although originally written in the context of urban design, the same suggestion applies to exhibition designers in the sense that they "should not attempt to totally predetermine the uses and meaning of the space they create."¹⁸⁹ As Hardy is not trying to lead visitors through her installation in a premeditated manner but instead places minimal limitations on to the visitor, her strategy fits seamlessly into this line of thought. Moreover, these characteristics bear a resemblance to the notion of sandbox. Hardy motivated her open-ended approach in a video accompanying the installation, in which she recounts:

Every space that we move through, has a way that you move through it, there are rules to... you know, how we behave, how we use space physically but also in our bodily actions and behaviour. So I feel like, yeah, this in between space is a sense of freedom from that. Not because we are oppressed in our daily life but I think it is important to have a space where something new can happen, what you don't expect.¹⁹⁰

Hardy's animated world offers an alternative and immersive experience, which is "very much about the present" according to Folkersma. Moreover, it is about how we experience our present world in which a kind of parallel lives exist: "[y]ou have a life online, on the internet, and there is life in reality. We can all have different experiences because we all live in our own bubbles. Perhaps [Hardy's] work is a kind of subtle way of alerting us to this."¹⁹¹

Interestingly, both descriptions of Folkersma and Hardy seem to suggest an alternative reality. Also differentiating between two worlds is McGonigal, who questions "[w]here, in the real world, is that gamer sense of being fully alive, focused, and engaged in every moment?"¹⁹² According to her, the real world does not offer "the carefully designed pleasures, the thrilling challenges, and the powerful social bonding"¹⁹³ which are certainly afforded by virtual environments. In other words, reality does not motivate people as effectively, as reality is not engineered to maximize one's potential.¹⁹⁴ Hardy's installation, however, certainly aims to motivate people in an innovating way and can therefore be seen as an attempt to unify both worlds.

The installation is an almost theatrical production, in which decor and props become an essential part in the act of storytelling. Although it is clear that the physical space does much of the work of conveying the story that Hardy designed, it

¹⁸⁸ Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1960), 6.

¹⁸⁹ Jenkins, "Narrative Architecture," 129.

¹⁹⁰ Art Tube, "Sensory Spaces 13 - Anne Hardy."

¹⁹¹ Art Tube, "Sensory Spaces 13 - Anne Hardy."

¹⁹² McGonigal, *Reality is Broken*, 3.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

is questionable whether there is truly a story to transmit. As was described in chapter two, the museum-as-experience uses the objects and their setting to evoke a certain experience instead of utilizing them to transfer meaning. Consequently, visitors have to contribute to the process of meaning making, which is exactly the case in Hardy's installation: it conveys an experience by means of evocative elements. In contrast to truly evocative spaces, however, the installation does not stimulate a ritualistic enactment because of its abstract and destabilizing elements. It is unlikely that visitors know the codes concerning how to behave, as the experience gained inside the installation seldom refers to earlier gained experiences. That being said, the fact that the installation is located in a museum – instead of, for example, in public space – obviously informs audience behaviour.

As explained in chapter three, spatial stories are not focused on one particular outcome or plot, but instead allow the visitor to roam (and change) the space at will. In this specific installation, it is to a certain extent that one is able to manipulate the surroundings. Because audience members can choose their own routes as well as what to watch, they become visitor-performers in an emergent narrative that they are constructing themselves. Interaction with the objects, however, does not go much further than walking through the ribboned curtain and perhaps questioning (or even testing) whether one is allowed to touch or move the props. Therefore, the notion of restricted freedom can be used to describe the strategically limited interaction that frames the visitor's ability to explore the space.

4.2 Stedelijk Base at Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam¹⁹⁵

Since the re-opening of the Stedelijk Museum in 2012, the museum has consecutively initiated several wings¹⁹⁶ as well as the entrance area in 2017, which has been metamorphosed into an open and welcoming meeting place.¹⁹⁷ On December 16, 2017, "the museum's revised spatial design"¹⁹⁸ was completed by the opening of Stedelijk Base. The long-awaited exhibition consists of two parts: *Part 1* can be found in the basement and presents art and design from 1880-1980, whereas *Part 2* is located on the first floor. Here, visitors are offered a selection of art from the 1980s to now. This latter part of the presentation will be completely redesigned each year, and it is important to note that only the spatial design of *Part 1* has been designed by Rem Koolhaas. Although a similar associative and non-hierarchical layout has been used to present the artworks, the spatial design does not resemble the labyrinth of downstairs. Instead, the ambiance is quieter as works are displayed on large, white walls. Given my particular focus on novel strategies of display and its relationship to audience behaviour, I have only focused on *Part 1*.

Stedelijk Base (from now on referred to as Base) is a unique presentation for the museum as it "is the first-ever major, integrated presentation of art and design in the history of the museum."¹⁹⁹ The collection includes but is not limited to paintings,

¹⁹⁵ Permanent exhibition at Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Date of Visit: February 27th, 2018 and April 12, 2018.

¹⁹⁶ "On the ground floor of the historic building, STEDELIJK TURNS presents a changing program of collection displays, each showcasing new perspectives, research, and topical themes. It sheds light on hidden or suppressed stories, and unseen or rarely exhibited artworks. STEDELIJK NOW, which occupies the first floor, is home to a roster of temporary exhibitions" (Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, "The Collection, Stedelijk Base.").

¹⁹⁷ Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, "Feestelijke heropening entreegebied"; Smit, "Nieuw entree Stedelijk."

¹⁹⁸ Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, "The Collection, Stedelijk Base."

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

sculptures, installations, furniture, everyday objects, accessories, photography, drawings, and video art. Interestingly, there is no hierarchy between the various media, as all works are in dialogue with each other. Former director of the museum Beatrix Ruf even called the non-hierarchical presentation “post-medium”²⁰⁰ and mentions the Internet as metaphor: as one can surf many side paths online, this presentation similarly enables one to discover the dialogue between artworks. It highlights common threads between various art forms while it also provides room to evoke cross-connections and shared narratives.

The exhibition presents nearly 700 works, which are grouped around historical movements, social themes and iconic artists, such as Pablo Picasso, Piet Mondriaan, Kazimir Malevich, Gerrit Rietveld, Ed van der Elsken, Sheila Hicks, Lee Bontecou, Mark Rothko, Jeff Koons, Maarten Baas, Nan Goldin and Marlene Dumas amongst many others. Although Base represents the art historical canon of the twentieth-century, it will not become a static, never changing exhibition. Instead, new research and topical themes will influence the presentation of Base, ideally resulting in a dynamic collection that invites visitors “to experience the transformation of the canon.”²⁰¹

4.2.1 Spatial Characteristics

To enter the exhibition, one has to descend a big staircase from the entrance area of the museum. The first encounter is a display with a looped video on *The Making of Stedelijk Base*.²⁰² In front of the display, there is a simple wooden bench where visitors can sit to watch the video. It elaborates on the process, motivation and implementation of the spatial design, for which Koolhaas collaborated with Ruf. Interestingly, co-curator Margriet Schavemaker explains that Base is part of the museum’s desire “to make far better use of the collection.”²⁰³

After optionally having watched the video and/or taken an audio-tour (which is available in six languages), visitors encounter the floor plan that is printed on the wall before entering the first gallery (see figure 10 on page 37). It strikes me that there are no hand-outs provided, although the designers have certainly thought about how visitors could navigate the space: “[t]he perimeter walls offer a chronological overview of developments in art and design, while free-standing architectural elements create thematic zones of related artworks.”²⁰⁴ When visitors enter the gallery, this time-line starts at the right side with Van Gogh and Cézanne, and goes around the entire room. The artworks that are displayed here start at the end of the nineteenth-century and round up to the late sixties. This chronological order serves as the backbone to hold on to while navigating the open-ended route, or, the inner labyrinth wherein visitors have to find their own way. Schavemaker explains the timeline as something “you can always return to, [as it shows] where you were in art history.”²⁰⁵ This layout underscores the networked relations of the collection instead of highlighting individual artworks. It should be clear, however, that nothing or nobody is forcing you to start at the right – visitors can decide for themselves whether they

²⁰⁰ Sandra Smalenburg, “‘Je kunt focussen op meerdere beelden tegelijk’,” *NRC.nl*, December 13, 2017, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/12/13/je-kunt-focussen-op-meerdere-beelden-tegelijk-a1584775>.

²⁰¹ Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, “The Collection, Stedelijk Base.”

²⁰² “The making of STEDELIJK BASE,” YouTube, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, December 13, 2017, produced by Studio Maslow, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvqlom6Z444&t=29s>.

²⁰³ YouTube, “The making of.”

²⁰⁴ Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, “Stedelijk Base,” date of visit: February 27th, 2018 and April 12, 2018.

²⁰⁵ YouTube, “The making of.”

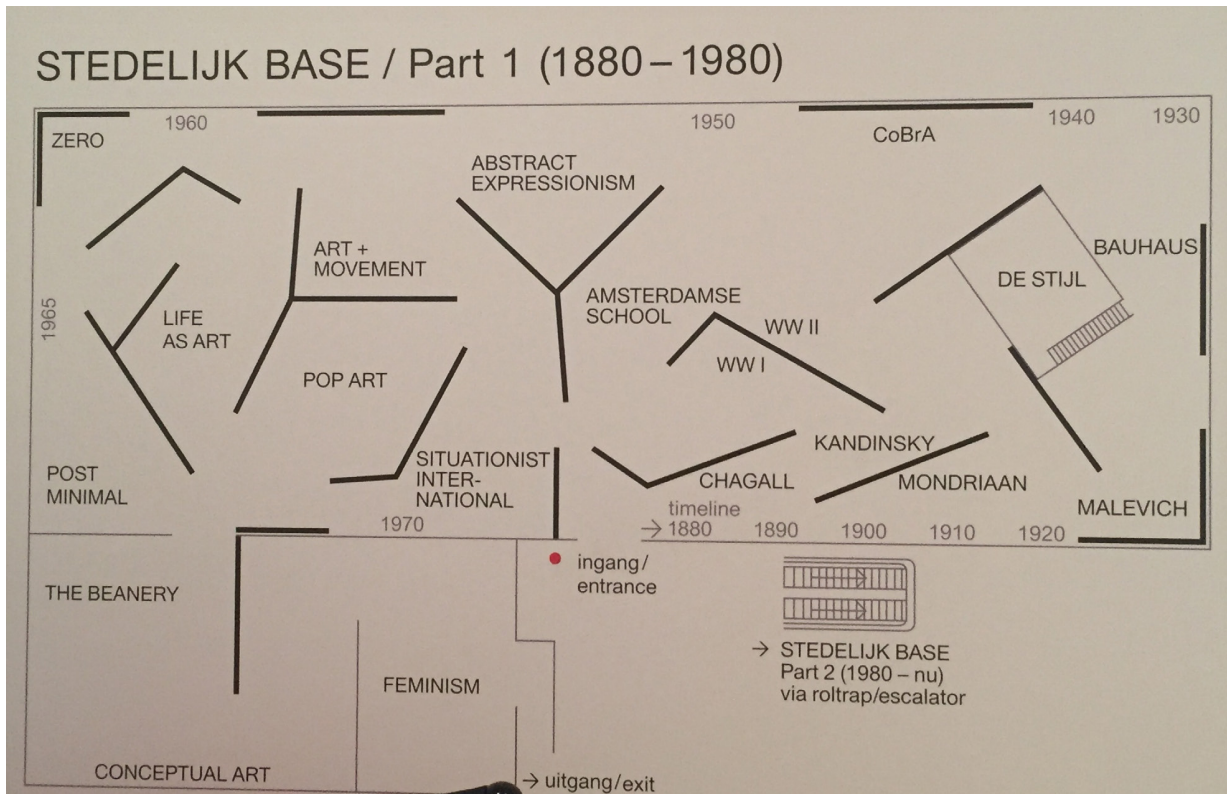


Figure 10: Floor plan, part 1. Picture taken by Tanja van Zoest on February 27, 2018.



Figure 11: Exhibition view. 1920-1930: “Malevich and the Russian Avant-Garde.” Picture taken by Tanja van Zoest on April 12, 2018.



Figure 12: Exhibition view. “De Stijl.” Picture taken by Tanja van Zoest on April 12, 2018.



Figure 13: Exhibition view. 1940-1950: “CoBrA.” Picture taken by Tanja van Zoest on April 12, 2018.

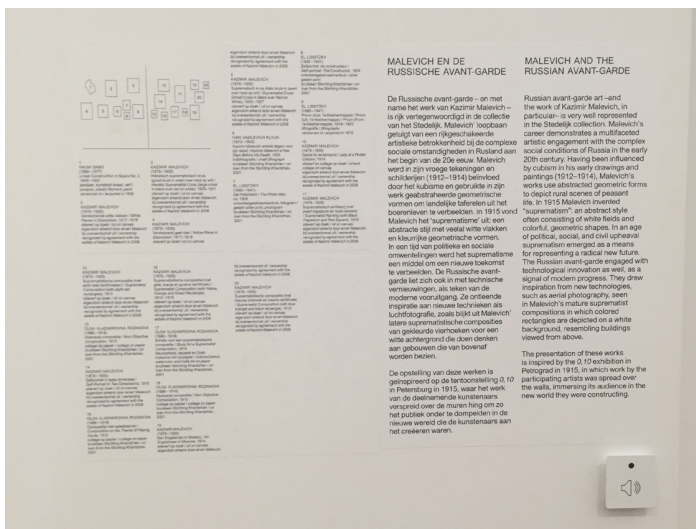


Figure 14: Captions and thematic explainers on the wall, plus an audio symbol in the lower right corner. Picture taken by Tanja van Zoest on April 12, 2018.



Figure 15: On the left, a guided tour for (art) students and on the right, a guided tour for retirees. Picture taken by Tanja van Zoest on April 12, 2018.

want to navigate the space clockwise, counter-clockwise, randomly or something in between.

The architectural elements constitute the labyrinth, a network of diagonally placed walls, which are made of steel with an almost velvety-look. The collaboration with Tata Steel Nederland enabled Koolhaas to design slim and thin walls, which turned out to be more like screens than real walls - in contrast to the typical heavy walls that a museum often consists of.²⁰⁶ The steel walls are eclectic and overflowing: “[a]t the crossroads it may happen that you are looking at a dark sculpture by Lee Bontecou, while the bright pop art colours of Roy Lichtenstein still burn in your back, and on the right the canvases of Van Gogh are looming.”²⁰⁷ In contrast to the self-explanatory displays of the modern museum that would lead the visitors through the exhibition space, Base does not apply an intended route. Moreover, the placement of the works is very experimental. Masterpieces are not hung centrally, nor are works hung in single rows. Rather, the exhibition seems to resemble a Google Image Search, with recommended images in the margin: the curators have been experimenting with hanging heights, huge works on small walls or few small works on a wide wall, and even with walls that vary in height (see figure 11-13 on page 37-38).

Koolhaas aimed to “provide for an experience as if you are walking through a city, with sometimes exciting areas and now and again normal areas, some parts that you recognise and sometimes things that astonish you.”²⁰⁸ As in each major city, the touristic highlight is a viewpoint that offers an overview of the whole room: “[i]n one panoramic view, you can see what the Stedelijk has purchased and acquired over the past century, as if it were a scale model of 1100 square meters. Truly unique.”²⁰⁹ This change of perspective offers the visitor a better understanding of the layout and its optional routings. Moreover, one can observe other visitors strolling, which is rather fascinating. When back on the ground floor, it is striking that in spite of the maze-like routing, there are also spacious and relatively open spaces to be found and new sight lines at every step.

In front of some works, there is a marked line on the ground to indicate the desired distance between work and visitor. Transgression of this line seems to be tolerated, as I have seen kids crossing this line without the intervention of attendants.²¹⁰ Other works, however, are shielded with a little fence made of metal wire, making it unlikely to come closer to the work. Furthermore, the light in the room is provided by long strips that are affixed on the ceiling. Unfortunately, it appears prominently in the showcases filled with graphic work, drawing a compelling pattern over glass.

If visitors choose to follow the outer timeline, there is a natural sequel after the works of the late sixties. Whereas visitors can choose to leave the gallery at the same place where they have entered, the presumably intended route is via two

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Thomas van Huut, “Hoe het Stedelijk en Rem Koolhaas hét museum voor de Instagram-generatie bouwden,” *Brainwash*, January 31, 2018, <https://www.brainwash.nl/bijdrage/hoehetstedelijk-en-rem-koolhaas-het-museum-voor-de-instagram-generatie-bouwden>.

²⁰⁸ YouTube, “The making of.”

²⁰⁹ Rutger Pontzen, “Nieuwe collectiepresentatie Stedelijk zet deur naar de toekomst open,” *De Volkskrant*, December 15, 2017, <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/nieuwe-collectiepresentatie-stedelijk-zet-deur-naar-de-toekomst-open~bbd63f37/>

²¹⁰ During my visit, I saw three or four attendants walking around (instead of being placed in one corner only). They sporadically make a conversation with visitors, but they seem to jauntily joke around amongst each other.

adjacent rooms wherein the timeline continues by means of thematic zones: conceptual art and feminism represent the 1970s (see figure 10 on page 37). To continue with *Part 2*, visitors have to take the escalator through the red tube, which is situated behind the video that started off the exhibition.²¹¹

4.2.2 Artistic Experience and Reception

Although the labyrinth may primarily have a puzzling effect on the audience, most visitors behaved according to a traditional museum visit: they walked slowly, read captions on the wall and did not produce too much sound. Interestingly, the remarkable spatial design can lead to personal experiences: when visitors get an idea of what is (not) expected of them, they are free to navigate from one thematic zone to another. Despite the many possible routes, I found it not hard to keep track of where I had been and where I still wanted to go. Presumably, the fact that the steel walls do not reach up to the ceiling facilitates a certain extent of overview, which helps to form an idea of the amount of space that is yet to come. Furthermore, the earlier-mentioned viewpoint also contributes to the awareness of the composition of the space.

Worth noting is that the majority of the visitors made use of the free audio-tour. Aside from captions accompanying the artworks and short thematic explainers on the wall, the audio-tour provides additional explanation at various artworks. These artworks can be easily recognized by white squares with the audio-symbol on it (see figure 14, page 38). When scanning such a symbol, the audio-tour is activated and depending on the artwork, information on the artist, the work, the process or the imagination is provided. As the tour contributes to a more profound understanding and knowledge-transfer of the displayed content, it also makes a partly individual experience possible. At the same time, I have seen several guided tours for divergent target groups, such as (art) students and retirees (see figure 15, page 38). In most cases, it seemed that the guide had already set out a route along which he or she led the visitors. I overheard a guide and her group of visitors who were in their sixties, jointly discussing the new setup of the exhibition. Not surprisingly, the guide spoke warmly of the design, calling it playful, easy, and less compulsory. One of the group members actively agreed and added that she liked the messy but cosy layout. A few moments later, when I descended from the viewpoint again, I overheard a man talking to one of the attendants, saying that “you actually have to come back a few times,” referring to the amount of works on display. He was pleasantly surprised by the fact that he saw other works than the first time he visited Base, which is an experience that I share: because there are so many possible routes, you can simply keep on walking, circulating, and discovering.

²¹¹ At the top of the escalator, one arrives at a mezzanine where there is a visually overwhelming installation by Barbara Kruger, that covers the space from top to bottom. For me, it was unclear whether this installation was part of Base, or that the mezzanine served as intermediate space of the museum in general. From here, visitors have to ascend another 12 steps to enter the VandenEnde Foundation Gallery, where a small text directly on the right explains that this room is certainly *Part 2* of Base.

4.2.3 Reviews of the Exhibition

The exhibition, and in particular the spatial design, has sparked controversy and resistance amongst art critics and journalists. The new presentation is blamed for primarily appealing to “Instagramming millennials”²¹² and referred to as a “Google Image Search: you get everything instantly together, in two dimensions.”²¹³ American architect and art historic Aaron Betsky expressed his disappointment in the Dutch newspaper *NRC*, describing the exhibition as “an insult to the visitors”, “pure chaos”, and even that it is “made impossible” to enjoy the art.²¹⁴ Moreover, he stated that Koolhaas and Ruf have rendered the Stedelijk and the Dutch art world a poor service: to his regret, the “self-appointed experts”²¹⁵ have ignored the traditions of the Stedelijk. Betsky stands not alone in his opinion. Domeniek Ruyters of *Metroplis M* points out that Base is in fact a break with the museums’ former modernistic take on art and its appurtenant love for form, aesthetics and contemplation. Now other values are being pushed forward, a less tightly directed gaze is stimulated. Furthermore, Ruyters sees the non-hierarchical arrangement as a “loss of individual contemplative perception”: the opportunity for artworks to claim individual attention has disappeared. Instead, the collection is being democratized, meaning that the extent of heroism has been levelled amongst the displayed artworks.

It is precisely this levelling or, in other words, non-authoritarian display, which has caused confusion amongst visitors and critics, because it “turns [art] into an image and [gives it] a certain degree of interchangeability.”²¹⁶ In contrast, Roos van der Lint writes that although “the holiness is rinsed away from the paintings [and] the artist’s intention disappears into the background”²¹⁷ it is also refreshing to show divergent ideas that were at one point all worthy to include in the museum’s collection.

Journalist Thomas van Huut expressed his appreciation and argued that Stedelijk Base is nothing less than the museum of the future.²¹⁸ Because looking associatively has become part of daily life, impressions are constantly sneaking in through the corners of our purview, elbowing for attention. Besides, impressions in the city are always unsorted, and thanks to a whimsical algorithm, also Instagram or Facebook timelines are a seemingly random mishmash. Therefore, “looking without side mirrors,” which is often expected in a white cube, is an illusion that Base happily seems to decline. According to van Huut, that is exactly what makes it a strong exhibition: “it dissects and confirms how we process images. It is as if you are walking through the neural network of a brain that was just processing the art of the twentieth century.”²¹⁹

²¹² Jan Pieter Ekker, “Dit is de nieuwe, onorthodoxe presentatie van het Stedelijk,” *Het Parool*, December 13, 2017, <https://www.parool.nl/stadsgids/dit-is-de-nieuwe-onorthodoxe-presentatie-van-het-stedelijk~a4545243/>.

²¹³ Koen Kleijn, “Dierentuin,” *De Groene Amsterdammer*, January 10, 2018, <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/dierentuin>.

²¹⁴ Bianca Stigter, “Stedelijk Museum maakt van kunst kijken googlen,” *NRC.nl*, December 13, 2017, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/12/13/nieuwe-inrichting-stedelijk-lijkt-wel-een-uitdragerij-a1584756>.

²¹⁵ Aaron Betsky, “Koolhaas en Ruf maakten een rommeltje van de collectie,” *NRC.nl*, January 28, 2018, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2018/01/28/koolhaas-en-ruf-maakten-een-rommeltje-van-de-collectie-a1590096>.

²¹⁶ Domeniek Ruyters, “Base Values - de nieuwe vaste opstelling van het Stedelijk,” *Metroplis M*, December 14, 2017, http://www.metropolism.com/nl/reviews/33863_stedelijk_base.

²¹⁷ Roos van der Lint, “Picasso en Sneeuwwitje’s doodskist,” *De Groene Amsterdammer*, January 10, 2018, <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/picasso-en-sneeuwvitje-s-doodskist>.

²¹⁸ Van Huut, “hét museum voor de Instagram-generatie.”

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Bianca Stigter, a journalist of NRC, questions whether visitors will truly find new connections between artworks, as initially intended by Ruf and Koolhaas. Rather, she sees the exhibition as a giant sale, almost screaming: “[t]he whole twentieth century is on offer!”²²⁰ Furthermore, Stigter sees the denial of the boundary between art and design as the most important break with the previous arrangement of the permanent collection. In an interview with Koolhaas in NRC on December 13, 2017, journalist Sandra Smalenburg posed the question whether the new exhibition design is intended for a new generation of museum-goers. Also Henny de Lange of the Dutch newspaper *Trouw* raised the question whether the unorthodox presentation of Base solely focuses on “the zap-generation,” which quickly picks up upon information from anywhere and effortlessly bounces back and forth. The regular, often somewhat older, museum visitor, which is used to quiet and well-organized exhibitions, will probably need to catch their breath in the first place, wondering how they should find their way in this eclectic display.²²¹

Koolhaas acknowledged that the presentation was indeed meant to appeal to “a new kind museum visitor, young or old, who is used to focus on multiple images at the same time and is thereby rather stimulated instead of distracted.”²²² Smalenburg also refers to museum visitors who might be used to see paintings in empty white spaces, and states that it presumably takes some time to get used to this new strategy of display. To the question whether Base signifies the end of the white cube, Koolhaas answers: “[t]his room is still a white cube, albeit a big one. My presentation shows what you can do within a white cube.”²²³

4.2.4 Building Blocks in the Basement

As became clear in chapter two, the future museum-visitor’s experience is subject to ongoing changes in society. In particular the increasing use of digital technologies leads on to the personalization of the museum visit, by which a tailored experience is put forward.²²⁴ It is striking, however, that although Base certainly offers a personal experience, the exhibition does not employ digital technologies in order to achieve this. The novelty in their approach is rather to be found in the physical layout and the fact that visitors are able to freely roam the space. As opposed to a “prescribed visit,”²²⁵ the networked structure and open routing emphasize the unconscious associations that were always already part of experiencing an artwork.

Nevertheless, because Base presents the art-historical canon of the twentieth-century, most visitors will be inclined to follow the outer timeline. After all, visitors will draw on past experiences which makes it hard to subvert the ritual structure wherein a series of actions is performed according to a prescribed order. At the same time, most visitors will take the presence of others as a cue for their experience, meaning that they will purposefully or incidentally behave in the same way as other viewers.²²⁶ The fact that visitors are given a choice, however, is of great

²²⁰ Stigter, “googlen.”

²²¹ Henny de Lange, “Kunst zappen in de kelder van het Stedelijk Museum,” *Trouw*, December 15, 2017, <https://www.trouw.nl/cultuur/kunst-zappen-in-de-kelder-van-het-stedelijk-museum~a2cc9c68/>.

²²² Smalenburg, “Je kunt focussen op meerdere beelden tegelijk’.”

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ Arup, “Museums in a Digital Age,” 5.

²²⁵ Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display*, 75.

²²⁶ Christina Albu describes this kind of behaviour in her book *Mirror Affect*, in which she investigates art museums and galleries that, by means of displaying artworks with mirroring or reflecting properties, enhance our awareness of belonging to a shared spectatorial space: “[w]e actively observe not only the objects on display but also our movements and the reactions of other visitors.” Although Stedelijk Base

importance. Visitors can decide for themselves whether they use the outer timeline as a guide, or explore the space associatively instead. The maze like structure enables both designer and visitor to partake in the (optional) collaborative activity of shaping the narrative. This is only possible because it is not the aim of the exhibition to tell a linear story: not focusing on one particular outcome or storyline, it bears a resemblance to evocative spaces. Thereby, it builds upon codes as established in previous experiences. It is important to note, however, that in this case it is not the spatial design that transmits the story. Because there are no narrative elements incorporated into the environment, the spatial design rather functions as a framework that allows for multiple routings by which different narratives can emerge. As explained before, emergent narratives grant visitors with most freedom and stimulate them to take upon an active role with regard to the navigation of the space. This is exactly the case at Base: as visitors are empowered to roam the space at will, they are not so much 'restricted' in their freedom. Instead, Base functions as a sandbox and even allows the strategy of story-building. Although this approach is not very conventional in museums yet, it seems that Base does allow the strategy that is "based on leaving traces and affecting the space, either on the part of the designer or the player."²²⁷ The thematic zones are the building blocks that structure ones experience, which ultimately put an overarching story together. Thereby, every visitor is empowered to make sense of the story in a personal way, which makes both the space and the experience more meaningful.

does not fall into the category of exhibitions that present "reflective artworks," its layout and in particular the viewpoint offer visitors the possibility of observing fellow visitors, thereby also contributing to the awareness of others being present (Cristina Albu, *Mirror Affect: Seeing Self, Observing Others in Contemporary Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

²²⁷ I.e. visitor. Fernández-Vara, "Indexical Storytelling."

5. Comparison of Cases and Conclusion

The examination of novel strategies of display has drawn attention to alternative ways to navigate the exhibition space. As both cases push spatial as well as metaphorical boundaries, audience members are exposed to disorienting (sensory) experiences. Moreover, the acquired experiences do not directly refer to previously gained experiences, which means that there is no frame of reference to align one's behaviour with. In other words, visitors are literally and symbolically given leeway to explore the space on their own terms. This fundamental change in how visitors move through and behave in an exhibition space affects the traditional power dynamic between the museum and its visitor, by which the ritualistic structure of the museum slowly changes.

By unpacking the innovative exhibition designs of Sensory Spaces 13 and Stedelijk Base, it appeared that both case studies can be placed into the bigger story that is being written, namely, the story of *The Museum On The Move* as described in chapter one. Firstly, Sensory Spaces 13 fits into the realm of experience-focused strategies of display. Originally a combination of the white cube and the classroom, the museum-as-experience deploys spectacular exhibition designs to mediate the museum visit.²²⁸ Although the museum visit admittedly became more experience-focused and displays were no longer solely aimed at the transfer of meaning, they were still used to inform visitors on the context and function of the objects.²²⁹ Hardy's installation, however, elucidates that when an artwork can be experienced instead of understood, the need to provide context and/or the amount of (textual) explanations can decrease. As visitors explore the sandbox of Sensory Spaces 13, personal narratives can emerge. Hardy's work, thus, fits into a bigger movement in which museums commodify sensory experiences,²³⁰ which could eventually mean that transferring knowledge as one of the traditional core tasks of the museum becomes less relevant. After all, an experience does not equal knowledge in itself. With exception of the practical instructions as devised by Hardy, the visitor is empowered to explore the space at one's discretion.

Secondly, Stedelijk Base can be subdivided into the realm of the museum of the future. As was described in chapter two, the museum of the future follows the museum-as-experience, allowing for an even less directed museum visit. Responding to the need for personalized user-experiences, Base assigns a lot of freedom to its visitors that provides for a tailored experience. In countering the "one-fits-all visitor experience,"²³¹ the exhibition aims to appeal to people with different interests. Moreover, by means of experimenting with the boundaries of spatial design, the phenomenon of the museum visit has been stretched and moulded into a new shape. Given the amount of critical reviews, however, it appears that the majority of art critics might not yet be ready for this novel strategy of display. This is striking, because the exhibition illustrates a current dynamic within museum collections, namely, museum professionals are urged to tell more stories than just the one that has been told before. By means of experimenting with new ways to tell stories and applying a novel strategy of display, Base does exactly that: it contributes to the process of rewriting canonized history, as well as it sets the tone for future

²²⁸ Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display*, 193.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Albu, *Mirror Affect*, 3.

²³¹ Arup, "Museums in a Digital Age," 5.

collection policy.²³² Strikingly, it even allows visitors to partake in the activity of story-building, an experimental approach that seems to defy narrative traditions. Therefore, Stedelijk Base can be seen as a bold attempt of a museum that dares to speak up with the art it houses.

It has to be said, however, that it could also be argued that Stedelijk Base belongs to the realm of the museum-as-experience. As Koolhaas played a central role in the physical arrangement of the exhibition, he took up the role of 'star-architect.' In line with the phenomenon of the 'curator as creator',²³³ he took control of the entire space and designed something that could be considered an attraction, which clearly has a close link to experience design. By expressing her criticism, Van der Lint states that despite the absence of a prescribed route, the architecture is yet dominating the experience. She describes Base as a total installation that the visitor has to undergo again and again, in contrast to an exhibition that you can walk into to see a particular work of art²³⁴ – for example during a visit to an exhibition elsewhere in the museum. Therefore, Stedelijk Base is, on closer inspection, an exhibition *by* and *about* Rem Koolhaas.

Now, going back to the question that served as the starting point for this study:

In what way is the notion of 'script' of relevance to the museum that applies novel strategies of display?

On the one hand, it could be argued that novel strategies of display destabilize the script of museum presentation. Both case studies have shown that ambiguity concerning the inscription of a script increasingly challenges visitors to shape their own experience. For example, by designing the exhibition space as if it were a sandbox, visitors are provided with a notable amount of agency. This means that the elements that previously mediated the experience, such as the order and arrangement of things, the floor plan and visitor guidance for example, become less important in the constitution of the experience. In other words, novel strategies of display can contribute to the process of loosening the understanding of script. Subsequently, the restricted freedom that museum visitors are provided with is becoming less restrictive. Importantly, this can be done by, but is not limited to, the creation of 1) spaces *without* a narrative, in which visitors are enabled to focus on the experience; 2) spaces *with* a narrative, in which various open routes and story-building offer a certain degree of agency.

On the other hand, there is still a deep-rooted awareness of behavioural codes to which visitors respond. For example, the interactions that take place in an exhibition that applies novel strategies of display are still framed by the institution in which they are located.²³⁵ As it appears unlikely that the museum will let go of a script completely anytime soon, I suggest to approach the script as something that is present in the museum on different levels. From this perspective, there is no need to subvert the script completely. As a matter of fact, the script is even needed in order

²³² Van der Lint, "Picasso en Sneeuwwitje's doodskist."

²³³ In the context of Documenta 5, curated by Harald Szeemann, Daniel Buren wrote that "[m]ore and more, the subject of an exhibition tends not be the display of artworks, but the exhibition of the exhibition as a work of art" (Daniel Buren, "Exhibition of an Exhibition (1972)," in *The Biennial Reader*, ed. by Elena Filipovic, et. al. (Hatje Cantz, 2010), 210-211).

²³⁴ Van der Lint, "Picasso en Sneeuwwitje's doodskist."

²³⁵ Note: Exhibition spaces are already framed by social constraints, constantly moulded by visible interpersonal exchanges and performative acts.

to provide a structured experience. Our understanding of its significant characteristics, however, needs to be expanded.

According to the examination of the case studies, it can be argued that the script of the museum and the script of the (experimental) exhibition do not overlap anymore. Whereas traditionally, the museum applied one type of script that informed visitors throughout its multiple rooms or galleries, it seems that today, this is no longer the case. The museum is increasingly becoming a location in which experimental exhibition formats alternate between traditional formats. For example, both case studies have shown that the respective strategies of display demand specific behaviour and empower the visitor to varying degrees. Therefore, novel strategies of display have the potential to bend the notion of script, and thereby trigger expanded ways of audience behaviour. It is of importance, however, that visitors will become familiar with experimental exhibition formats and new ways of looking and/or behaving, so that in the future, they will no longer (automatically) respond to the same script over and over again. This can only be achieved when the museum stimulates the audience to explore future strategies of display. In the end, this could lead to a museum visit in which visitors are truly empowered to design their own experience.

More research is required, however, to examine in what way novel strategies of display could affect audience behaviour. As the digital becomes a more progressive and naturalised part in a large number of museums, it is of importance to study the next phase of strategies of display. The notion of story-building, for example, could be of value to the future museum visit as it stimulates the visitor to partake in the activity of shaping the narrative of the exhibition. Potentially, it could bring about a new experiential form that subsequently expands and bends traditional approaches to narrative.

Finally, to end on a slightly subversive note: future research with regard to the examination of the museum experience might benefit from an attitude Huhtamo calls “tactical transgression.”²³⁶ Interestingly, he believes that it is not enough to (passively) observe: instead, he suggests to have the guts to test the situation. This does not mean that one should break the rules. At times, however, it might be necessary to bend them a little to make the museum’s invisible regulations and boundaries appear for a moment. By doing so, one could anticipate what might be possible *beyond* the script of museum presentation.

²³⁶ Huhtamo, “Exhibition Anthropology,” 274.

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